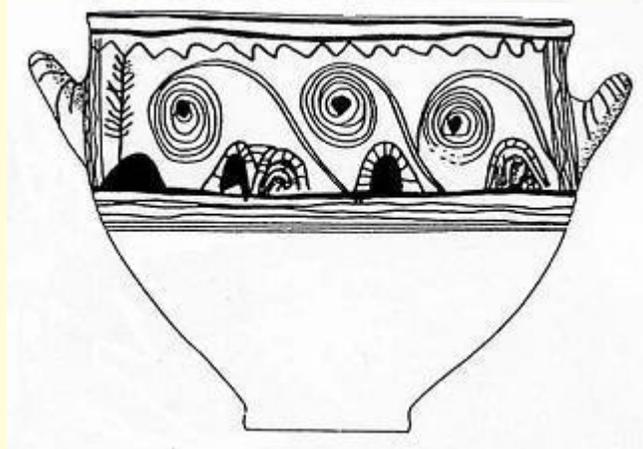


II



4

Out on the waters, most people turned green for awhile, and it took the night's rage down. We had Squiddy's men to master sail and oar, but their skills were not with mainland warships, and the wind's hot gusts made us clumsy fleet getting out behind Dia Isle. Out there the ocean opened without limits, blue and blinding where the morning sun threw white fire, so calm that the oars left rows of spirals in our wakes. When Earth's white shore sank under the horizon, we reefed sail and hulled our way east for Malia. My body pulled and pushed the oar knowing Mother Zoe could see us, but my senses had to work to make sense of anything

Fifth moon, first day it was: from here as a Keeper I had no point of land to mark the suns. It seemed beyond belief to lose Prax and my Girl of Rain. And I had made this happen, for twelve other families too. My head throbbed. There was screaming out of every midships where the wounded lay, the holes of spears and arrows stuffed with bread or wrapped in torn-up clothes. Space on every side felt torn wide-open

The great house at Malia was broken horns and burned-out porticoes. We had sworn our people to keep in hiding till they saw our persons, but we found them

reveling in the sea near Pyrrha's three Cyprus ships, with a camp and cookfire under a stand of willows. *What if we had been slavers!* I threatened to bleed the next one who did the like. When people's mouths fell open, it was no good blaming wind or wound. I laid my palms to Earth and prayed to heal

Things went hard as kinsmen found or did not find their brothers, fathers, sons. The lucky ones restrained themselves, others on their knees pounded fists in sand: Donos' son Butes held Arge screaming, and Kinuwa's father and mother held each other. All we had was to make our great circle again, and half of what we sang was an animal wail. With strangers looking on, I wondered how long we would seem deranged to the world beyond Karfi

When I told about Prax, Podargos ran off to board any boat not mine: Zoe gave me her back and kept buried in Honeybee's side, clear out to sea next morning. Pyrrha's eyes were neither blame nor pity. We were nine crowded ships now, almost two hundred seventy-five people including Cyprians. Aktor's face was still a tomb, and there was no high talk about Knossos

All day Crete went by, the ruins of great houses in high grass, and a living smoke at the mouth of a river, or on a cove. The islets wore tall palms, and big-horned kri-kri ran their hills. We were hunting a hide when Zoe pointed cranes flying, nine of them coming out of the east. Cranes you were lucky to sight between their stops to feed and

rest: Zoe tried their clanging-calls, and we heard some seeming to answer

--That way! Zoe cried to the tiller. --Turn, that way, they want us to follow! Papou, tell the man! And Zoe kept on, till the cranes faded in the sun astern. Thwarted, she sat down, and scowled on her ship of fools. For all we thought of her, there could be no turn away from our best help. And still, something was warning me to listen

Last light found us a white swerve of sand on the last tip of Crete, in the old days' nomos of Zakros. None of the mainlanders disdained food: three of our Karfi wounded died, and two Meshwesh. For them we dug a grave shaped like Labrys, poured and danced in thanks and honor. Podargos kept away among Ninna's and Melas' household people, and Zoe likewise with Honeybee's

Next dawn waiting the tide I slipped away, to walk along an inlet with young grass green over elegant white dunes. Rails and pipers sang across a quiet cattail marsh. Zoe tailed me, then wandered her way to my side, but kept her distance

--This is a terrible thing, Zoe. We can help the way you and I hurt, and you can be angry, too. But you and I will take care of Bright Foot. Come, sit. Won't Cyprus be good, with cousins there to help us? Tell me now, with all our different people on the beach. What is our name, when Cyprus asks?

--Zakkala, Zoe shrugged

--Zakkala! That's salty, what does it mean? What, you won't tell?

Zoe swore that the cranes had been pointing us a good place, a better place, and all to ourselves. I answered that we had lived that way on Karfi

--I want my big brother! I could not remember seeing Zoe cry, but she flailed away any touch. Well done, Otus prince of indigents, crack-headed crane. The sea rolled white and turquoise, barren as my wisdom. Then, Melas found us. He came unarmed, but his walk had grown stronger: he stopped at a distance and let his eyes ask to speak. Zoe tore away and ran past Melas for the beach

--You're not Zakkala, she told him

--What? No, I'm uncle Melas, he trifled. Then he asked about my head

--Is this goodbye before you go your way?

-- Otus, we were out of our minds, Melas said. --I come to say, I am ashamed. My heart is sick for what you lost. Look, I wept so much that my hands shake

--Norax taking the ocean in his shoulder?

--What? Yes, he is. Otus. We need to patch this up. I like Bright Foot. The sea and the ships scared him, but he didn't cry. He rowed beside a Meshwesh, and then he monkeyed up the mast. May we take so well to the new day, brother!

I might have been sitting still in a deep hole: I felt nothing, said nothing

--To me you'll always be a priest, Melas sighed. --To talk like one is hard for me. But, Otus, after last night, I see as much as when I landed here. Death---it closes one

man's eyes, and opens others. You Cretans had something. We called it darkness, weakness. I was pure afraid down in Mother Zoe's cave, and then I never fought with such a calm inside. For all that---what can I say? I was not myself last night! Melas exclaimed into silence. --Otus, it has to be something in Achaian bone, that makes us push every edge. If I do not push the world, I feel myself a stall-fed ox. Some nothing of nature. You see a garden, and it's well: to me it's all confusion, and waste beyond my hands. What I worry is tomorrow. I feel---confined by custom somehow. I think we are cut out for some new way, and I worry how to handle it

--What is it you want?

--Argh, he growled back. --I knew the Knossos captives would curse us for their men. It's worse. Ninna found out they are northern stock. North Achaians, families of the Ironheads that Theseus and The Lion of Mykenai paid to keep Crete down. There are tribes of us, Argivi, Nemeans, Messenians, all proud of our unmixed blood somehow; but Ironheads are prouder than their mountains. Last night gained me nothing in their eyes. I am proud that I learned from Crete. But they need to start obeying me. What do I do, kill a few more to make the point?

--Would that break you?

--Of course not

--Brother! I exclaimed. --We cannot bring disorder into Pyrrha's house

--But I don't have your Cretan charms

--Ninna says you have your own. Surely, you two discuss this?

Melas scowled at his feet. It was as if he were trying to forget his way toward something better for no one but Melas. --What are your plans, Otus, he shifted

--To follow what worked. Did you see the woman with boy-and-girl twins, with yellow hair? They are Shekelesh, from Sicily. They were Koreter's share of some house-hero's raid. Them, I promised to find a way home, because we can build on their gratitude. Likewise the Meshwesh. What do I know, Melas? The way those two mainland sailors from Amnisos fight each other, what can I say? Except we'll make them a good house to hide in from the Lion. Look---Ninna is first mother now, that matters. Give them standing, gain your home. You, in their place

--Argh! I am not in their place, Melas said. --What do I do, mount festivals, and wait three Great Years till they break down and chop my wood? They respect one thing, that they belong to me, by war. I care nothing what they think. There's work to do

I ground my teeth. At Knossos he fought no kinsman in our cause: now in his own, Melas worried he might hurt them. Karfi and Dikte had strengthened his battle-hand, and I growled to wonder if anything more of yesterday had come through

The tide was rising. I stood up, stepped forward and then back to face him

--Perhaps my brain is bent. You sound troubled because you think about abusing

people to get your own work done. Melas, where was all this sleeping on Karfi? We both feel blind. Let this troubling tell us what not to do, and together we will meet the other. You said, *Keep the dead where they belong*. Well, brother, last night belongs with them alike. I cannot turn Cyprus into Crete. And you cannot make it Achaia

--Always the tangle. Always the limits. There's my rock, Melas chuffed and ended with a laugh. --By Blue Hair's beard, you are a crank, but you do clarify. We'll see what happens, he repeated: words I remembered from that night outside his house, which led to this. None of us had Karfi to hide in any longer. I was beginning to know a man who put off his words of choice this way---counting in fact on sheer will, crisis or chaos to make wishes look like destiny. What next?

--*We are here!* Melas suddenly stood up to cry out into the world with his lion-might. --That sea is a bath of ichor. Salt air wakes up your blood! Come and eat now

So, he took up my hands; but only half the gaze met mine. I had always found that a bad omen. How far these things might lead him, I thought we could handle

-- Somebody told me water is the solid way to build a house, I said as we walked.
--Next year, we can start with a voyage to Libu, and Sicily

--Build, we will, Melas answered, --and honor our sons. Poseidon, I feel bold!

At the mouth of the inlet Bright Foot was waiting, Aktor's hand behind his neck

--Help your father! said Aktor. --Listen to Norax! Go on, Podargos

My son's eyes looked almost crazy: swimming and fighting back hating and needing me, shock that he had loved a monster, defiant, confused

--And you, Melas told Aktor. --Come, for their sake. Much to talk

--But I, Otus and I---Alright, Aktor consented. --See you next island-camp

Podargos had found a ram's skull with a triple turn of horn. He fixed my eyes with his, took it manfully over to a boulder in the sand, and smashed it. Then he wrapped his arms around the rock. Anything to keep from killing me

--This year, you and I took our first turns making Bull roar. Podargos, we have to help each other. What would your brother do, for you and Zoe?

--Kill! he said. --You did. Uncle Melas said

--Did he. Well, you and I knew your brother better

--I don't care! Podargos cried: he dropped his head against the rock, and hurt himself. When his rage broke, he tore himself from it, stood up, and then Bright Foot wanted my arms. We cried, not to see his brother's graces any more this life. I set him on my shoulders down to the water, and when we got there, he was asleep

--A better father open his eyes, I told Ninna laying him in her arms. She gave me only a high-chin glance of *Glad you're alive*, her mouth a black scowl. I took a broken bit of clay from my belt, showed and gave it to her. It was the tiny face of Earth Mother salvaged from the shrine she lost. A cloud seemed to pass from her face. Ninna turned

for the boat nodding so fiercely that I thought she might drop Podargos. With so much out of Melas, I thanked whatever had made me keep that for her

The Cyprians pushed us past Cargos that day and we camped on a shore of Carpathos. Where the town had survived the great waves and Achaian burning, the people lived around a red-pillared shrine in a courtyard, crowned by a cracked pair of horns. They had run from our ships, and then were gracious: they fished, had trees and planted, but little more. Very bad years had carried off most skills. *This is a place to come back to*, I nudged Melas

He was more eager to see Rhodes: Ialysos was the reach of what his brethren were building on Cretan ruins. Pyrrha's men, though, hid us up on wild beach there: we were sailing mainland ships, and it was lucky they weren't yet abroad with the season. Melas was still cursing as Rhodes fell astern. We worked and camped our way east, crossing river-mouths, and coastal waters with a strange new northern mainland looming at our left. Pyrrha said that was Lykia, its little valleys notorious for lawlessness and pirates: the sailors hailed its jagged white mountains with home-songs nearing Cyprus. *Ya, Ya, Ya* they call-and-answered their land's names, *Alashiya, Alashiya*

Then came the worst of our voyage. Kinuwa's father and mother rode their bench almost silent day by day. On the morning we struck south for Paphos, they stood up holding hands, jumped into the sea, and that was the end of another family. *Help*

your father, I asked my shaken children. Podargos and Zoe both hid their faces in my sides, and any sense behind the world felt as thin as our arms around each other

When Pyrrha stood up in full formal dress again, and came down the ship's center walk to take my hand, a breath of gratitude swallowed my fear as her mountains rose out of the sea. Two great white ranges of them, north and east, and a beautiful plain up there between, Pyrrha said, with many farms

Her face was shining with home. She named every headland, each wink of a village, pointed the high Troodos and the best of their copper mines. The taste of the air turned green with trees, spring flowers and grass in well-watered tilth. Here came Ya's highest mountain, twice anyplace in Crete for size---and then, as swiftly as ever I saw our home-fleet work, a solid dozen sail flanked all nine of us every side. These were mostly fish-tail merchant boats but their decks packed archers and spears. The moment they saw Pyrrha's headdress and upraised arms, their will to meet us turned to jubilation. Pyrrha sang out, and a swarm of arrows shot the sun

Paphos overlooked a curving cove of white beach with two great rocks near shore in the middle of her bay, and the first thing we marked was how many different kinds of vessels lay in her sand or tied up along stone quays: fat merchanters, island needle-boats, elegant ships of embassy from Caria to Byblos. There were derricks and works of wood swinging bales and great jars up, or down: they even had a modest sea-

wall and right there the multicolored houses began to climb the hills above port, stone streets fanning out to each bright-painted door, a home, a workshop, a villa for sailors with ships on its facades, each with a plume of smoke out the roof-hole. And people, people pouring down to shore for their sons, and climbing out on terraces to see

Pyrrha pointed the town's great house and, on the highest roof, the person of their first mother Moira under a white sun-shade. Podargos and Zoe loved the drums and laughed to see they had trained little monkeys to play them. *She's coming down for welcome; and now, look yonder,* Pyrrha smiled. And there, up among the harbor's plainer homes, the house in Ariadne's honor. It looked lifted from old Knossos, with three white stories and windows on the sea: a green palm shaded its door, the posts and lintel graced with running spirals, and on the roof, crimson Bull's horns with a Labrys of bronze between, facing Crete. Pyrrha said that sunsets flamed it like a torch

--Cretans who built it have farms up-country, she added. --Some, their children work other islands for us. See the vines trained over? Late-summer leaves and grapes make it lovely, Otus. Your arms around her sleeps

I bowed my head and burned back tears. The two hundred of us looked so hapless, grouped out over the sand with blonde captives and Merire's darkest-olive Meshwesh in the mix. Then we saw their queen striding down the center-street with her retinue, and the women every rooftop trilled *Oh-lo-lo-lo-lo-lo*

Moira---She could have been Pyrrha's mother or my own an age ago, eyes and thick black tresses dark and glossy as obsidian. Barefoot, near fifty, she stood taller than any of us, a silver crescent-diadem at her brow, proud-shouldered in a red open-breasted jacket, her lean waist belted with a rainbow sash and her three-layered bellskirt a weave of seashells and chevrons, magnificent to see. Her ladies and their children crowded after her, and at each side walked her barechested house-bonds, six to a hand, men from their twenties to fifties with every color and style of hair and kilt or tunic: dressed as I had been taught priests and palace-men should, bright-stone necklaces and rings of trade and travel on show, their sly glances taking our measure. Their faces spoke a seasoned crowd who took no disrespect: they pointed this and that about our ships, and one or two creased his brow with how to feed two hundred people on their beach

Moira kissed and embraced Pyrrha twice-over, her three ships' captains took a knee for their blessings, and then Pyrrha's sister Kia squeaked through the people to kiss her likewise. Midwife Kia was a small woman black-curled and stylish as any in sight, her cries and pecks quick as a bird's, and somehow, pure mischief in her wide-open eyes. She was younger, brisk, less stately than Pyrrha and unconcerned about it; the bird whose dream had brought us here

--All this, Melas whispered, --and not a man in the front row

--Oh, hush, Ninna told him. --Think what it is to breathe now, safe, and free

--I beg your pardon, said Norax with an unoffended smile; and beside him, in Honeybee's eyes, shone the elegance of this queen and her people, the things of the spirit-world that crowned their days' endeavors. Honeybee fidgeted, as though her feet were roots already digging. And into the pause, just as Pyrrha began her offices:

--Zakkala! came Zoe's shout. No one could see her behind us, it might have been a gull's cry: the hundreds about us laughed a little. We were going to find that somehow after all, it was the name that took

I asked my mothers and fathers what to do. My two arms lifted palms-out and, smiling somewhat, I met every eye I could: they took Crete's blessing with light bows of their heads, smiled back. And as if my parents nudged me to it I thanked these people for something not forgotten thirty years: for their sending six ships of their sons at Minos' call, and for the victory this brought us all at Athens. As it turned out, some of those sailors, my age now, were here and they whistled and clapped their hands. I took up Pyrrha's hand and lifted it high, and thanked them for welcoming our children. They would find us ready to serve and to build, like this little girl Pyrrha long ago

--Good! Good! Pyrrha whispered, though I had made her blush, and the people made pleasant murmur as their queen approached me, took up my two hands, and felt them with her eyes closed. When they opened, she looked as though her mind took a

moment to come back to us. She reached out gently and touched the Labrys at my neck, and asked me for names all around: I got busy from Ninna our first mother to Aktor and our young. But that led straight to Little Zoe. Honeybee gripped Norax

Zoe stepped out and met the eyes, from queen to people. Something had turned in her, for not getting her way, and days on boats with strangers. Zoe smiled and waved the way a little bird tipped a wing. She saw the breaths drawn, the hands covering faces and the half-turns away, and she simply waited

Pyrrha simply said this had been done by Mother Kriti's enemies. This was the only time outside of a death that I saw Moira's mouth tremble. And so attuned were these people to her that somebody in the crowd, a young man, began to sing a low, slow rhythm of a soothing-song, the kind a healer might use to calm the mind before painful work. In the same slow-rising voices, more and more people began to hum for her, and sing, and we knew they had seen hurt worse than Zoe's. I held my girl close in front of me, and then Pyrrha, and Moira, and Kia the midwife one by one embraced her. The sound faded: Honeybee lifted her palm out high, and Moira, lifting and lowering her own, moved to other matters

Her eye picked out Merire's Meshwesh, the hostile Achaian faces, and she said pleasant camp waited everyone while we made new arrangements. She greeted all the little cranes with us, who needed a good place to hide till they learned to fly; and when

she said at last *Be welcome, Come, unload your ships*, she meant *your* ships. She knew that we brought things to build on. It eased our minds of shame in so much need, and we leaped every way to work with her

Indeed they had done this before. We gave up counting the mules and help that got us ready that day to move from port to the hills outside of Paphos. On the way there was more, because Moira led us first through Ariadne's house. I came off the sea black as iron to let go the world for tomorrow, and here was a place like home as fresh as sunny day. Inside, midwife Kia kept three chambers, and in the first she and her sisters stretched me out in a spiraled clay tub, in earnest of rites for everyone. As our people filed through and left little stones or seashells with their prayers, Kia had me oiled and dressed again in the chamber of their birthing-stone, a strong gray boulder with a shape to help comfortable labor. In the middle chamber I saw what made many people weep: a chest-high altar horned in stone, and the horns looked cut by hands that built Knossos. More, along the dais where the room's low running benches joined together, a crowd of nineteen little standing Earth Mothers, every one of them different, with birds' or women's heads or standing on a talent of good copper. And in the midst of their Great Year dance, another stone the perfect shape of a seashell, bigger than any in the sea. Honeybee and Zoe tried to blink this dream away, an oracle and house of birth where even She Who Walks On The Sea found new life

The sun was going down on our first day. Camp was a wide spread of level-topped hills, dry with thick grass and the shade of old willows and tamarisks, a loud stream running seaward. It was work to unload so many loaves and cheeses, jars of wine and oil, baskets of dried almonds and old-store wheat, and a score of sheep came after the mules. Beneath those burdens the town had folded up half a village of sailors' tents, and among them old weavings to work with. So camp was touched with hope: the sea breathed softly under these hills, and through the trees we gazed on our ships and wide-open world. We could have been plundered that night and heard nothing: on The Nail we had forgotten how to sleep

Through the next half-moon Moira's Cyprians all but left us alone. I raged and ached, missing Prax. This was cruder than Karfi life, but there was a safe sunny beach where we taught our young to float and swim. Norax's Oinops and Arge's son Butes took straight to it. Those days we always saw Winato, the man hurt worst inside by what we had done, sitting alone by the waters: now it was the turn of his son Phitios and the queen of our weavers, Euryale, to make him want to plant and build again. He could not let go, he told Honeybee, of things he had done to people in our fight: the more because on Karfi, he had asked to learn how. *Who was that man!* Winato tore into himself. To me this likeable lout was the opposite of Melas

Alashiya night was full of owls, jasmine growing wild: we began to dance again,

and shouted back to Mother Zoe. There were few chores but wood and water, so things went well enough for Melas and his surly blondes. As for his household, Pereko came to Melas and made it up for the threat that night at Knossos. Behind that was Pereko's Cissia the potter and their son Oka. They pushed Pereko back close to Melas because he most likely was going to lead new uses of our ships, and they wanted their little girl Eos off The Nail. And still, Melas said he was waiting for Moira's other foot to fall

--Ahh, he said beside me some days later, when an invitation came: the town's latest crop of kourai were returned from their year of separation, and now came feasts and ceremonies of their welcome as adults. We wanted our young to learn belonging where we were. Podargos and I led a hunt so we'd have at least rabbit and partridge to bring: our women picked flowers and wove up garlands for us to wear and throw. Melas thought he was on to something, but our whole camp went down to do them honor, even those bickering mainland sailors, the Meshwesh and Merire

Paphos turned out twice-again as rich and proud, the women with strands of carnelian and lapis in their curly coifs, their best flounced skirts lifting with the turns of their welcome-dances and the men wild and fierce to rival them. When the sun was high, priests and priestesses from the upland places of their learning marched into town at the head of pipers and drums, chanting a birth-song and swaying great palm-leaves as they led their new adults back into town. These girls and boys had left almost naked

with shorn heads, and now they too wore young curls, the women in fine flounced skirts and open-breasted jackets, the men in pointed little sailors' caps of leather and a sword of bronze at each their sides. Norax pointed me the blades, some with double stabbing-points and hooked in the middle like a jawbone

A host of fifty youths marched singing past us toward Moira's precincts. The women were bearing baskets of saffron-flowers picked that morning, and their bare feet were torn and bloody from the hillsides. The men carried nothing, but any wound their bodies had suffered this past year of learning blades and hunting, they had laid open, and these bled likewise down their chests and legs and arms. Not a face went by without the eyes wide-open, tranced with their own strength coming home

They filed up into separate houses in the town, for secret things and taking of a name. And then in the great open crescent of space between the town and the sea, where we had stood, the new ones rejoined each other. Before us the men gently washed the women's feet, and they the men's wounds. Merire, beside me, made a sound as if he swallowed the world's best fig. And that was the end of these formalities but one, as the young men and women formed up now, their walking-groups as friendships made them, to stand before first mother

We followed up the hill among houses bigger and finer as we climbed, and the painted and gilded and flower-bathed white stories of Moira's pillared halls stood the

greatest, with terraces over us full of well-dressed people and the ground-floor gardens open for the feast. It really was a hive, brisk with business and easy with its aims. We followed the Cyprians, left our sandals with theirs, then walked along a bright wide hallway of tapered red pillars, whose floors were crazy-paved slabs of pink schist. It brought us past two separate fine stairways, then in under a lintel of spirals in red, white and black. We had entered the great hall, and before us high at the far end was Moira: enthroned at the top of a three-leveled dais, the wood of her comfortable three-legged chair like the dais white as ivory, flanked by palms in red-spiraled planters

From her earrings and necklaces to the weavings of her garments, she was Earth Mother, silver and gold, all crescents of the moon, smokes rising from censers burning cedar, dittany and other sweet unknowns. She was receiving the last few men and women, who climbed the dais toward her with eyes averted and, reaching her, held out their palm; and in each she placed the feather of a crane, which they kissed and slipped in a pouch or tied to necklaces. Each bowed solemnly with hands covering their faces, lifted their arms and held them out and open: a gesture like a bird's at stretch to fly, a courtly thing of gratitude. With that, one by one they backed down the triple-dais for the doorway, then turned and ran out under the spiraled lintel with a whoop for the gardens and their friends

Their wounds left smears of blood on the floor, and their faces shone. They had

earned the totem of their clan, and full belonging; and with a touch of Egypt that our women understood, the token spoke of the Earth Mother too who waited to weigh each person's soul against a feather. Cyprus married that to their sign of family in this world, made harmony the path to afterlife---this breath of a thing with weight for their living. It told us their happiness, their confident courage to suffer with and for each other. We all simply moved to venerate her likewise, and Moira gave us each a feather too

--Ahh, said Melas holding his own up to the sun as we were heading out, into the gardens for the offerings and the feast

--By Zeus! I said. --She's got us by the quills!

--I tell you, Melas vowed, while smiling all around, --the other slipper will fall

--My slipper your backside, said Norax. --Is it so much, what we owe? These people have what it takes. Otus, give me the big word. Substance

--Seduction is substance? Melas laughed. --Maybe to you, brother

--Look! Norax pointed at him for our tribe. --It's Melas, alone with a thousand fools of us. Melas! Norax laughed. --Go on then, tell us you won't crawl back up this street if she winks your way. A man can die in those arms

--More than once, Merire grinned; and Melas grinned along with us, but then, with a cordial *Gentlemen!* he slipped away, off into the courtyard's gathering crowd

--When you and I talk, it tries to get somewhere, Aktor said to me, folding his

arms: he looked flush and strapping with his usual fair-brown club combed into swept-back curls by Ninna , but he was wincing watching Melas ply the loud sunny swirl of families. --He shrugs things off. He jumps all around. He doesn't listen, uncle Otus

--He tries. Come, let's together in our cups, and see who gets carried home

I had said the word, about a tent in a strange meadow; and as Alashiya's drums and the wild chant-music took us up, I kept him close, this youth, who helped the pain awakened by his black-eyed beauty. *Here we were*, and my heart leaped into the half-dancing circles with Aktor and Podargos and Merire's men

The rites were majestic, with Moira's house-bonds offering big-shouldered bulls between the garden's two tallest palms, and then the meals along the benches of their common-houses. Their fiery red wine they sipped at first in brooding silences. Slowly the hours and the wine flowed on: Norax for one met a man and woman of his old nomos Phaestos, now of Miletus. For him, they took pains regretting their family's leaving Crete back in the hard time, and then they insisted that Norax come and see what they had built of a good lost home. Pereko and Winato picked up offers too. A woman of Troy on business liked Pereko's sharky look and archer's eye, and Winato in spite of himself hooked an old Carian man out of Caunus with chatter of his looms. It was as Pyrrha said, you never knew whom you'd meet. The worst thing to do was let anybody see your empty cup

Our women were already thick with Moira's: the people flowed from common-houses into gardens, back to friends' houses, where they pleased to talk and drink and play and eat. They said nobody grew any older as long as they sat at table. There was more ceremony honoring Pyrrha's voyage, and Moira gave her no less than planting-land. *See? See?* Ninna tugged at Melas

Drunk by dusk, we lost Merire somewhere. The hours turned soft yellow, red, then blue with a breeze like balm. Moira's dozen house-bonds and other men began to disappear into the torch-lit town. The new young women were offering themselves, their houses Goddess' house now, bringing love among the people, gaining gifts with which to start their lives. From youth I knew the gentle calm that a man took home from those customs. Talking this with Aktor, who turned nervous, it came out he had left Karfi a virgin. I told him to spin in place eyes shut, and point; but just before he knocked on the door he looked back and said, *My father thinks this her shame*

--Prove him wrong! I drunk-whispered, and Aktor went inside. Along came Merire, weaving, wobbling, singing downwards to his codpiece: he walked as big as Norax with the mantle of black matted locks, dark-olive skin and wolf-shiny eyes. Now that he wore nothing but a belted kilt and boots, his chest and back showed scar-tattoos that half-covered him in webs of woven X's. Cranes' nests, among other things

--You look destroyed, what happened to you? I laughed

--Moirra, Merire sang out, his muscles limp with wine and ecstasy. --Ohh, he laughed to himself, --my tasty tuber drops off!

Jealous, I bucked him up along camp road. Merire said she only sent him home to say that she wanted to see the pair of us next day. --She makes strong war. Spirit-war, Merire explained with a drunk but sly grin. --For the spirits of the young ones. Did we not see power today, to bind them? She makes it a thing a healthy man wants. Kings, tricksters---traps they weave around you, things you cannot get out of

--Well-ended, I laughed as Merire threw up

In the morning we were seated at Moirra's sunny table, and broke fast with her and Pyrrha. By then I dared not be so cordial as before, because on the road we heard about one of Moirra's house-bonds starting trouble over the Meshwesh in her bed. *And you, Moirra glowered on the man, intend to do what about it? Well then! Go live elsewhere as you please, and take your nose along.* The woman was a mountain or a moon, something almost too much to be seen across a table, the animal beauty, her solemnity and hidden skills. I hardly spoke. She and Pyrrha, pleased with the festival's minimal fistfights and injured drunks, talked about Cyprus' sister-cities, Amathus, Kition, Enkomi: older and bigger, but built with more bricks of Canaan

Before I knew it we were walking home again, and our steps were strides. Moirra asked me to travel a year with Pyrrha: port by port around The Great Green, our work

to seed the world with gifts, and draw more trade. It was fundamental custom, full of future. Scarcely beached, my being leaped to it; to see the lands and cities that had sent my father ships

Merire's men would see home that winter of the voyage, and right away he said half of them agreed to guard us all the way back. Sicily was a port of call to keep my word in Shekelesh. To that, Nyasha the mother of the little blonde twins offered work as Pyrrha's lady. The hazards I feared, and Cyprus' hands I trusted

We built a good fire for talk. It haunted me that I had ignored Zoe's cranes, and I wanted this right with her: she cried without asking to come, and promised to help start our home, for we had land to plant through Pyrrha. Ninna had seen it, a long level valley half-a-day's travel up the river feeding Paphos, the soil black and the green slopes fine for vineyard, fig and olive. Honeybee saw good in my going, the sooner to wean ourselves. We had partners to hand, like that grandmother and her family from Amnisos: there was even a quarry of limestone one day off by oxcart. And Honeybee, in seeking out the families of Squiddy and his lost mate, had already crossed a Cyprus mason in their midst with one of Karfi's best weavers, a gazelle we called Brimo

Podargos won his fight to come along, because his other choice was a young man's year in the mountains, too much like The Nail just now. He was turning out no boy for priestly things, and if not, this could help him every way. Norax meant to stay

and work, that was all, as he liked the balmy flat open spaces so much. And he made sure Melas knew that people needed him here---although Melas' hope was now to refit the ships and make the most of them. Aktor's face longed to come but he claimed next voyage. I was glad for him at Melas' side, with Norax and Ninna on the other

It took half a moon to make ready while our hundreds moved. As usual, second camp built better, and home was all the hills, woods and water one could ask, with gulls and ducks and cool air coming up the river-mouth, the sun each day dying into the sea. The place we called Zakkala too. It had stuck with the Cyprians, we liked its salt and music; and nobody now wanted Zoe to say what it meant. We liked its mystery among us, not reducible to words

Moira mounted a feast for Pyrrha's going. Our lead-ship's captain was there, a stick-thin leathery gray-stubbled cuss called Ramose with black Syrian eyes: Pyrrha he worshipped, and me he cut like chub for a hook. *The mission is yours*, he said. *The ships are mine: there's a reason I'm fifty and not fish-food, prince*. So we had yet to drop sail and I felt like a water-fly; but Moira's instructions made me want to rise. *Show your Cretan. Remember, each place you visit, to honor their officials even more than their gods. Where your hosts are familiar, be judicious with gifts: be generous where people are building. Keep both eyes open for things of house concern---and whatever happens, respect old Ramose*. I could scarce-believe I was going, let alone try to tinker with ships of their wealth

I remembered loving Pyrrha since I saw her on Karfi. Her house-bonds were like Moira's, working hard their range of skills, living well and grateful for her rain. Their gambling and meals were all excited talk that this was Pyrrha's last trip for awhile, and they teased over whom she might make a father. In hand I had a year of days alone beside her, but they stood to win when she came back. When I fumbled around these things with Pyrrha, she said that we knew much, we were going to find out more; and she laid her arms around my neck. *Cranes mate for life---unless it's not working*, she smiled

There was one last day that made me proud and sorry to be going. Two of the mothers out of Honeybee's household---Arge, who had lost Donos, and Winato's worried woman Euryale---launched a plot that startled me out of my tent, surrounded with a four-deep circle of every young man and woman of our camp. Their own sons Butes and Phitios, Norax's Oinops and Pereko's Oka pushed Aktor out in front as their hundred young voices boomed out a good-voyage song. This was thanks, said Aktor with a laugh, for pushing everybody off The Nail. Best of all, they gifted me with the only thing they had, each other: he meant their oaths, as cranes and Zakkala, to astonish my eyes and Moira's too when I came back and saw their year of building. So, I left this home with a treasure inside that no misfortune of The Green could take. It brought on likewise the last thing Melas ever said to me. *It is just not fair!* he teased as we were drinking. *The things that come your way and you're not even trying!*

Pyrrha, Podargos and I rode Ramose's lead ship, and hers the best aft cabin-space out of the sun, because the way she looked was half our mission. Merire sailed with us while his Meshwesh plied a second at our side, and I began to divine some secret with him and Pyrrha. In a day we rounded the great cape south of Paphos, bypassed Amathus and followed Alashiya's southern shores: the mountains turned their shoulders, stretching out of sight along her spine, and then Kition's white curve of houses and their smokes, a city nestled in a bay between wild marshlands. But we did not put in, only took in convoy two treasure-ships, and two more with Cyprus guards. From here on we were six vessels sliding in and out of the wind as it helped us, bound for Enkomi, where we took on crowning touches of our gifts

Ramose was strange, a man happy only when bored because it meant things in order. But that was his home's way, Enkomi's. From her stone-built ports to the upper city's ramparts, through their gates and then the doors of great houses, some official like Ramose or his mother moved us place to place, experts of protocol bored and glad to hand us on. What was *that*, some bloody thing on the beach the gulls were at? A rapist, we were told: a sailor from Tyre. They had pulled his eyes out, cut off his genitals and staked him for the crabs. Anything he owned was now his victim's

This, and the shore's heaped ramparts, ugly and inconvenient, were new-drawn lines. Canaan was changing, pounded generations by waves of Hittite and Egyptian

arms, both come to plunder. Cyprus saw its share of brain-crazed refugees. The third Tutmoses had beached here in our grandmother's days, killed and kidnapped for tributes of copper a fool could get by trade. Now that he ruled a house of worms, these people let his praises slide, remembered his mother and mocked the walls his monument. Better get ready, Pyrrha warned, to see what men were doing in his wake

I had glimpsed two sisters of Paphos, her thriving elders and, in each, a co-equal court like Moira's. The garments, jewelry gleaming at the tables laid to feed tribes of princes---people actually hailed fist-to-brow when they saw Labrys round my neck, and praised Moira's hands. But I knew myself outside their high councils, not even peer to Cretans long mixed-in, and curled to my sleep a child

Next day on ship, most eyes were on *Ya's* last mountains: mine kept measuring the wealth in our holds. Bales of cloth to make spoiled princesses gasp, rank on row of copper talents, bundled logs of rare wood from the islands; Canaan's tin and ivory coming home in fine swords, carvings, plaques and ornaments. Potted seedlings picked for people overseas, rolled rugs and tapestries years on the loom: fat-bellied jars of olive oil and wine, fish-sauces, pickled things, and more holding straw-cushioned pitchers and pyxes of aromatic resins, tiny statues, cups and goblets gold and silver, clay wares. By the time I thought myself something again, we sighted far mountains of Asia red in the sun, and steered south of the great one called Zephon, toward a river's channel. The

coastline pinked, and sweetened: the sailors called it White Harbor, the cliffs and hills behind them gathering us in with fields of fennel-flower, bright as clouds. Ugarit

They gave her temple fires old cheers: three smokes of evening prayer were climbing her skies, two from the white roofs of town-sized buildings on the north slopes of the city's gentle hill, with smaller shops and houses bunched around them. The third rose out of a palace rooted in the hill's south side, the house of their royal ones with main wings and courtyards bigger than both temples, and another little town of kinsmen's residence behind. From the shore to the brown inland hills a rampart of earth and giant stones embraced it all, with towers in its flanks---a place as big as two country farms, a thousand houses sure with green open commons, gardens, spider-paths that followed the hill's lay, orchards. I walked forward mouth open as we neared the warehouse-warrens. There were *four* harbors, and strong smells on the air: mud-sour marshes flanking the bay for miles where river-horses swam, and Ugarit's dyeworks, fronted with sunbaked mounds of crushed-up shells in perpetual decay

--Good berth those quays to the far side, I pointed for Ramose

--Been here before?

--No, I answered

--Then go sit down, he shrugged

Back I went between banks of grinning oars. Pyrrha told out reasons why a new

man would be gaping---how Ugarit ruled a hundred towns, that Thebes and Hatti claimed her, and more. But this little thing was the real beginning of a year that taught me my in consequence. Green Man was now mostly green. From there I swore to shut my mouth and watch the people who could swim

Tying up, we lost sight of everything under the rampart, but the entrance gate at the top of stone stairs was a mouse-hole in a giant's wall, no wider than a one-ox cart, and low: inside it turned us quick to the left into a court that made defense like target practice. Coming through, the city's hill climbed away all yellow lamps, the shadows of her breezing trees in rhythm with the shore, and meat and music on the fennel air

We stood in the dusk and only felt the guards, then saw long-robed people striding down our way, each head a rival hairdo, some piled tall as a Hittite's helmet. The portly bright old man in front was Arkhalba, factotum of the king: he knew Pyrrha, and so did wife Naka who instantly gave her a necklace of blue stones. Officials, gods, leading families, craftsmen, people---our visits aimed to sweeten things and leave them eager for ships of trade behind us. So she had gifts for each high priest at both their temples, and for the women's houses in-between. Their high god was El, a spirit-son of Earth and Sky: he was all power and strength, although they never saw or pictured him. Baal his son was the substance of their king, and him we gave our best. Even Naka caught her breath when our crew unrolled a rug made for this Baal's house, a

magnificent white dove soaring azure-blue

Arkhalba rubbed his hands together, every barefoot citizen seeing afresh their king's international weight. Their other temple, to El's brother Dagon, I liked for its open sides and the skylight over its dug-down sanctum. Dagon was their wheat, the strength of their gardens: Dew of the Land they called him, or Zeus the Plowman. Fine; but I wasn't going to ask why their kings were Baals if Dagon was El's brother. I did hear one of the public prayers call Baal a son of Dagon, and in that I smelled old-home, a farmer's god turned king of storm and war. Their rites were thick with Goddess-wives and sisters, but we saw no separate houses in their honor: Earth Mother here was Astarte, and Asherah, with a third besides they called Dione, The Lady of Byblos. Pyrrha shrugged: it was only what you got where clans from all directions mixed, and men had pushed their own importance longer. She was generous, where I saw men losing track of their inventions

We had one day and evening with king and queen, and they used Pyrrha's golden goblets pouring wine in furrows of their fields. He was a black-bearded bear with one eyebrow and a leopard-skin robe off one hard shoulder, front teeth gone from battles, gold and silver shocking in the gaps. I fumbled his long deep-Asian name, but he was full of regard for The Minos, and told many pleasant nights in the city's Cretan quarter. The queen might have been island-born, her bellskirt's flounces hung with

silver pendants, her hair a peaked-up wonder, and cat's eyes to rival Honeybee's. But her fashionable jacket was cut to hide her breasts, or rather, to hide most of them

To the rites of day and feast of night they called every craftsman and person of standing at hand: it seemed they made war with their styles, their halls a clash of Egypt cotton, breastplates and bangles, Hittite wigs with island-kilts thigh-high, a jaw-line beard of Babylon. For that, their servants, *people of the king*, got on as family with full *sons and daughters* of the place: they bickered, danced together, ate from sharing-dishes, mocked the slobs who left the mess. Slaves there were, but few from war: most had either committed some crime or turned themselves for awhile into wealth they could build on. They courted skills because that was how you climbed their web. And connoisseurs-all, they loved the potted trees we left them, banana, and a plane-tree with big five-finger leaves: a strawberry tree that bore red winter fruit for a soothing drink, and a Cretan palm, for the city's high center looking seaward

The bad news here was Egypt. Tutmoses was dead, and his son, a second Amenophis, had already marched so far north that he crossed the Orontes in Ugarit's back-country, crushed any tribe with nerve to test old tributes, and sailed home with seven princes hanged head-downward on his prow. He was another one to keep the wives at heel, and carried on the gouging of Hatshepsut's name from afterlife. I had thought us deranged by The Nail. And yet, in a slipshod little tavern for barley-beer

and fish-soup, I watched an Egyptian and a Hittite break bread at one table, sharing their finger-dishes and arguing accusations as they ate, for both had families here no matter whose king claimed the city. Against the tavern's inner wall, a black-bearded Hurrian livestock-trader nursed his mug, grinning at them like a potted gladiolus

Ramose never forgot ships' business: he rotated men to keep the ships' guard fresh, oversaw every store, and then lounged in taverns and in houses like our gardens. There were men-entertainers in women's wraps who gave knife-throwing shows, women for holy communion in the temples who never bore children, and more who turned wet-nurse, losing privilege but gaining home and helpers. At any given hour half the city rang off the rampart with a clatter of work and reveling at once. As we cast off, Ramose was singing catches picked up from the *kosharot*, the city's songstresses, and best he liked the ones about misfortune

On ship, Podargos and the little yellow-haired Shekelesh girl named Kopi were taking a shine. It was otherwise with Pyrrha as she cast her first luck-stone in the sea. Miles out, she began to talk in hopes of putting age behind my eyes

--Where I see this, women covering up, she said, --I see men who can't control themselves, and women settling for boys. Where are their teachers, what are they doing? Fool me, none of them: the rites sing pretty Goddess, but the young girls love The One behind, Anath, because She's fierce and lusty. What tames them down and

spoils them? City things? They learn to want husbands who cower for place. He beats her where her powers temper his. And she would rather wear gold than show her teeth. Life gets easy: all it costs is the light inside. It is not good omen, Pyrrha finished

Ahead the coast kept shifting shape, its river-bays and one-ship yards like buds of ports, and The Lebanon's green-gray hills with mountains blue as thunderheads. I prayed to be useful to her one dawn to the next, *shachar-shalim* as they said behind us, and practiced tongues she taught me. Next day there was still darkness on us after pleasant things, as if the light of the world were going down. Then we saw Byblos

She was a city like a white crown for the two strong hills beneath her. There was a little valley between the seaward slopes' great terraced houses and the humbler, many-colored town, and over the walls Pyrrha pointed green heads of palm-trees in a circle round that place. They shaded a freshwater-spring and courtyard, where women of The Lady held her rites with the people round a sacred pool. The slope of the beach was so crowded that Ramose had to work at space for six: fishing-skiffs, fat coasters, barges set for sail with men lounging on well-stacked trees, even a Nile reed-ship

We climbed smooth-cobble streets past one-room homes, then bigger ones, but all with polished plaster walls and some with running benches where the families sat and idled; and scarce a person dressed in skins or without some amulet or carnelian jewel in the nose, The Nile's good linen and touches of gold for Byblos fish and timber.

It was a city that stood its ground with deep water cisterns through a siege, and here and there a courtyard with some lonesome obelisk, gilded-grand with Pharaoh's unintelligible glory. The place had an open seaside lightness, the presence and the taste of its Lady and her court. Where we saw Egyptians, even soldiers walked unarmed

She was Astarte, Anat, and Asherah as everywhere this land, but Byblos called her Ba'alat-Gebal, and hailed her king Adonis. To Pyrrha this was standard visit but I saw it lift her, taking each their hands: The Lady's diadem above green eyes was pure bright silver, a crescent pair of horns that spoke laws as well as mysteries, and even in her king with his young curls and bicep-bands of gold, we felt a lively peace---a confidence in long-productive kindness with a good salt of cunning. It was like meeting Moira's elders. Their Akkadian and honey-beer ran like water and so did the rites and business we chanced to see: like Ugarit, they played Egypt more than bowed that way. More wonder to my eyes, their feasting-hall was glorious with work by old-home painters: lilies, lotus, papyrus-reed swaying alive with butterflies and ducks, tandemed dolphins in a blue that shimmered yellow, and no less than a big-eyed bull with leapers near my chair. I drank their wine, to keep my soul in Byblos where I sat

We bypassed Sidon with its stone-works and trade brisk as Byblos', for others of our ships called there. Our task was Tyre beyond the headland, two cities, the old one the main and the younger jam-built on an island one mile out. Fetid reek of dyeworks

and decay: both throve the like on trade of olive oil, oranges and lemons. Unfortunately our work was with a rising family of the island-town, for Cyprus copper needed eastern tin. As visits went, we gained fair ground: it was getting in and out. Ramose also knew the edge of his captain's rule, and would not leave the ships for the press of bodies jammed into those streets; nor give me, in a port like this, more than twenty guard for taking Pyrrha through

First try and we wound up stuck, our gifts and spearmen, in a sweltering fire-trap of an alley called a street between two walls of timber-thin houses: the passage was single-file one-way with exceptions for the brutes walking over you, and spearmen hardly fazed these blanked-out faces of the world. Word came back that two or three sultans were finishing a fistfight up ahead, and every window a different human tangle, families just watching, an ale-house loud with cups and screams and music. Right over us both sides, men with less than princely faces stared down, sizing us up

Patience we tried. I blanked my face and browsed a hawker's stall, where black meat hung on hooks. When I asked the keeper what meat it was, he tapped it, and a thousand flies flew off it into the pack of people's faces. They dodged and bumped and started fighting too. *Troop! Turn! Present!* I shouted: my panic was Pyrrha hurt, or Ramose's tongue if we got robbed. Our men clacked their spear-butts and gripped them for business: we shoved our way back out and found the ships. *And what would you have*

done? I asked Ramose the smirking cuss: really enjoying his little kingdom of the sea, and I hated him his mastery of it. Tyre: house of Earth Mother of the families and Her Baal named Melkart, the ceremonies ancient, business shrewd. If that was the home of old Europa, it was good for her jumping the first bull out of town

Ashdod, Ascalon, more and more the walls and boats of Egypt's garrisons guarding royal road, though Ascalon faced no wall to the sea. Our competition was not so welcome there and we sailed them by, liking the miles of trees and untilled country where their little rivers fell. Within a moon we were bearing down the coast for Gaza where the routes for spice and incense met the sea

Old Crete was gone, and everywhere: small as Gaza was, and full-occupied by Pharaoh's soldiers with horse and chariot, the strong house on the hill beside the river boasted paintings and more people from old home. Come caravan and Pharaoh, people called it still Minoa; and as some had married Ugarit and others in their trades, they gave their thanks for crops to Zeus as Dagon. The road of Egypt's power ran through Gaza's north-south gates, and ships and camels met between the other two. Podargos loved his ride on one. It spat at Ramose, and he spat back

Gaza's men of the desert burned their fragrant wares in Pyrrha's honor, and never let us see their wives in tents outside the walls or watching herds. It seemed that kings and occupations had worn away a place for queens: our gifts for the Egyptian

lord were bribes to let us treat with caravans. The desert-men rejoiced in every courtesy, thought most of our sailors were women, and nights they loved dancing with each other or, if drunk, with girls of Cretan blood. Under infinite stars their music wailed out of skins and pipes every kind, with a clatter of little bronze discs above the drums

The more we traveled, Podargos grew happier doing things with Kopi. He liked each place, he felt my eyes on him to learn, and missing his sister, he taught Kopi games from the mountain. Sometimes he let his homesick father in. Both of us trying to find our feet, and so many strong different ways all about us

We sailed on south past the river of Egypt, and league by league again the land changed. Losing its garments of good soil and green to show another world's bony barrens, rock and sand-dunes, dusty highway, salt-lakes where reefs had trapped the sea. *A metal land*, Podargos said. The Sinai; and far to southward in those sun-cracked mountains, mines where people dug out Pharaoh's gold

--Point me the Pole Star, Ramose challenged one night where we beached: he laughed when I showed him Head of the Dragon. --Got news for you holy Keepers of The Door. The star that never moves has moved. Follow Dragon north now, you'll land four days off. We follow Kochab, yonder. So much for your verities!

The land turned our ships toward the sun, and now we drew near Pharaoh's port Pelusium, her red-brown water channels strong about her fort with the last of Nile-

flood. This was our gifting stop, and hardly touched the river's Ways of Horus and the south. There was no end to the wetlands, marshes and reed-lined lakes, lagoons and canals that either dead-ended in crocodile-swamp or brought you to a town with gold-peaked buildings. And this was only To-Mehu, land of the river's mouths

And yet, as we passed inspections and were led up toward official houses, we seemed to---lose the land. More and more from the moment their bare-chested priests surrounded us with purifying smokes and half-heart song and gesture, every wall inside and out of these brick-built houses fit for kings was covered in their carved and painted picture-words, their gods and totem-animals rivaling their colors in your eye. I followed Pyrrha but I must have been dazed. Even a window looking at a one-tree marsh felt like relief, and there were none in the great hall for business. We washed our feet before enormous doors of brass cut with giant priests praising Ra, their sun. Those opened to a cold hall, then another pair of doors the same; and these swung back into a hall with red-stone lamps like towers, one at each corner of a polished floor with pictures in it, a duck-hunt on the marsh where the big man's arrow took a score of birds. Inside, it pleased a man alone in a great cedar chair to receive us, like a bald brown child in white and gold

They gave us quarters painted Cretan, bulls among rushes with their cows, fresh enough to ask about the artisans. A priest said they were respected, but wanderers

living on their skills: their styles were improper for grand places, they slept where they painted and moved on. There was nothing on those walls for his eyes. Proud as I still was, those people were the only things I wanted, yet, out of Egypt

Westwards we hit the worst squall of the voyage, and I was too afraid to smirk that Ramose had misread wind and clouds. There was no place to beach in time and he cursed himself reefing sail and running up and down, even tying Bright Foot and Nyasha's crying blonde twins in place between benches. The ship began to pitch, yaw, roll and sway, heave and surge down waves as big as country hills: sometimes the whole prow went under, and once it was only his arm that kept a midships-oarsman in the boat. He took us through, then looked ashamed: we had nothing but smiles. Yet Ramose took no food or wine that day, and there was plenty

The boats near Pharos looked poorer, clans of fishermen and families working skiffs, and needleboats of sodden reed riding low with the west's rare woods, pistachios and oranges. Passing, they politely hailed, admiring not too much our ships: the mouth of Nile lived a steady state of things in rhythms of the tides. After Pharos, the land west of the river began to shed its green again: marsh dried out to a desert-edge scrub, with steep north-faced plateaus in the African distance. Tamarind trees, acacia, mastic, junipers clung to their soils and waited rains: we saw cranes again, for they liked winter here. We camped at Merire's call, and there were worlds to learn from him, little places

of water with figs, dates and oranges, green Meshwesh farmlands facing the sea road: each day of sail there was an outpost walled in around a well, two or three mud-brick stories high with rooftop battlements, and the olives and cow and pig pastures laid out to feed the families of settled-in Libu, who manned these westward forts. There we looked to lose our best guards, but only a few left the ships. Mersah Matruh was like rowing a boat through liquid light inside a sheltered bay. Six days on their towns were more like stone-built camps for tribes who roamed the seasons of their land: the houses at Ngame were three-fourths underground, with stores off every living-space. No people wiser with their water, the houses cool through summer and warm in their windy rains

Merire's kinsmen thought him a shade, and all his brothers: then they covered their eyes and wailed, fell back fainting, danced like trees, and feast was on. Every body more than twelve years old showed Merire's same webbed X's in their scar-tattoos. Three days and this was only getting started. His mothers sent off news to other camps and, over and over, we watched families running in to explode in grief and joy around their sons. Some had already named sweet black-eyed children for these dead, and solemn rules fell by. When the year's circle turned at midwinter, Ngame mounted ceremonies that meant our full-adoption, their best thanks

Good winter there. For the burdens of our hosting there were traders' goods to

come. We ate couscous-wheat with mutton, sipped warm teas and spicy sherba-soup. Merire took us hunting gazelle, and when I bested Ramose that way I could have slept smiling in the rain. Most of all I was marveling at Pyrrha, how equally at home she was in a formal court or a camp under trees, changing and always herself. The one loathing in her world was funny to me, with the way our feet made love in bed: she abhorred a dirty floor and anything to do with other people's shoes. Nyasha the Shekelesh had one carp the whole way, saying Pyrrha did not seem to need her much

Come early spring, she went away for awhile with Merire: she called it their mission from Moira, and when Pyrrha came back sure of what she knew, she opened their secret. A plant called sylphium grew only here along these shores, a big stalky aromatic like giant fennel, sweet for sheep or to flavor up a fish, but its bulbous root a surer thing against childbirth than wild carrot, or a pessary, or wool soaked in lemon and oil. Merire had told Moira about it, that night of their garden moons ago. So it was Moira, wondering what sylphium might become. And the two of them said I was welcome to partner if I pleased

Merire made a point to walk his ship-fellows home, and soaked up gifts and obligations, we his ornaments for once. In each little town they had a spirit-house like Ngame's, where their girls and boys learned strengths of Libya's Lady, Dripping Rain. She was fierce and lusty as Anat, old with magic to save, or kill; and they learned battle

and the ways of love in goatskin garments till their day. When the Seven Sisters set, they extinguished all their fires and made love three days all comers. To spring's crop of youth, their mothers gave them leather from their cows; and as everywhere, the daughters gave their flowers to the mysteries. Young men brought them necklaces, hard-earned cowrie-shells twined with shoots of Green One. A hard flash-flooded country, her gardens underground, to be missed, and curried

Launching out north and west for Sicily, for the first time we lost all land. Seven nights we rocked out there against the wind, tiny creaking toys: the moon was waning-weak and if the sailors were nervous, I was afraid. Ramose wasn't just sailing aslant each sun that set ahead of us. One eye on a cloud or star, he sniffed wind, fished out seaweed, dragged a reckoning-rope; then he ordered turns and turns-again, as if he saw interlocking rivers in the waves. Turns in the middle of nowhere! Breezing up-deck past me with a riddle-tune, adept of the world, a sea-king

*No wing or oar can reach me, no colors like my own:
no sailors ever beach me, except as skull and bone*

--The sun, the sun! Podargos said

Sicily, close-in, almost dwarfed the ocean: broader than Crete, with a vast volcano's mountain green and gray to the snow on its shoulders. We beached at

Thapsos, a little bay facing sunrise between two headlands, with a river on each side: a dozen fine white stone houses clustered on a neck of land jutting from the beach, and the shore's grassy hills showed clearings with round wooden houses of their families. It might have been Paphos long ago, everything building: now it was Nyasha's turn to be the wonder among tears and feasts. Out of that, half a ship's trade of gifts, and buds of business: the families of their farms had young people eager for a craft, and we had eastern rarities and teachers. The thing most promising went hard. Podargos told me he wanted to stay, and not like a boy only sweet on little Kopi. He was living the vast spaces seen all his life from a goat's ledge called Karfi. Had I not hoped he would rise to it? I felt the healthy ache of his age to get out from under Ninna and his tribe awhile. Nyasha I trusted, whatever grew or fell out of Bright Foot's heart. So I bit down on my own, as I remembered Moira's counsel on where to be generous. It gave me courage to expect the same from her

True of speech, it was good to see Podargos' spell of panic a few days before we sailed. We calmed each other planning it out that one or the other would come back in about two years. So there I left my living son waving as we set out toward the sunrise. I worried his wild early life, and liked more and more that idea about sylphium

The bay of Pylos was a blue curve sheltered by a long green isle, splashed with spring's red poppies hills to seaside, and in the isle's lee a powerful row of black ships

waited work. Near water's edge, a burly ash-wood statue of Poseidon-Earthshaker guarded all with lapis eyes, his arrogated trident high in hand, horse-bridle in the other. He had come far since Dagon-days as a boy of mountain-springs. Pyrrha said he had a sister here, and come high-summer they decked a marriage-bed for them; but his was the only image from here to house. I saw works of Cretan hand that brightened halls with pretty women riding chariots, but Pylos was not built for ceremony. Priests and priestesses, rich with the run of their gods' slaves, worked the land through sanctuary-places in the hills. Good stone roads for chariots led every way. Below the walls there was no place just to sit and not be thought idle

The great house was a fortress walled with enormous stones, the roofs of three buildings and a warehouse of their wines on one hill stark above the town. Houses ran from well-cut stone to wooden shanties, and the bay felt crowded, as if inlands bred sons they couldn't keep. Guards in chariots met our sails, the rigs tricked out with horn and inlay, drawn by horses twice the ponies pulling Earthling carts. Brethren of Knossos' rulers in the same white-fringed robes, they drove us each in honor up a piece of stony road, and through massive bronze-braced gates on hinges. They left us at a stair up through more doors to hall, and out of the sun, the tiled courts and corridors dazzled with romping animals, lions and great-winged griffins, hunters and marching men at song. We were marched to chambers with spiral-painted bathtubs, and black-

haired Pelasgian slaves with blank faces poured our hot and cold where no pipes ran. Fortunate, sullen Earthlings, they oiled and scraped us, fussed every curl

At feast the lord of Pylos, another Koreter in white and gold, displeased his queen indulging Pyrrha like a bird no other had upon his arm. His queen had her own throne, but she sat the evening smoldering at his side, fine as Moira to the jewels in her hair and speaking as spoken to. Bearded husbands, women with gold-chased breasts half-covered, the sires drinking mead from stone cups cut with scenes of battle in the islands. We ate while a harper played sad things of war, around a hearth in the middle of a great four-pillared hall, and lounged as in a camp of people wandering still. I watched my looks and studied Melas' dreams made real

They had a woman of court, Eritha, to handle our gifts, which house-pride would only accept as trade. We looked to make an inside friend, and Eritha poured wine, a hard Achaian jaw to her handsome forties, a peaked cap that let brown locks curl down her temples to her blue robe. She began to moan last year's crops, pointing from her terrace mouths to feed along the bay. In short, she needed twice the usual trade-lots for her basalt. Pyrrha calmly mentioned droughts in Cyprus, crews and cargoes lost in storms, and we had not doubled our demands. *This is all I can do for you.* *Most people don't mind,* Eritha shrugged. Pyrrha minded, but she managed to regain old terms with a bribe of Gaza myrrh, and a Meshwesh jug of something quite reliable. And

still Eritha wore a cheated smile, as we were marched and driven out

Ramose eased us around the main's steep headlands, eastward for Kastri, Cythera: once I looked to point dolphins for Podargos, herding their fish with wings across the waves. Cythera lay days before the Cyclades, and them I had not seen since my father's ships sailed for war. But Kastri told a story echoed at Melos, and Naxos, as we threaded the islands for Miletus and home-coast

Gone, everywhere: an old rich Cretan house ashes, labyrinthine living-places never far from crude new rows of Achaian market-stalls. The Cretan blood alive in these places had long dug in among kinsmen of the isles' strong houses: our gifts were to keep ties young. Earth Mother stood as ever at the core of spring's wild venerations, and meals that made good talk on good stone benches

Yet, a tide was dragging the anchor of the islands. Thirty years since earthquake took down half these cities of The Green; as many years without laws of Dikte on the sea. From Kastri to Melos and Chora, the rich port of Naxos, the houses had stood or fallen raiders' prey by their own arms, and men gained ground in people's thanks. But what had they learned? Why were more of these peoples of the sea marrying in Achaian seed without threshing the harvest? They worried neighbors' strengths, turned farmers into guards; then saw this in each other, and kept going. By Naxos I hid Labrys under again, to help me shut up while kings on their balustrades boasted me about

boys with sticks marching after mens' parades. Pyrrha marked the same places boasting each a Goddess born to them. They might as well have claimed the sea. In Naxos no less, Dionysos born from Zeus' thigh

Not long ago the world had shattered: who was helping them take it like some judgment on their ways, a call to change? More and more beards, more places like Pylos with a throne that made no answer to moon or sun, the shops and trading rebuilt separate from ceremony: more of these marriages that filched daily powers from the damos. Earth Mother's split-off totems splitting families. Naxos was rich because their great Mount Za caught the clouds, and made them rain. It was one thing to give a Zeus gratitude. Another to point *me* a cliff above Chora, where Ariadne jumped into the sea. Conferring her upon themselves, with kings to shake the tree until the fruit fell

Miletus' bay on the Maeander was half of Ugarit's, and young as she was for a Cretan-born town, had never burned yet. Carians had been allies of my fathers, and stepped forward far into the islands. Their feather-crests and boarstooth helmets were liked where their ships patrolled: the men had old-line spirit. Like Earthbull's, crazy for a fight sometimes, prouder than mean, but murder where they saw a threat

We heard of Norax well-received. I wondered if he saw Miletus' other side. The Qari and their coastal kin had Hittites at their inland backs. By turns their men fought off Hatti's reach for taxes on their sea-trade, and other times when the price was right,

they trained up young hundreds to help Hatti's wars against Pharaoh. And now they had a trade in slaves, the wreckage from inland. We saw the naked bearded men strung along by rope collars, women and children sold strictly together, a rule to keep them docile and productive. Their hope lay with the house that happened to trade for them

So we coasted another moon home; saw Qari's smaller cities Cnidus and Caunus on their fingers of blue bay, and the wild shores of Lykia. Every land its flowers, secret waterfalls, and hosts of brilliant birds in circling thousands. In the wake of Pyrrha's welcome at Paphos I had to find Ramose, to say the thanks he hated every time to hear. Spotting him still on ship, first I just watched him once more, his pure attention on each little thing. It seemed I had been looking for the way of a king without kings, and that somehow he was the man best living it. There was no way to say this and it didn't matter because when I came up Ramose rushed me, seized my cheeks and kissed me on the mouth. *So long*, he said and he turned away again to coil his lines

Paphos' people made a welcome, though Moira chanced to be in the summer mountains: mine finished with thanks in Ariadne's house. As no one at Zakkala knew we had beached home, I looked to surprise them, but they gave me one. It was in every face like a death no matter who kissed me, and I had to stamp my foot to bring it out

Melas had raided Carpathos. Where I said we ought to come back sometime. Ninna had washed him from her mouth. She would not even say where Aktor was

Our young who pledged their building kept their word to make a father weep. So I hung my darkness round Melas' neck as they sang and showed every fruit of their spirit. It all came out as we drank sitting downcast round a fire, under the moon

Melas had worked six months pulling in the skills to put those boats of ours to work. I listened and could see the man's feet itching stuck on planting-soil. Then Melas and Pereko went to Moira, for the practical touches and luxuries with which they aimed, they said, to open doors with Rhodes. But they could only raise one ship's crew out of Zakkala's Karfi men. It was Aktor who noticed that most of those, like Pereko's son Oka and Butes, were men who trained at knives and might have gone Abas' way, had he lived. So, Aktor raised a crew with half the trouble, and Ninna's blessing was the wind behind them. Someone remembered it was strange that, for once, Melas did not want Aktor with him. He knew his son had Ninna's eyes

From there, the rest came in pieces. A ship of Qari beached having spotted the ships just like Melas' at Paphos: they told Moira they were hunting one boat that killed and took people out of Carpathos. Nobody knew where they sold the families off, but two moons later, Melas himself had the dumbfounding gall to come home to make gifts of their spoil. And Aktor's boat was not beside him

--Twenty men banished, Norax said, --and if ever they or Melas show again, Moira expects us to kill them. She gave them curse to white your hair. I am a fool, and I

thought we knew the man. Aktor? He never came home, nor any of his twenty. So, I hold, said Norax showing fists, --to the nothing we know for sure. Carpathos must have killed some of ours, if Aktor was there. *Some of ours!* I do not understand this shame upon us. I want to crawl down under a mountain

First time I saw Norax at full cry. Butes who had lost his father Donos, gone with Melas: Phitios gone with Aktor, wanting something for the shattering of Winato. Pereko gone, and Cissia doubly desperate now to bring their daughter, Eos, off The Nail

Botcher's brothers, pricks royal, desert dust! Everything we had for comfort scared him. To hide it, fill the world with fear. *You're not Zakkala.* Zoe, a child had seen it. When was I going to learn. What did it take

Come daylight, I raised a Great Year dance for Ninna's and Honeybee's glorious beginnings. My heart was an ache for many sons, but I had glimpsed a world to work with, and come safe home. Sleeping at Zakkala beneath the summer trees, *shachar-shalim* I heard the sea, and felt the rhythm of its rise and fall. More than once in dreams I was striding out to meet it, arms high like the horns of a white moon, beyond black roaring waves. But always waking up, just there; and then, not far, the real one's scent and sound.

5

Our first house we washed white two years later, and over its door went Moira's gift, a limestone brace of mountain horns with three spirals facing the morning. Six rooms with a ground-floor center sanctuary and benches round the walls for communions, two stories with good windows, a rooftop garden: it was more than Ninna ever looked for again this life, and from there, she as first mother gave back labor along the valley, raising other homes. In the evenings people came back to our first fine yard, with its gathering-tables under willow trees old as Mother Zoe. We sent every first-fruit to Moira, and looked for ways to build our families. In Melas' venture we lost about one in four Karfi people, but a good dozen babies like Brimo's were fat ones

Keeper of Days was going to need some years to sight the sun against our hills. The moon's days told me when and where to start, and we had our own festivals winter and summer along with Moira's. Ninna dug her torment of not knowing into gardens of every herb and flower round the precinct, lilies, jasmine: she was planting one day and I told her she should rest. --You work more and talk less all the time, I said

--I remember a man's brave kindness, when every good thing was burning,

Ninna said. --So I wonder what I failed to do, to make this life enough

--Honeybee told me you turned his beatings into Ironhead marriages for the house. You, first mother, are the warrior conquering Cyprus

--Aktor is lost to us, isn't he. Otus, curse my mouth, I could see him and Phitios dead and feel better than I do

Honeybee and Zoe kept Ninna near: *We'll make it so good here that Aktor will know he must come home.* They took Ninna gathering crane-feathers every season in the coastlands' nesting-marshes, and brought stately things to Zakkala ceremony. In the midst of our losses it was Norax's Oinops coming to the front: of old days he was always third man with Prax and Aktor, and his father kept him close with their pleasures in the land

We cleared for grain, orchard and olive, planted our nurseries: there were nights of love alone with Pyrrha, with others in the gardens of Paphos. Pyrrha never named a father of the child she was showing by late autumn's moon, but when I asked what names she fancied, she said Deucalion for a boy. *Why do you cry? Is this not why I found you, and why you came, to bring sweet wine back to the world?* She could make a man go up in flames at once in spirit and in flesh

And then she wished that somebody grow trade of sylphium promised with Merire. Easy for her to line up men to work Zakkala in my stead, and Ramose to sail as

far as Sicily: I could see Podargos. Moira was ready to send masons and potters Thapsos' way, and it might help Bright Foot. Last to this push, there was Cissia the best potter out of Karfi, as ready as a man at arms to sail. No surprise, losing that son of hers Oka to Melas' dreams, besides her sharky house-bond. And if good lady Pyrrha could take a year at sea, Cissia meant to have young Eos off The Nail. So, I talked this out with Ramose in her name: he rolled his eyes for credit Pyrrha's way, and she laughed to say she saw her debt. Then Ramose fixed on me. *Give you ten days of Crete on the home leg, and then I leave you there.* A double-edged promise he enjoyed

Instantly I missed our tiny trees, Ninna's yard with its moving shadow of the horns, our river's talking stones. But again I surrendered to the sea because, if we did not vanish, there was gain every side of going; and not least, if we brought back Eos, a standing of the kind I wanted with our core of Karfi people planting Zakkala

--Keep this up you'll be walking sailor-legged, Norax joked. He had his own request: to make bold as I could to find our good sons yet with Aktor. There in our last cups came Oinops' turn to plead for a year under sail. In the end, when he listened to Norax against it, I saw in him our dead man Donos, that Karfi day from a life ago when he worried his chances and bet the wrong way. Oinops, with Norax's fierce-red hair and as Libu-large, had his father's wisdom young

Honeybee and Zoe made me feel the last of home. Ramose was less annoyed

with me this time, and listened when I asked to beach near the Achaian outpost in Rhodes. We coasted past the pulled-down houses of Trianda: for Pyrrha I put away the end of Cretans there, and we made their little bay Ialysos. Their bulky men at arms had a boulder-fort with a few stone houses near it for their families, and these ran a works like Pylos' little brother. Harbor-master must have heard about Melas, and was not pleased by what looked like some reach of Cyprus law into his bay

I learned nothing for gifting their yellow-bearded chieftain; but when I saw the size of their potters' barn, I kept the man's cup full. Hinting at business, I wondered if they had enough ships to bear so much stock eastward---and he roared back *Why!* at almost battle-pitch. Because, I said, the tables of Ugarit and Byblos began to like Achaian clay where they could get it. *So you say. We will discuss it. Come back,* said yellow-hair. And I knew that, with him, I had just cut myself out of the game

--Cursed crocodile-eyes on their prows, Ramose muttered as we cast

On Carpathos, shells of houses where Melas burned his name. We coasted well off Crete's southern mountains, put in at Kommos the best jumping-point for Libu, and Knossos' cheese-counting grip was no more. The Messara plain's plenty was fetching back things of the world, and Kommos was growing houses, ship-sheds, style. From the beach I saw the great humps of Psiloritis wrapped in cloud beyond her harbor, and seemed to wake up to myself there, building, working, free, with a boat and home;

drinking new weather and places, the problems and indignities turning into play. I left offerings for so much help from my family, and paid a skinny boy to bring Zoe and Makris a prince's box of myrrh. I schooled it into him, *Sweet Wine comes for Eos and six more*, and he switched his donkey for upland trail. I felt ready to carry his water, yet I breathed a world that was enough, and lost the sorrows of The Nail in the name of a boy that might be born. The winter with Merire and his three new wives was full of hunting, sleep and plans

In the middle of The Green, while Ramose wove his secret sea-paths out to Sicily, I heard songs that men at the oars had never sung for Pyrrha

*Away away we sail and row, off we go, wild wind blow
sweet for the girls who can't say no in the boats of Alashiya*

*The water-boy, the water-boy, the master wants to boff him
he stuffs his twat with shards of pot to keep the bugger off him*

*When we put in at Ugarit she screams my thing will never fit
we leave them happy tit by clit in the boats of Alashiya*

*On every isle of mothers' trade it's every mother's son gets laid
so here's a gift will never fade in the boats of Alashiya*

--Papou! Podargos shouted for old times coming down the grassy hills at Thapsos; and look at him! Two heads taller, straight brown hair out loose to his muscled shoulders, and he still had his bright mountain eye. Podargos was thriving,

and if I thought him young to be turning himself into a house-bond of Nyasha's, that was what he wanted---belonging to a town and people with equal room to run and build. His pairing up with Kopi was part of a feast that coupled many. If it smoothed the way for business, there were fist-fights too

--Some of the old families here resent blood of Minos, Bright Foot explained. The people here were all Shekelesh, but their first king Kokalos had wasted many sons against Knossos; and ever since, the families grounded in that grudge had marked themselves Shardana. Like Cretans they honored their tombs and remembered what had put their people in them. But these Shardana scorned old-Cretan strut, scorned Thapsos' imitations, and scorned the second-hand Cyprus breed of it alike. So this was the grief behind Thapsos' dance and music, that almost half of their men from families of that grudge had sailed off to the west, for another island. Not unlike our Karfi exile: their new place was far away, but not too far

At the talking tables, these Shardana cousins foxed a few of Moira's artisans to their houses, flashing amber and things worth silver in the east. In ten years, while Thapsos raised two big stone warehouses Cyprus-style, Shardana ships better than their first sardine-chasers would be sailing with knock-offs of Thapsos clay. Bless Bright Foot that he kept his Cretan head down, turning into a herdsman who loved the level lands and The Great Green air, like Norax. There were sure to be children his line in the house

of Nyasha. He gave me a doubled pair of gifts for Ninna and Honeybee, but he could hardly sail right now. So, my joy and care stretched already from Sicily to Cyprus

The trip's dumbfoundment came when we saw Aktor. Cissia spotted him in Pylos watching our ship come in: Aktor and, beside him, Winato's son Phitios, the pair of them in front of the fortress waving our way, their backs to Poseidon. And down our sons came running in a heavy jog, each with two blades slung over corselets and bucklers, their locks back in tight clubs and their faces all hard prime, like a pair of officers off some Kari ship. Such gear they gained somehow and I disliked it. I saw a few familiar heads around their beached boat, too, the sleek Cyprus double of Aktor's father---and hid my prayer against hearing they were somehow tied to Pylos

There was half a stranger in Aktor's eye, as if the shocks of our first days off The Nail had become his life. We kissed, and Cissia pulled us over to Aktor's ship where, sure enough, the full twenty young men we had known since Karfi life looked well, but in the same ways as Aktor and Phitios: most of their gear the lean things of a fighting-ship. The corselets of one or two showed the sewn-up hole of a stab through a previous owner. There was a cold bond in their midst, and Cissia felt it: right off she tried to make them know how well things stood in Cyprus. That life's good wheel of The Great Year was still turning, and for them. The woman even named out babies born, and trees in Ninna's gardens; all of which at once made Phitios cry, and Aktor sullen. It was

nightfall near my boat before I was alone with Melas' son. His granite face had thinned, sharpening his eyes and nose to the look of a falcon. Aktor showed me his right-hand sword. It was black iron, with three hacks in the edge. --Show me yours again, he said

--First, show me your feather from Moira

--Good old uncle Otus, Aktor smiled, and he dug out Mother Zoe's pouch strung round his neck. It had suffered, and Moira's black neck-feather of a crane inside it, too. With both hands Aktor touched the red feather given me, and I saw his dreams of touching Ninna's face: the news about Podargos gave him a Karfi smile

--Still have children every port, eh Minos?

--You know, I said, --a Cyprus metal-master warned me about iron. Bronze still does break it, unless good hands have tempered out the brittle and the soft

--You still talk like a priest, too, Aktor ended. --Alright. He's dead. The stranger whom my mother called my father got himself killed. I only heard it told for a joke where men drink. He got stabbed in some tavern north of here, in Nauplia, The Lion's port. Over a woman fetching barley-beer, Aktor said shaking his head. --What did he think himself? It is no matter. What I do now matters

--And that is what. Aktor. Come home, I'll stand beside you

--You always did, he answered. --You always listened. So please, uncle Otus, listen now. Before we left Paphos, I noticed the men he was choosing for his ship. I

could feel my mother uneasy, so I made myself her eyes. We put to sea for Rhodes, and then he and Pereko broke off south for Carpathos. When we caught up still on the sea, shouting questions, he just kept waving *Follow* from their stern---*Do what you're told, Do what we do, Follow*. So, we followed. But we hadn't hit the sand ourselves when we saw the men of his boat pouring over the sides, and charging that little town with their weapons out. My father himself came running to have us arm. And when our Cyprus captain asked him was he crazy, my father killed the man. Right there. As if to force it on the lot of us, there was no going back

--He was raping a town, uncle Otus! Was I supposed to kill my father? I got our boat out of there. And he cursed me for no son. Do you want to know the last words I heard from him? *This is for you!*

In the shelter of my boat Aktor covered his head in both hands

--We failed to help those people! he raged. --After that, we were adrift. I could not kill my father, nor cousins off The Nail. We tore our hair, hid up awhile. And I got us talking, like you before Knossos. We had to stand for something. So, uncle Otus, we push back. We do the hardest thing we know. We kill raiders. Now, if we find Pereko, cousin or no cousin, we will kill. We say we go home when we stop finding these fools. We do not want trade. We want the road open, for people who remember how

--So you come to look your father's god in the blue eye and have done. Good,

Aktor, because you have done enough. Do you forget you have several fathers? Why suffer the choices of one

--Uncle, please, Aktor said, turning his homesick smile away. --Just say we are out here, watching your backs. We cannot show our faces, until we---Arghh! Who knows! Until it seems we have helped more people than we failed

Such was Aktor's answer to the islands' dragging anchor. This son had come down off The Nail a ready killer, like the others I had poisoned. In Cyprus, he grieved for Prax, and yet none of us had healed faster than Aktor in her arms. Now it seemed that his father's dumbfounding crime had twisted him backward twice as hard; and I fought to stay calm, with one likely chance to fetch them home

--One day on Karfi, Aktor, you gave me some wise words. *No blood but the mountain speak its mind*, you said. Aktor, our families are free again. Surely there has been enough

--But the mountain is the world, uncle Otus. You and Mother Zoe taught that. I remember your words, too. When the people suffer, somebody has to be brave

--Have I ever known braver? I asked, making sure Aktor's eyes met mine. --This is a young man's honorable answer. But it is a mistake. It charges down the throat of what we hate. Please, I struggled. --Listen to one old man who learned the hard way. Mother Zoe was right: *She licks up heroes like dust*. Together, this night, you and I have to

look around and see something else about Earth Mother. She eats mistakes

--Yes. And when I showed you my good sword, Aktor said from a pause, and then a smile, --you saw her teeth. The Griffin's teeth of Lightning-sons

I snapped my mouth shut. Because I knew that I had bent the balance between Aktor's bloods; had melted down his losses into a new but twisted kind of iron. He was not going to listen. I left this hanging and dug up makings of a lean meal for everybody with us. Phitios sat beside Cissia for stories and Zakkala gossip: if we could pull him home, the rest might break and carry Aktor. I told them we were bound back to Karfi on our way home, to bring little Eos back to Cissia; how fine it would be to see the place and elders, and to feel their guard around us through the country

Only Phitios bit the hook. The pull of his hurt father and the nature of a planting-man put him on our ship. With Aktor that dark morning tide, his sleep made no difference. I seized him with a fist where the slings of his swords made an X on his chest, and spoke. He bore it well, until I felt myself failing and asked about his boat

--This world is circles. Sail off to kill all the killers and you come to your sword's sharp end. And still I tell you, son who makes me proud---Aktor, if this is what you want, you cannot do it better than *from Cyprus*. You want this exile. You want this crazy mission. Both of my mistakes, I put in you! At least, consider, that boat of yours belongs to Moira. At least make right with her, for your family's sake

--You tell them what happened. And we will keep on making right with her, Aktor replied; and then he kissed me both sides, and that was our farewell. Years along, I was still seeing his falcon look, his homesick eyes; and the Karfi-granite jaw, locked like his life around a needless shame and a vengeance that could not prevail

By then the sun was a full moon past its summer crown, and Ramose rammed us down the wind, full-wide of the usual resting-isles and Kommos too. He was salty with having to sit ten days at Myrtos before heading home, but at least we disappointed neither him nor Cissia. Merire's people had seen their son return unlooked-for like a shade, and so The Nail saw us. For me it was climbing a mountain wide-awake into the place where old family were sleeping, and all of it a dream: we never stopped talking, and this time said goodbye as if we lived on the next hill. Six more people sailed with us, and five days later we were home

That voyage was the start of two trades, with Merire and Sicily, and the more it did for Paphos, the better for Zakkala. When Cyprus learned of Melas' death, people made him even more of a lesson in disgust: the kinder they were to Ninna and ourselves, the more his name was to spit. Ninna, overwhelmed between, slashed her arms for Aktor and blooded the horns above our door. For him we made rites every moon, with Honeybee's and Little Zoe's help in the house of Ariadne, where they served and learned from Pyrrha's sister

On the birth-stone of that house, Honeybee gave Norax a daughter, Aithe. I grew my trees, Ninna the household, and Zoe with a midwife's future if she pleased. They all helped with little Deucalion. *You will plant, you will prosper*, Ninna sang to him: *hear now the great ones on the sea, protecting you. I sing you brothers' hearts to shame the sun*

I adored my wives their strengths and where they needed me; could suffer with our men digging ditches, learning the water-cooled saw that cut our stone, and in the evenings longed to plough, especially with Pyrrha. Phitios came home like resurrection to Winato, and they made famous husbands. Podargos came to visit, his herds turned into ships' business growing in his pouch; Norax and his Oinops plied Miletus as I did westwards, and some of our men fished mackerel and tunny with Trojan partners. Like them, more of our young scattered into the islands, eager for their own

The more I traveled, I learned to confess it: when things were good with Egypt, things were good. We were Canaan's kin and partners, but their own little status-wars cost more than Pharaoh's taxes. The second Amenhotep kept their peace with a hand much lighter than promised early-on: when he died after twenty-five years, I found myself grandfather to Podargos' son, named Prax. They were both in Cyprus because Ninna was dying. She entrusted little Prax her crane-clan's feather: she wanted to die in the garden, and she gave me my first clue that something was not normal. And now from these days onward, a life and world began to fade

--Do you think it's the sylphium shipped these years? Ninna asked

--Dear one, a man does not drink that. What do you mean?

--But you don't change, she said. --A bit of salt, your hair. But your skin. Your face. Tell us. Tell me, Ninna pleaded: she was not afraid of passing through the door, only speaking from the first unwilling steps a mortal faced. What could I answer? Many a man belied his age. When Ninna died, her mask was smiling. Though Aktor never returned to her, the last she saw was the line of our young coming through her garden: they kissed her hands, for the strength to lose a home and build another. She slept below a pretty hill, and many times our dances turned her way, with palms out high

The next Pharaoh reigned ten years and, nothing like the Tutmoses before him, he all but left the east to its affairs, a man for his dreams and monuments. I lost my Nail-hard brother Norax, who died in a good bed in the home of his son Oinops' family, out in Miletus. I sailed there with his daughter Aithe, cut my hair, my arms, and we danced his honor. She had twin daughters now. Oinops' house stood partners a long time with Zakkala. And then came a third Amenhotep, a little boy-king, whose mother's family Pyrrha had sailed to see. By the time he put on his blue war-crown and broke a rebellion in Nubia, Honeybee too was passing from the world

--You won't share it? she wept. --You can help me, and you won't?

--Share what! I answered, kissing her wrinkled hands. --You know Kia's

prophecy, I die like everybody else. Oh, Fourogata, the people who walk proud here learned from you. You were the altar that you raised for Ariadne, you made it more than trade---Honeybee, don't leave us

She did. And I did not die like everybody else. Like Moira, like Ramose, like Winato, more and more of them. Arge, and Cissia, Euryale and even Brimo the once-gazelle. And one by one, the people grieving change beside a grave saw me not changing. Their playful envy cured into wonder, and then became unease, resentment, fear: the thing I loved most began to turn. Sport of nature! Here, nothing gave offense like keeping a blessing to yourself

I shrugged that I had been struck by lightning. What was my diet, what did I bathe in, what root or talisman? With no answers, rancor grew, and worst where it counted most, in the elders whose hard-earned status this unnerved. Cyprus' elite were shrinking in their jewelry and textiles, turning skeletal under the finest scented wigs, and I went about a black-haired farmer whose skin still liked the sun. Vain I was, till remarks became hints of accusation. *He drinks the juice of monkey-stones. He comes to your house to lance a boil and two days later grandfather is dead---dry as a fly when the spider is done*

I stopped trying to answer. Did they expect me not to eat the whole fruit fallen to my hands? Pyrrha's sister Kia died. Next we knew, most of Paphos' traders refused to carry produce of our land. They wanted an answer; but the queen after Moira, Arne,

had not won her office on short memory. To her, Zakkala was her elder Pyrrha's child. Arne bypassed the fools, sent all we had overseas and, by luck, it fetched a good year's silver. That shut people up, till their envy got worse again

Merire died: he tripped on a stone, then got sick, and so believed himself to death believing he'd offended some daemon of the stone. I was asked to make offerings at Sais: the Libu all but ruled that town on a western branch of Nile, and the temple there of Neith was immense, full of people and learning. Inside, Merire's property by work went to all their children, his copper sword and spoils of it to his sister's eldest son. After, I sat outside that portico and learned the words inscribed above the door. For the first time, the stone immensity of that land gave me a good deep strength

I am all that has been, is, shall be:

No mortal ever lifted up my veil:

The fruit I brought forth was the Sun

Podargos had all a man could want. Hhe and Kopi raised four children, Nyasha bore Shekelesh sons to reckon with, and they kept Bright Foot clear of Sicily's worsening feud. My son Deucalion was a man to name every bird in our orchards. Zoe grew to a woman with a gift like Kia's, and all but lived at Paphos' seashell-oracle. She played with people till their own sense served them, and it grew the oracle's name. *Should I sail this year?* a trader would ask her. *Will you feel more lucky next?*

Zoe too bore a girl, Kaliopi, with her dancing-feet. I watched their lives ripen fine evenings under the great trees of our yard. Grandfather now, I did begin to dote in the sun. Old Crete, even The Nail, grew sweeter: this should have been an old man's nap. Instead, I was still fit for voyages. Travel kept me some from Pyrrha, but none of the trouble touched her. In Pyrrha we lived past measure: Zakkala was home, music, dawns and evenings jasmine-scented; strong harvests, children, swimming with them in waters like liquid sky. She and I never got enough of holding each other, naked, kissing: our feet still rubbed together, making their own love every time the first

And then I was kneeling beside her last bed. Pyrrha told everybody else to leave the room: they went out smirking-sure that now, for her, daemon-man would work his gift, and it would out. I had nothing: words

*You made my heart
big as the mountains
not even mountains
could love you more*

I watched Pyrrha traveling, returning from visions that soothed her pain. This the woman who forged two trades with Sicily and Libu; now crosslegged upright in her bed, like some tiny ancient seed a child of herself. She lifted her hands toward the room's light, and her fingers were a clumsy little girl's: she was in her mother's Cretan

kitchen, tongue at her mouth's corner, one eye shut, learning to work thread and needle. Her hands rose up together again and again, threading the eyelet like some gesture of solemn praise: its beauty tore down my bitterness till I was left only shattered, and in awe. The other world had opened in the room. The thread in her hands was real and infinitely long, and the line of grandmothers teaching: I saw worlds vanish in her passing, and their gestures and praise untouched by it. Pyrrha slept, and then the eyes in which I lived came back, lucid, radiant

--I dreamed, she smiled, --our first day together, on the mountain. And I wake to my beloved, and the world we made together of what we said

--Pyrrha! Pyrrha!

--No, no. Listen, she said. --These years of talk, I arranged to help you. Sweet Wine, Zakkala is our family's. But--you had better leave. Make yourself their agent on the sea. Don't wait till someone wants to see if you can die. Strange man, crazy man! Sweet Wine, take your name back. That is all we can hope, is it not, to bear with everything, and keep our honey? Go back to Kemet. Take my name to Lady Tiye, who rules with Pharaoh. So much land, they ran the country till he grew; and Tiye wants good island things. My ram, be brave, whatever keeps your summer rising! Husband, will you brush my hair, before the women come?

I gnashed my teeth not asking to die with her. If I did eat poison, or drown,

would I be a walking corpse? She looked down generations: the choice was live for that, or ashes now. I swore my Pyrrha all. She closed her peaceful eyes. Her spirit left her mottling hands. I kissed them, and when her breathing ended, sat her up in state, and brushed her hair. Then pushed the room's shutters open. The midday trees were still as if the last bird had died

Below, Paphos faces stared up from her courtyard. The wine of my blood turned fiery red: in that window I took my old name again. And people gave me their backs

--Not even for her! --Curse your selfish secrets! --Why don't you leave, like your kinsman that other murderer?

I went into our orchards and hills along the sea, and crushed the tears from my heart. When it tore me inside-out I was back in the paradisaal night with Mother Zoe under Dikte, and we laughed that I had found her right three ways. I refused to see Pyrrha's grave: it was a lie. And then, I never worked so cold and sure at things whose end or reason, I knew not. Even Melas was laughing in my soul---*Why are you so weird, anyway, even for a Cretan?*

Zakkala had standing to fetch good crews. Ramose had taught us to turn ships over when rot crept under the rowers' benches; so by trade and silver, three new boats were mine-outright, fat-belly galleys with more ways to work the sea's whims. The captains liked what Ramose taught me about who commanded them, and the rest

looked like ordinary business. So once again I was leaving a valley we had built, with horns and spirals in the sun. *I was out?* What trial was this? What stupid dreams repeating in my life! I never forgot presents-home on top of any cargo, just for spite

Pyrrha's palm tree now stood with the tallest in Ugarit. In Tyre a new head-family was squeezing the land-locked sisters of her trades. Byblos went on as if there were no yesterday: Gaza too, with her Sutu desert-music and island flash. My eye began to like that little Ascalon, unwallied against the sea, the white cluster of its royal young buildings and the spread of the town like only the best of Ugarit. Podargos' sons took Shekelesh business there, and Shardana amber. Even shops' quarters they planted with green, as if to please the passerby

We coasted to Pelusium, and Pyrrha's name produced a pilot up the channels of The Nile. The green shores narrowed, turned, offered several turns, narrowed again, pretty village girls waving from the old shaduf: blue and earth-brown the waters, the wind at our backs combing vast fields of wheat and barley. Put aside snakes and crocodiles, I never took to these steamy flatland warrens of the river. Dead-end marsh and quicksand warning you not to lose your way

Our pilot concealed his landmarks: I began some. And as the river's inland branches joined and we started to row through city after city, I found my spirit lowering its shield. I was alone with business crew. There was nothing for it but to

learn: a casual might was staggering my eyes. Walls and roofs of temples high as country hills stood above the walkways of the guard, with pennants ranked along the roofs on poles twice as tall as ships' masts: where the gates stood open we glimpsed white limestone streets straight and broad, plazas lined with obelisks and gargantuan seated kings. A double-row of seated scowling lions flanked a boulevard of paving-stone that looked as if it walked to the horizon

Sandstone, granite block within block of painted walls, giant forests of pillars, temple-facings glowing in shadow or colors ablaze with the sun; and along their foundations, no end to multitudes streaming every way on errands of the realm, priests, farmers, herdsman, officers, work-gangs, clutches of families, carrying-chairs. We passed five cities bigger than Ugarit before the river's channels joined to one; and for miles between such places, the fields that fed them stretched out of sight

Kemeti called everybody children, and we never had liked our island-share of it. At Giza, though, at Memphis, and every mile up along that river, we saw better how they could say it. In a few days we beached at Akhmim, on the eastern bank before the great turn into Thebes: Akhmim was Tiye's family's hometown, and here the house of her mother. Tuya, by name, came out her front doors between two peacock-painted columns, and stood there a kindly-smiling, spider-thin matron in a black wig and red-sashed gown, that flowed like water down her bones

--Ahh, the Cyprians! Tuya said, letting us know we weren't all Byblos-boats. I bowed and proffered a massive gaudy fruit bowl cranked out in Crete: her toothy frank smile made me sorry to present such mock. What gave Tuya pause was Pyrrha. --She was a flower, Tuya said. --We were brilliant together, once. And you must be her son? What does your name mean? Won't you come in, captains and all of you?

Deucalion, New Wine Sailor kept his mouth shut except for sweet tilapia-fish. Tuya's two grandsons in short red-sashed gowns came to table, the elder maybe twelve with fine black eyes and a glossy mane, Tutmose: the little one Amenophis, with sunburn peeling his bald-shaved head, was pudgy and interruptive. Tutmose spoke enough island to try a joke that shook the table: Amenophis alone didn't catch it, Tuya scolded him about homework, and he mocked his confident brother in reply. Both of them I gifted with obsidian razors, and met the next Pharaohs in their eyes

Tuya regretted that trade had to wait: this was second month of flood season, the family was due up-river in Thebes, and she asked us to sail behind her barge. A festival founded by Hatshepsut was on, so popular that it ran longer every year: eleven days in honor of Opet, another face of Isis, mother of Green One. The rites kept Pharaoh young

--She's a big fat hippo with a lady's head or a lion's, and a crocodile down her back! laughed Amenophis. --Blap! She farts beans like a priest

--Her powers helped your mother to bring you into this world, said Tuya

gravely. --Mind, because Opet likes big bites out of vulgar boys. Now, Deucalion. Comfortable in Thebes, I shall introduce you to Anen, my brother-in-law, chancellor of our lands to the north at the river's mouth. He will take you to Khaemhet, who manages grain for the throne. With your mother's charm, Tuya smiled, --you will return here, things in hand: then we can proceed. Your cups, gentlemen, more of this wonderful wine. I taste your earth and herbs. To the house of Lady Tiye, and---your house? she invited

In Egypt you felt like young dust

--Zakkala. Thank you. Thank you, I replied

And then, Thebes, like the mother of cities seen before; and within it on the western bank, Malkata, palace of Tiye and her Pharaoh. He had raised already a stupendous temple in the place where The Green One's mother had rested after labor: I learned he was a king to build on wisdom of his women, in the faces of his priests. Their pride lay with princes of old who had captured Thebes and made Amon-Re god of gods, forgetting the mud: this Pharaoh had himself blazoned as a vessel of Isis, shaped by Her hands on Her wheel. I stopped trying to count the people walking and singing in the main procession, behind golden well-dressed statues of Amun-Re, Goddess Mut, their strapping son Khonsu. Pharaoh himself led chariots twelve-abreast down a vast open avenue, westward toward the river; then he and his family boarded barges, and

from the halls of Karnak the people's march trailed his voyage south, to Luxor sanctuary. Thousands of people that day and each with an offering to follow their king's: baskets of lotus for the priests' hands, cones of joss and jasmine, wine-jugs lashed to flowery oxen, braces of duck and striped gazelle

I gave our crew little gifts to be seen, but none of us saw inside these places. No one did except for the wealthiest, and clergy. If the painted elders glowed from the strength of Pharaoh's prayer, people took rub of youth and good moods from them; that Opet had given him suck, that no one thirst nor hunger forever

As Amenophis strode back out of Luxor's towering gate, and gave his golden mace a randy shaking for his multitudes, I was with Khaemhet by way of the chancellor. The man beamed bright as his hard-won breastplate enjoying the cheer, his head like a raisin with gold-drop earrings and gappy teeth

--Green One shines, Khaemhet observed. --His seed will be strong, and the barley with him. Your ships come timely. Not even we can eat all he grows

--Dew of your land, I smiled, and at the words, somebody jostled into me: a servant-girl not twenty with a chaplet of greens in her black curls, melting cat's eyes night-blue, and her gown a diaphanous festival-dress of island weave, likely borrowed, exquisitely too small. Nofret, her name: we were wanted back for Malkata's midday feast, and Nofret clung to the wrist of little Amenophis

--You can play with Nefertiti anytime! she scolded. --Forgive me, sirs, he has no respect like his elder brother

--Piss of the Land! said Amenophis skyward, without elaboration

Malkata's tables were spread below Tiye's and Pharaoh's in a hall of gilded stone three times the yard at Zakkala. Pillars the girth of its trees sang back music, echoed our clatter: with each course a painted man or woman brought a fresh fingerbowl of lemon-water. This palace housed three hundred lesser wives. Gangs of fellahin were digging a lake off the river for the house. If Kemet ever turned all its strength to war, the world had better stay home

We ranked no audience, but Lady Tiye met us in her gardens. In its great pool, hatchling-crocodiles lunged among the lotus, rippling its mirror of the sky. The country loved Tiye's round brown eyes, her skill with festival and her scowl that froze little Pharaohs. She chose me a Nubian orchid, then sat and took my hands with ready terms

Where I looked for dismissal, this great lady reached out for Labrys round my neck, regretting old-time amity with the islands. Equally vague, I mourned the loss of bonds by which bad things happened

--I always liked island diplomats, Lady Tiye smiled. --Enjoy your stay, New Wine Sailor. Your name will be welcome in my ports. Be assured, my husband makes more than grain grow. Bring us the islands, and good faith reap ten-fold

The smile she left me with foretold the night, because Nofret climbed into my bed, a girl full of pillow-talk charmingly sure of her own great house someday. Next I knew back at Tuya's, I was hearing the virtues of a marriage

Nofret was a servant, but this was more than I had hoped; a small inconspicuous niche that worked with what was. Now I just had to watch out, and stay ahead of my problem in people's eyes

So I left Egypt glad for the humbling this time. There and around The Green, I learned to sow reassuring intelligence, and Tiye said it helped to keep garrisons just the right strength in Canaan, and the vain bloody squabbles of its kings in Pharaoh's courts. Amenophis must have ruled forty years, and after those early killings, he scarcely bothered even Libu. The islands never saw so much grain for their fuller's earth, obsidian and marble

By the time the third generation of my children bore the fourth, the rhythm of my ships around the sea was the rhythm of its festivals and gardens. Where a man remembered unburdening himself in his cups of good Zakkala wine; where a woman remembered the wild feel of my hands, snake and tongue, as I had learned pleasures from women in the land of Dripping Rain and other places; where I taught some family arts of vines and olives, there in time fathers and mothers told a child of Deucalion's line. And down the years of Merire's blood, the sylphium trade kept growing

--Wine for love, and sylphium to cull the fruit: bless a man in the middle!

One day in the harbor of Naxos I answered those words, and met Afti. She was daughter of a famous house of weavers, with thick black hair, and eyes blue-amazing as her silk-clad breasts, her hips a honey-jar. Brazen for what she wanted, her spirits quick as currents in the isles; and curiously, half her pleasure was in hiding ours from a lord of a husband. I saw her women tucking my trade away in their baskets, hiding it

--You, calling any man lord? He doesn't know what sylphium is

--We want it that way, Afti answered. --He has a name that keeps criminals clear of Naxos. He wants sons and more sons. Thanks to your cousins' clumsy jars, I give him what Naxos can feed. Would I rather a priest? Yes, and without my husband as he is, look at our neighbors. Women, children kidnapped off a beach. The weak, the ones who do not face up, they burn

--Let me guess. Your mothers chose his kind of strength for your sakes, and now they find raiders already in the house

--And what shall we do then? Afti would laugh. --Run off and live on boats? They are boys, you are a man. I want to hear more about The Great Green, the countries you know, the shapes of places where the lands fall in the sea

Her honey took me, and her predicament. It was her husband's *cousins* in the islands playing their part in these games. Fear, defense, more fear---King's trick! If she

and her ladies called him *boy*, why hand him the house to stop a tantrum? *Grow up, Afti, while you can!* I'd say. It was not my views she wanted. Years over her I took fool's chances: her lord would have spitted me two ways. There was something in Afti like a Karfi artisan mired in poppy. She liked her dark old man of the sea, foxing the simple sun king who made her feel safe from his own games of death. When this had unmanned me enough, I let go. But Afti was far more than honey and surrender

One of her sisters took over meeting me for sylphium when she died, and slipped a rolled-up present in my goods. At sea, the world unfolded in my hands. To the stitch, there was every coast and shape of island I had ever scratched in sand at Afti's asking. Hold it up, and through diaphanous blue-green waves, you saw the edges of lands laid out around The Great Green---the way a crane saw them, from the sky. North to south my routes from Troy to Libu, the Cyclades, east to west, Byblos to Sicily: Cyprus, The Nile's mouth, Crete with my warehouse at Kommos in the midst, and cities even on the isles in silver points. Years it took her, stitching out the countries in her head: a being like that, self-tangled in boys' arms! I treasured that gift its help, and never showed it to anyone. Not until I learned what desperation was

What was there but to live? I rode the trade and gifted families. In Libu the people were the strongest around their mothers that I knew outside of Lesbos, and knowing my blood with Merire's line, Meshwesh children called me uncle like the rest.

I kept moving, turning over ships and crews so that no one quite tracked my years. Each day like any man's with its dangers of death, yet not a bad tooth of it touched me. What was this *for*? Each home a refuge from the others, I gave every one of them feathers of a crane. I saw my children travel and learn their cousins, and always, lonely on the seas between. They throve and died, went on, forgot, remembered: at first I grieved them as for Prax, a child passed-on before his father. But the longer I lived, the more alone. Old bull on a mountain, watching his little towns; knowing he could not live there for what he was, but loving their songs, and wishing they understood there was nothing to fear

Pharaoh's strong first son died untimely. I was at the Kommos warehouse and it pleased Lady Tiye that I sailed. My little jewel there, Nofret, had ripened to a coveted servant, and she gave me daughters and sons. They sowed flashes of island style where they worked, and it put them among the innocuous few on the good side of second son Amenophis. At a dinner I saw the pudgy boy grown round-shouldered, long-faced, slack at his doting father's side. Nofret said his outbursts had become tirades against priests of Amun-Re. My mind had to turn like a sail and yard together, to grasp that his priests despised him because his eyes were in the spirit-world. They wanted a king for armies, for keeping Canaan's wealth away from Hatti, without the bother of trade

But Amenophis was not his brother. His father had shrunk, but he was the man

who looked as though the world were already too much. He had the luxury to answer with a mild glassy gaze, punctuated by rage

I went back once in the next five years, when his father died. By then he resembled myself at my father's death, rising to his flower to find old ceremony broken. His priests glared through his lackadaisical rites with no idea who had taught him the emptiness of pomp. In Tiye he confided, she understood her son, and she gave me a commission. She wanted an island-wife for him, and artisans, too, without Egypt's eyes, for some momentous thing in secret works. *If you call it momentous, I said, it will terrify me.* Tiye answered, *You won't be alone*

There were Cretans to locate already painting in her lands, and from Sicily to Ugarit I spent Egyptian gold, and earned my share. For his wife, affairs looked best in Melos in the Western String of isles. The woman they chose was a kourai named Kiya. Melos had Achaian ships in her waters, and a wary eye born of pillage in Crete's fall. Through Kiya, then, Melos expected strength over wealth. They were disappointed

I heard only talk after Amenophis kissed Kiya's hands. She bore him six daughters, more than any other wife: he made her at home with the artists and their kin, and servants from my family of Nofret too. In turn, from their inquisitive dinners Pharaoh drew what he called new thoughts. *Yes, yes, Nofret told me he would say: Of course, why not, paint what you see!* He was searching for something. He began to like the

island way of letting children feast, and it helped him shake his priests. The little ones laughed at painted men in gold hashing out the solemn meanings in his stool. Amenophis ecstatic just gazing at a wall now covered with crazy sprays of birds, big-headed lilies, bulls ramping after cows in green labyrinths of rushes. Amenophis called for *paint what you see* in his family's images: *You asked for it*, said a Cretan painter's eye. And there he was, a pot-bellied father, kissing Kiya's babies in his lap

His priests detested him, his loves contented insults to their aims. For a moment Amenophis might have shown the world new kings. He did so anyway. Beleaguered, he snapped. A vision changed his name to Akhenaten, after Aten, hence the one true god for him, the sun. Within ten years, he and Tiye moved their country's entire capital city from Thebes to Amarna, days down-river in a place no builders had touched before, because it was red desert. Tiye's reason had relented. With a stroke, Akhenaten shut the country's temples down, cutting off his enemies' river of wealth. Having idled so many, he raised armies---with chisels, to hammer all gods but Aten from their stones

Still, he forced nobody outside court to go along. The people of the land kept more of their produce, but the sun beat them hard as ever in the fields. They liked Isis for Her thousand names, and Green One. His image went into the ground with them, a tiny man squatting in a pilgrim's cloak like an exile bound to win the world

Akhenaten lived behind the walls, and for the signs they cut and cut again. In a

handful of years the world went around him. Hittites taking over town by town in Syria, creeping up on outright-rule of Ugarit. Tyre on the sea was under siege by a gang of her cheated neighbors. On both sides of that, Shekelesh and Shardana men fought each other in old-home feud. In boats like my son Bright Foot's they had come to see cities, and learned to get paid kings' gold for eager blades. At Akhenaten's back, priests were encouraging trouble in towns north of Byblos

Nofret aged, and steered our ship like a tender of Tiye's barge. They farmed our children out to the house of Akhenaten's gruff vizier, named Ay, and to a rising general named Horemheb. Both men were Pharaoh's close in-laws, but they disliked his insults to the past. In them, our family there survived

Twenty years and the Hatti pushed Egypt out of Ugarit. We paid their big-hat viziers the old protection. I went my careful ways, till Tiye sent for me through Gaza

--The Great Green life agrees with you, she smiled horribly. She had shrunk beneath her plumes and polished disk to a black-toothed creature, tiny and always cold on her cedar chair. This time in Egypt, I knelt with my heart. Tiye had given me life

--My son is going to fail, she said. --The priests and the old land will win. What in the end is the point of just one god? But fear not for Nofret and your family. Others will rule before Horemheb, and his house is trusted army blood. Now, old friend. If ever we talked about what Canaan can become, do what this old woman asks

Drawn in again, I should have known what came of it. Byblos liked its tithes of trade from the small towns of northern Canaan. With Hatti marching into them, a chieftain named Abdi tried to forge his own new country from the pieces. Egypt's garrison caught and killed the man, but his son Aziru held the tribes together, and kept Byblos' shares of trade. According to practice, Byblos complained to Pharaoh's ear. He was not listening. While Tiye looked into matters and sent messages, Akhenaten's priests sent Aziru gold. To build the threat themselves, and make a man of Akhenaten. But of all this, Tiye intended something else---a kind of buffer-land in Canaan, between Egypt's and the Hatti claims. My part was to pacify the king of Byblos to it, Rib-Haddi

He knew me a son of reliable Cyprians, agent for his cedar-wood. He crowed beside Adonis' ancient pool, a rooster between imperial example and neglect. I said, Egypt's hand went heavy where kings failed the whole: a buffer-land would keep both masters from his door. Rib-Haddi would not hear that Byblos would never be Thebes. Having bullied neighbor-towns to cut his losses, he was drunk with mutiny and meant to try the edge. In a few days, with sobering word of soldiers on the royal road, half his men left the walls, and Rib-Haddi slipped out after them. I was working to find him exile when he was murdered at my back

What had I done? What was I doing? Tiye never faced me again. For years, trade in Ugarit said that Aziru's northern buffer-land did work: he wrecked it himself, selling

out in time to Hatti, which drew Egypt back. Achaians creeping on the islands, it seemed an idea worth something, but the blood on it cursed me a fool. Nofret passed away. I grieved on the ground. Kiya disappeared from court. Of her, I got no more than a painter's black look

Drowning in consequences, Akhenaten broke as his children died. When his gaze fixed, his priests rifled his city, buried his name in kind, and back in Thebes raised dazzling restorations, to help everybody forget they were making it up. The artisans wanted ships out, and it was time to let a few years sow confusion round my name

From the islands to The Nile, I sailed a man with a belly sick of men. Sick of priests, sick of kings and chieftains, sick of tricks and walls and fables, and filling their mouths with wine and oil. I blessed the sea's salt curses, the cranes' free cries of exile big as the world. Had my own Kemeti family any memory or pride, to bend a knee where men made gods like pots? For Nofret's children, I bit the words back. A little boy named Timo looked a promising fellow, and I watched him from afar

Priests I reviled, and I could not get the priest from my blood. At Knossos, my father's word for that was stewardship. And without land, even a buffer-land, stewardship of what, for what? My buffer-lands were time, ships, the meltings of my names. There I was, estranged four generations, no true home; and what to do with this gift, or against this curse?

I was adrift, as Canaan's kings said now of Egypt. But Horemheb was not. He built his house through fifteen years, cut the noses off officials caught with bribes in the wreckage of Ahkenaten. When his time came, he pleased people with building his throne from their queens' line, and he made high priests of men he trusted from the army. But he knew my face, and I never went nearer than the ports

He ruled twelve years, and Timo, fourth of my line, had Nofret's eyes and hair black as ironstone. As a boy learning cipher, Timo sent me a greeting on papyrus: when he wrote again he was a well-spoken infantry corporal, hoping to meet someday. Another soldier. At least he belonged. Timo outlived Horemheb, and a year of a Pharaoh Ramses. When Seti took the throne, Timo was fed into new divisions of soldiers being raised: Seti styled himself The One Reborn. Canaan's towns read the omens of Mighty Bull, and reinforced their walls. Adrift, I was ripe for what happened, and so was my grandson

I went back to Cyprus by the name Iakos. My eyes filled with the place as keen as that first day at Paphos. It was the last crest of spring, past the moons of crocus and crimson corn-poppo on the hills. The rivers high, rock doves sang in flowering thyme: the air was thick with water, the trees budded out in sweet chestnut, mastic, pistachio and plane. It was people's favorite time except for harvest, crops in, the dead well-feasted from jars of wine and seed: they swept their houses, purged themselves of

grudge and sloth, and rose to the high weather days. I had not expected to breathe as though great windows had opened in mildewed walls. I was a mark, mouth open, wanting in

--Been here before? Ah, Cyprus, queen of islands. Please, sit down

A black-bearded man at the fig-shaded table of a common-house; Enkomi-born by his nappy curls and jewelry, Ugarit the loom of his long gown, a black Hatti knife. One eye gone from its half-open socket, a veteran's wound. Ugarit these days forced men to Hatti arms, and Hatti used them to practice up for Egypt, butchering Hurrians in Syrian river-towns. Smiling the man poured barley-beer with ritual pleasure, and I longed for old Norax, for brothers to make the most of what was left

--Like it here? the man said in keen Akkadian clipped his way. --A land of weaving dreams. Health, sir. My name is Mopsos. Ah, good barley, he sipped as he read my trim, my old cropped-feather headdress and Labrys too. --Cyprus knows ferment. She *is* ferment, he laughed. --Hard old Cretans too. You appear to be of means

What was I doing? Circling Zakkala's garden of our seed, horns and spirals; afraid to see it, and afraid to be driven out again

--Ah, Iakos, this stranger rang on. --Now come the new birds, birds of prey to feed on fat. Achaians: some pay for trading-camps, some build outright and dare complaint. They plan to steal, you see, so they build their high points first. I wonder,

what will come of Cyprus patience and generosity? Achaia breeds too many sons. I have seen Mykenai, the house of Achaia's Lion, the walls they build and the circle of their fathers' graves. Their chieftains' eyes look inward, but they never stop pushing their reach. What will happen, Iakos, when Achaians are at home here? These islanders know, they feel it, like cranes the wind. They will fly, taking even their mothers: they sail before they slaughter over land. So, their Mother will step down from her copper stand. Now, think you, Iakos---where will they go? Where they always go: where trade is and no Achaians. Here, then, good man, drink me a profitable secret. Partners, you and I, we can be waiting on the hill. No cost to you, Iakos---an interesting journey, to a place where Cretans live already. Do you understand? When Achaians take the copper, the hill to wait upon has tin! Go east, old man

--Will I do well? I asked, as blunt as my beery fingers

--You should, Mopsos lilted

I had to believe. Every horizon made me homesick. I pondered, tracked down people who knew this man: there was no end to trade in the east, and anything with promise of a place, I reached for. I took my ships across to Ugarit, and on the high ground of the great bay's southern rim was another Achaian camp: my good old spiders, right in the face of the city trying to pluck their passing trade. We coasted south, the mountains descending to Syria's inland plain, then higher and greener north

of Byblos; and this time at Tyre, we bore up her river, into a great valley flanked by spines of mountains. Every hill and landmark was an easy find with the painted papyrus Mopsos made

When I was satisfied berthing my ships at the caravan-town, we followed road and trail out of there for days toward sunrise, south and east, up and down the half-desert country into Hazor. That was a city as thick with sand-farers as Tyre was with sailors. Sutu, Shasu, desert-people who moved on foot with their pack-animals: our quarry was connection to the far east flow of tin. If they could stand the heat, so could I

Days we walked the coast of a sea with salt-white shores, and westwards at our right hand, rising uplands. Beyond the lake, a broad river valley, the Jordan's running south beyond sight, and green as a little Nile between close hills. There the signs went bad. Sutu tribesmen, a few, then bands of many began to come past us all day and night, running north and east; bleeding men laid open, limping, helping each other to fly from something very bad. The camels they had left were limping, slung with brothers' bodies, Egypt's arrows in their sides

Where the mountains fed another river down this valley, we turned its way west upstream, as if trailing the vultures. Ahead, many passes crossed through these uplands under a great soft-shouldered hill. Across its high points, a brick-walled citadel flying goldfoil pennants of Thebes. Beth Shan. It was bright early-morning, Dagon's green

dew on the air, and a drifting char-grease smell like nothing from a priest

First thing on that plain before we mounted for the city gates, my eye caught a pennant flying Timo's Division of Seth, Mighty of Bows. But no Kemeti would talk. The place to a man was still in shock with yesterday's horror on the plain, and fighting to keep control of itself with work-details on pain of more death. In the citadel shops I found the Cretans, a handful of wizened potters and masons, sons and families cowered in a clutch around a little house of Earth Mother: like a double of Ninna's, and one lazy dog on its roof. When I gave them Mopsos' name and asked their help to meet some master of their metals, the oldest woman answered, *What? Mopsos promised you would come with ships to take us out of here!* For me it was over. I wanted word of Timo

In the citadel courtyard Egypt's wounded writhed on stretchers, shrieking across the droning of priests for the arrows and heads of spears dug out of them. Their dead lay yet among Sutu desert-men out under the hill: half the able and their prisoners were gathering bodies, building the pyre, and the rest fetched baskets in. Severed Sutu heads, hands, ears, genitals, dumped in rancid heaps for comfort in sight of the wounded's eyes. As I waited outside their governor's sunshade, his scribe threw up all over papyrus addressed to The One Reborn. *Start over*, he sneered, *useless coward of a nephew!* *Where was I? Hail and greeting, Mighty Bull, who makes the chiefs of Canaan cease every contradiction of their mouths*

I managed to intrude and inquire. *Oh, somewhere off the hill, the golden hand waved. Ask for yourself at the victory-fire*

I went down, and seeing the smoke at the plain's far edge, tried to get there where officers ran muster and made lists. Acres of Sutu strewn in sunken clumps of desert-black, laid open, twisted on broken backs in tracks of hooves and bladed fellie-wheels. Faces bashed to pulp by heavy fighting-rods. Camels sprawled in red sand, entrails out where swords had pulled, disarticulated pieces, vultures cursing, crowding, craning to swallow. Feed, Mother Night: she eats mistakes

The potters said that desert-men pushed in and out of this plain. This time, their game plucking trade and women had stumbled into Pharaoh's. The One Reborn broke his water with three divisions of chariot and foot against two hundred camels. And now his blood was up to meet the Hatti

A rat came out the loose anus of a horse stretched out in golden tack. In green grass an axe's work, the ragged left piece of a face. Nearing the pyramid of Mighty Bull burning on the plain, I knew Timo was in it

Did he live to realize he too was adrift? I lived to see his death bring our family more standing on The Nile; the comfort Nofret's children took in their priests' labyrinth of reasons. Time, twist the knife in a sport of nature! Could I help my curse of memory from Knossos? If this was belonging, tear out my tongue, my spit never stop

East wind rose with the sun. Human punk drifted with crackling-sounds of hair in fire. I covered my mouth with what I had, and it was Afti's folded weaving. It came to hand Sicily-up, the opposite edge of the world

The Beth Shan Cretans paid silver for a way out with sea-passage. In fact, two brothers of their families saw Labrys, heard where I was going, and staked me a year of service for the same voyage. From there, because it was working, I sailed Iakos, and learned their names

The warehouse at Kommos made for crude winter. Like The Nail, it taught us each other, the places grieved between us, hollow in the heart as Dikte. Before we sailed that spring we were pilgrims together, and climbed into the midst of all we wanted. These circles of rising stars and flowers. To speak our thanks and share our meals along benches of communion, to lift our palms, to be the circle and the center of a pouring. Cleanse the spring, weigh a feather, love, be grateful, consent; and gardens under great-grandmothers' figs in the good high places. Learning to see the great subtle breathing of the mountain in yellow gorse-flower; hearing its half-sleep murmur, under the bees

We had that between us, beaching in Sicily. Thapsos was small enough yet for our strength to tip the local feud, and young enough to make that the first matter in their welcome-council. Their eldest woman spoke it. Whose side were we on

--Our feathers make us family, I answered. --Nyasha, a Shekelesh mother here,

my fathers returned to your kin. Her daughter wed their son, Podargos

--You do not understand, replied this grandmother, in a diadem of sun-wheels stitched with gold. --Nyasha, she began, --returned here from slavery. On that she built a house of sons to keep her daughters safe. Nyasha, though, had learned from her Achaian lords of Knossos, and their end. When the best of us drove out our Shardana cousins, Nyasha lived that they never come back our masters. The sons she raised made sure of it, and our cousins' raids grew scarce. By then, however, her grandsons were none for the plough. They ventured off in ships like yours, decked with things that talk great cities. And the kings who pay young men for war found them, with ready gold. Shardana curse our houses, yet they follow us in everything---so now, for spite, the curs tail our sons into battles, and fight for the opposite side

--Respectfully, I said when she had spoken, --there are more than two sides. You have Achaians camping your south coast

The Thapsos council knew it, and looked down. A crowd of the curious in doorways knew it too

--Your windows look toward Pylos, I said, --and Poseidon looks toward you. Let Sherden spin their knock-off clay. Whatever the Shardana do, their aim is not Achaian; not advantage over you till you are gone. Let our farms feed the storehouse, and trim Achaian sail in your sons' steads. We will not bring war, nor let it come

--So you know these big fair fellows, came grandmother's sly reply

Enough to spoil a Lion's spring. Next season we were waiting when ships full of carpenters arrived. Council, we tried: they did not need carpenters to trade. Beyond that, they had no purpose here for which men asked permission. When it turned to fight, we killed three for two, and in a year their trading-tilts were back. Blue eyes burning with royal order to behave, fetch copper and amber for their cups. That, I trusted like their love for the topsoil king who roared it at them. We watched them, and shrugged, the way Sicily lived with her rumbling mountain

Once more I began to find. The Cretans I came with nestled into lives, had children, died. I came and went, played old confusion-games: news of Seti on the wind said he was home, mostly, building a vast womb-temple named for Green One. Evidently his rebirths were running out. Time made me grateful past remembering how brief our good place was. Its brevity meant nothing. Its goodness had roots and branches, and no king's son could kill the tree

A Thapsos sailor's widow took Iakos house-bond: Syka, for the fat figs of her land. She was all the line of old Nyasha, thirty-three handsome with the broader-faced island look; her hope to see her young son and daughter turn a smith or a potter off the farm. I could help. At a feast, Syka first said to me, *Let me take you to see the figs*, which made every Shekelesh laugh. I understood, and our ambitions wove

I sailed only two in five years after that. Syka's house was a great wooden oval of cedar and oak, the roof crowning Thapsos pasture in sight of the sea. Like every house she hosted cousins on the circle of sitting-benches built inside: she liked to say the stars turned round the smoke-hole, but Syka's altar was the family table outdoors under trees. Sailor's hunger I had known, but I drooled for her hearth burning Zakkala oil, onion, garlic, and eggplant a big queer bulb that ate like meat. There were always almonds on that table; wine of Cyprus, because the local palate was a cat's tongue; and Syka made a sardine-sauce that turned even green fish tasty, better than Troy's or Libu's. On that, she could field ships. But it was a grandmother's secret, Syka said at table. And could I not just eat, let others talk? I sat back, regal as Dagon, home

One year in the great decrepitude of Seti, we caught three Achaian ships sliding northwest, past us, into Shardana waters. Beside me was Syka's son, Namar, eighteen in his first helmet: his hand was always white around his sword. We had to speak to this. We chased them up-wind and, by chance, right into three strong Shardana ships off their island's south coast

We forced them to beach. For the first time, Shekelesh and Shardana made Achaians listen to how we did things, gifting our ways past mistrust, talking. In their holds, no goods or presents: they were hunting. And still we might have treated, till their red-beard leader exclaimed *By Zeus! Is there no end to these jabbering, effeminate*

Earthlings? We made them feel lucky to run from there alive. And then, Shekelesh faced Shardana on the beach, with equal arms

Something had changed. These men both sides were young. Their fathers' skills in war were sharp, but not the first felt grudge of feud. The sight of common enemies, near home, said more than years of fathers' tales: they feared their towns burned flat more than shame across the water. As we stared, a Shardana shouted *This looks to bleed both sides!* We answered, *And no Pharaoh gold in the bargain!* So we boldly sat, traded scout-reports, then food, and bet our cups on wrestling. But feud had meant too much for easy parting. When a match brought blood, I managed to play old custom that only our two best men should fight. *No!* said the same Shardana man. *Let our two weakest fight: then each will be weakest no more!* On our side, wrestling chose out Syka's son

From the day we laid Namar beside his father, Syka made me sleep a year outside. It was Shekelesh way, and in time her daughter, Alexi, came of age in her brother's loss not so sweet a flower; but offer she did, the rites here as old as the houses. Thapsos' mothers nourished their gardens around so many men of war

I had to sail next season, the north isles with sylphium, and came home to a son my blood in Syka's arms. The fifth since Ariadne walked. I remembered him that way because he lived not much longer than she did

Ariste grew up in the first years of a second Pharaoh Ramses. Thapsos might

have grown its Cyprus seed into a place as strong as Pylos, but there was no end to the east's ready gold for young men. I made Ariste their match at arms, but kept his honor home. He loved his older friends and saw how few of them came back. When he took up his mother's potter's wheel, his fellows made him suffer

--If a man lives to fight, what happens to things the fight is for! Ariste raged from his wounds at Syka's table: he was a boy as well-spoken as my Prax

--Brave men bring them through, I answered touching his chest, --here, where you hang your crane's feather and the memory of your blood. A bond more than any king's trick

Ariste found his way. Those years, many men at arms left Sicily and the towns of Shardana too. When luck failed their dreams, this second Ramses caught some of them raiding his coastal towns. He enslaved them to his armies, or to building yet another first city, Avaris, at the head of his Canaan road. Happy Journey, Kemeti called that place, unlike our men who made it back

Ariste learned to make copies of Achaian prize-bowls, to paint the warriors marching round and around between the handles, and he traded them to men at arms who stood them up high in their houses. That fed his time at his wheel. One afternoon he brought me a finished grain-jar like a child in his arms, as graceful as Cyprus work all white with its paint in red and black. Around it flowed an ocean's waves, with a

darkened isle to one side where a great tree grew. Turn it in your hands, and islands crowned with trees came round, spirals between them, running spirals. Ariste had never seen the work of Afti's loom. What she had woven from words of space, his crane's eye shaped and turned in time

I took him sailing to see other shops and ways. Ariste talked more about fuller's earth than island girls. Ugarit by then was crowded and foul, the same one sour odor from marsh and dye-works to the streets: the higher walls kept the sea-breeze from its work, built up under Hatti rule against surprises in the harbor. Jaded to the tavern-keepers, greedy, thriving-still. Ariste learned from potters there, and traded up a better-working wheel. But we could not sit for beer without hearing of a battle to the south, inland, at Kadesh. Around us wounded soldiers' talk, laments and arguments: a battle that had been a thousand times Beth Shan. I smelled it afresh

--Did you smell past lives forgotten. Do you admire it, the waste, I hammered Ariste aboard ship. --And what do you imagine they learned after spilling each other's guts? That nothing between them belongs to them, that the best course is a marriage of their houses, and an oath to make nicer in their trades. Am we mad, Ariste, or why do they kill ten thousand sons to behave like your great-grandmother?

I sailed him out of there, this time for Ascalon. It was still the young green city cupped by the landward crescent of its wall, with the sea-side open, and only a

neutral's trade about. Still like the best of Ugarit, with houses of women where kosharot sang songs. I was black inside for the graves and funerals waiting everywhere. Surely we could bring home some kind of medicine, and we heard it in the songs of one named Ahlaran. Thick dark hair maturing gray, with Sutu eyes, her voice the desert longing for the rains; fingers mistress of the strings and pipes she played of every land. Podargos' trade had earned trust here, but it took Ahlaran half a moon to name her price. And that, she stipulated, paid twelve moons. *I can hardly sail away from here myself,* I told her truly. So, she sang us home. I listened for the lays most soothing, for when Thapsos' families grieved along their benches

*Derceto, queen of oceans, queen of the pool of Ascalon,
entwine your silver tail with Dagon's in the stars,
and sing me old Diktyнна of dear mountains,
who leaped into the sea and found Your name*

In the great hall of Thapsos the Shekelesh men drank to Kadesh, cups thumping foot-songs, comparing proudflesh. *Hear Hear!* what they did to Shardana on a field no man's eye saw before for blood. How Pharaoh believed two Hatti spies, and camped himself in front of their thousands one hill away. How they burned his tents, till Ramses' rage and Shekelesh bodies turned the day. Why, men said, the beards of their dead faces would live a god's age. *On Ramses' lying walls!* they laughed. *Hear Hear!* The

Shardana's best were Ramses' slaves, and double-gold around. Men drank along the benches, said their brothers were not gone. When the snoring began, Ahlaran stopped, and we left the hall

We worked our trades and year by year played the Achaians. Ariste served too, though we never showed them more men than we needed. For all men sang of themselves, we took up Shardana's little round shields that made a clouting-weapon of your arm, their shorter blades with the weight more forward, good for hacking your way inside Achaian long ones. Had I learned? Had I made my peace with war?

Four years after Kadesh, men heard-tell that Meshwesh farms looked ripe on the western Nile. Thapsos knew that my ships knew those waters. Had I made my peace? I asked if they had thought who else might feel like visiting this year: it made them leave at home the few men ready to retire anyway. I sailed, though I saw no more reason in this than young men's games, because I wanted to shame them back toward old rules. Filch fine things, but leave people food: fight only the men who fight, and no call to burn down houses half your own. So we coasted Libu country, and when the ships went in, I sheared off into the wind. A trick I learned from a black-hearted brother

But at Kommos in Crete, at the warehouse, I knew to get back home. It was too late. Everybody fit to sail was drunk. An Achaian feast was on, to close the inaugural year of Mykenai's new Lion of the mainland: Atreus, high king of kings. *Quite a fellow,*

said the sailors and stevedores under their breath. Building good roads, he was, to move his soldiers, raising flanker-walls to his Lion Gate. *Maybe he expects company?* they laughed. People who knew better, building little kingdoms off the big one, from which they dared not disentangle; like Afti's pleasures, darker. In their corners men laughed it up that Atreus, slaughtering rivals, fed one of them the man's own children in a pie

--Well, as long as he is qualified, they joked

A Griffin's claw began to grip my stomach. My ship's captain called it fool's speed to strike out across open sea. I bribed up a skeleton-crew and found enough of Ramose's turning circles. We caught a sailor's gift of high weather, too---which was bad, the more I thought. At the oar I rowed facing forward, and punished myself with the sun. Monster, sleep, fall off the edge of the world! Moon and Mother Night, bring him around, return us Dagon's dew and dawn

Thapsos was gone. Syka, Alexi, Ariste, houses, shops, stores, Thapsos, gone. Gulls at bodies swollen by the tide, strewn about our child's-play walls. The strongest men curled up in surf and sand, first and last to die. A woman brained with a jar of pickled olives. A toddler-boy stuck through to cow the rest. Stone halls pulled down with prying-bars, a better job of it than Poseidon: houses rifled in rage that found no gold, their circles each a char of oak and cedar. Koreter was laughing in the waves, in his mad blue mountains: *You will never be free of us*

Here was the neck of a Paphos jar shaped like Knossos mountain-horns, and climbing it a painted tree of life with breasts like fruit, and leafy tops for upraised arms. When I found Syka's table hacked apart for fun, then shards of our shrine, I took off my cropped-feather headdress, and it fed the night's fire to a sky without a moon

The blackest thing I knew was burning care

Kadesh had smashed two monsters. I swore The Great Green's turn was come. If none of these lords not husbands looked any further than the day, then that was where my curse of days could serve. To help them find each other

Mother Night, she eats mistakes. My oath was cedar ashes to my skull, and tasted from this hand.

6

--Oh, look Papou, cranes! --Papou, we want to go with the cranes!

Eight generations, flames from Troy to Gaza, and the same little cries

My twin Kemeti children caught a chevron of the great birds thirteen strong, blithely crossing the blue square of sky above us. Black necks, white cheeks and crimson crests, feeding their way north for the high-summer roosting grounds; and we shut in by four stone walls of the Vizier's Heliopolis courtyard, waiting audience and war. To see them was longing. Always home, never lost, led by their bonds, and those their only limit: free wings and laughter for the fears of men, the fables of fathers and their walls. They laughed us one harsh clang, a black-lightning cry, and were gone

--Papou? We want to go with them, Papou

--Go? My dear ones, where? I said, and they saw me fail to laugh

At Thapsos I had smashed the last jar of sylphium. Three generations of The Great Green got little more. As well, that day I started pouring out double wine everyplace I went, and I told each peacock how his rivals drank it, deep, and unmixed with water. So, down the days of those three changings of my kin, the wine-soaked

fathers along my routes produced too many boys, and made half their choices in their cups. Worse yet, after Thapsos, every land of The Great Green turned dry, by luck of weather. The sons who had turned their cousins into useful enemies shared no food, and the raids began till there was no food, only memory of harm. Where things could not be fixed, people asked who made them so. And at last I watched the grandsons tear down any lord-protector in their reach. Not a throne untouched, and fear The Nile's new watchword. *Stasis*: a king's taste of his own

Our savageries and sufferings were about to get worse; and then, a chance that they might turn. I polished up my double-bladed lies for the Vizier

--You both look so grown-up today, I told Pamako, my black-haired boy of seven: he was eighth son since Minos walked the world, and his name meant a troubler and a healer. Thendra his twin my little tree of life, both of them dressed in their best Kemeti linens by their mother, of Nofret's line. What I did this day was at her back, and the children understood some dark withholding. The three of us afraid of the enormous cast-bronze doors we faced, afraid of the big little man inside

--Papou, Thendra pined. --You want to go, too. --We want the islands, said Pamako with a move to take her hand

--Both of you. This is where you were born, this is home. Your mother and I just want you to visit awhile with the nice Vizier and his family. My, look how fine and

strong his house. You saw the islands. Go back? Where towns are on fire, people so angry and lost that they hurt themselves? We saw your cousins' mothers there dig sticks into holes for a mouse's bite of grain. You wished you could help them. So, we will. My darlings, somebody has to be brave

--Let somebody else, Pamakos shrugged

Wine of The Kid true of speech in his eye. What were children, by then, to a man in a salt cloak, having seen so many bloom, falter, fade? Life's power to forget; and in that, one half-free hand to try what worked

--Pamakos, my warrior, I hugged them. --Thendra, my strong little tree

The joined enormous doors of bronze boomed open, drawing day into darkness. I rose and hid my shiver like a ram unwilling at an altar. A bald burly priest gowned in impeccable white cotton padded out across the stones to us

---In the Name of His Omnipotence, User-maat-re Mer-y-amun. Strong Is The Justice of Re, Beloved of Amun, Great Ramses will see you now. By the Eye of His Excellency, Ta, Vizier of The Two Lands. No boots, please. Any arms, leave here

His cautious kohl-black eyes raked me, a boat-born bastard kinsman of barbarians at his gate. *Come Come*, the priest insisted patting me, *You people always have a knife someplace!* Finding none, his back led us through a dark corridor that babbled both sides with gilded glyphs. Out we came into an audience hall---a hall like being outdoors

in a world of stone, where everything pointed the one man fit to sit. Flanked by the walls, backed by the frieze that dwarfed him, Ta, the Vizier, in full pose on a golden chair upon a dais. We bowed beneath a red disc's golden rain of rays upon him

From smoky slits under the ceiling, slants of the sun's white glare cut through shadows to the floor. Out there my Great Green kinsmen wandering, burning the world they could not keep from slipping through their fingers

The priest introduced Iakos, trader-son of a house of servants back to Lady Tiye's. The Vizier inclined his metal diadem. Eyes of a falcon, his ring-knuckled hands relaxed on golden rests, Ta enjoyed my children's clothing and their bows. Then I kissed Pamakos and Thendra both cheeks, and the priest nudged them from me, to shepherd them kindly through a door. Thendra looked back with one little fist to her brow, and it was done

--A family well spoken for. Every day bring such charming testaments of truth, Ta said on high, with a casual smile that faded fast; and I saw the man who had earned his chair by crushing rebel kinsmen, where Nile met the sea. --Now, his voice darkened. --Be warned, Iakos. You speak to great Ramses. The state will not hesitate. Approach

He watched me unfold Afti's weaving. At the toe of his sandal I touched its gold points as I began. And there I kept my eyes, away from his

--Highness, this is work of an island-woman's loom: a useful thing to look at, as

if one saw The Great Green and the circle of the Earth as a falcon does

--Etana! the man yelled with loud interruptive delight, and a slap of his gold wrist-snake against his chair's arm. --I read as a child of the like! As I recall Etana, a figure some appoint as a first king, far east of the sun. Yes! Ta said with schoolboy glee. --Wonderful tale! The man asked a gift of Inanna, their savior of the wandering dead. Ahh, the days! Ta exclaimed like a man seized with sudden music, and off he launched:

*--My friend, let me take you up to heaven, you will see with eagles' eyes:
put your chest against my chest, put your hands to my wing-feathers:
put your arms against my sides.*

When Inanna's eagle bore Etana aloft one league, it said to him:

--Look, my friend, how the land is now, examine the sea

I hid my eyes for the way we laughed in Gaza at these well-read murderers.

When Ta ran out of memory, the next lines fell my way

*--Look, my friend, how the land is now!
The sea has become a gardener's ditch*

--Yes, lovely, Ta sighed with the world at his feet. Then the dark moon came back into his face. --And this wonder of a fabric is our gift?

--Highness, it only shows---a greater gift. As Egypt is of course the gardener of the world! If I may? I fumbled, angered that he should even try to take it

--Highness, Egypt is peace and safety. Few eyes notice that The Great Green went to war, and this danger on your border comes of it. Three generations gone, Achaians wiped out this city, Thapsos. After that, no place on the island was safe to build, and from here came Shekelesh, wanderers now; men hardened by your services in wars, and wounded in the place men call home. You know how they and their old cousin-enemies, Shardana, always showed the world a face of war. But where do Libu acquire those elegant long robes and garments, Highness? The looms behind Shardana's warriors show skills, and will to work. Our families know theirs. And until they have true homes, they will make no peace

--Great Ramses crushes flies. We find Shardana swords alike in Libu paws!

--Your Highness is truth, I said. --But Great One rules more than his sport. There is a way to break these peoples to your use

Ta said, with limpid indifference, *More*

--Highness. The more all sides gave in to stealing, the more their families ended; and that made danger for ships of trade, like mine. So these lands before your feet began to starve for crucial things. Kings ate their peoples' seed-corn keeping loyalties. Some turned their hungry eyes on this great city, Troy---a very estimable place, and she is no more. The burning of it broke broke these peoples every side

--And soon, here, here, they smashed into Cyprus. Paphos, Kition, Enkomi:

fruitful cities, flames. From there, old Ugarit one day's sail. White Harbor slept too long with guests-unwanted in the yard. The sea full of refugees and criminals, it was too late, even for mighty friends. But Ugarit cried to generous Merneptah. He was a Pharaoh to feed even Libu grain, a man for law on the roads of Canaan, into the hills of the Sutu and Apiru outlaws. But Ugarit burned. In revenge, the island cranes sacked the greatest Achaian house in reach: Pylos, Highness, whose fathers had burned Thapsos

--Now curse is on The Lion of Mykenai: he has devoured his own. He is finished behind his walls, and his too-many sons who know it are abroad, the cutting edge of this. The islanders who cannot flee, join. As ever, they are like to marry as to fight. But, Highness, of all these words, may the Great One hear these. At Djahi, Great One broke half their strength; and now come their families, in boats and ox carts by the roads. Highness, they come to live or die: there is no city anymore to stop them. Hazor, Ascalon had corps of chariot like the rest. But these are hordes of footman-skirmishers, I would say five more thousand men at arms, of all their fifteen--and they grow with Canaan rabble, who will dig no more kings' ditches, but their graves. They fight to fill their bellies for the day. They will not build until their rage is satisfied

Now I gave him my eyes

--Highness, in your hands my wife, our children, our good house. Forgive my island trades, I beg. But from them comes a loving gift

From lion-headed rests Ta's hands rose slowly, and joining his fingertips, he touched them to his lips. In his eyes, the warning smoldered

--I place my hand to my testicles. I will guide them to your knives. Highness, let Great One plant the winnowed seed to prosper him. Here, I pointed northward out of Gaza. --Here, like a buffer-land, the great one's doormen, Egypt's footstool. I know the poison that drives these peoples. Use their skills to keep the highways eastward good for trade. Make their strength serve Maat, wealth and order, on so costly a frontier

--Our richest frontier, Ta corrected. --And no end of petty kings blocking up the roads to Babylon

--Highness, these peoples are traders, not hoarders. They brook no kings among themselves: the men who lead them act for family councils, and each with a voice in their communions, the meals along their benches. If there is a way for which cranes die and live, that is the core of it. The moons and suns between their horns are not for war. Let them be your children again. Wealth will flow, sure as their fathers the Keftiu princes on these walls. Let them build great Ramses' honor. The only problem will be, what to do with a harvest like a mountain

--Nn, Ta mused. --I must say, this way of your people, to offer a child in extremity. Well. It cuts both ways, does it not. Nn. This might appeal, Ta said. --Great Ramses himself plants trees. But Canaan, a garden of snakes. Shekelesh garrison Byblos

now, Shardana before them. I can name these wandering whelps, Hellenes you call Ironheads, Qari. They *are* in Canaan, man! Explain it then, Ta demanded. --Your cousins break their fathers' oaths, and raid our river. They have Alashiya, they have Mersa Matruh, and Pharos, do they not? We allow these animals homes, and they threaten us?

--Highness. Islanders are many tribes. Feuds and weddings steer their boats, and melt their names. What marches on you is, in a word, the men of them. Agamemnons resolute to prove what never worked. And years of sons entangled too, benumbed, gone mad. Where does a man go home when he leaves his garden? Highness, they say themselves, nobody wins against The Nile. They come because the fight they need is more than war. It is a thing that hurts too much to stop. A very old

--Hyksos parasites! Ta recoiled with a waggling of his chin. And as the spaces of this world reverberated with his word, his lip curled up to show one tooth, like a man half-crocodile: the eyes in the water the least you see of strength and skill and appetite

--Drunk with easy prey. The houses they burn, better they never saw. Come to root like pigs in more of our good black tilth. Look at us, Iakos. Look into Great One's eye. Alas for Libya, who said *We will live in Egypt*. Now. You have told a family story. We want to know what is worth the throats of a man's two lovely children

Gardens for more. To break you, and your master, big man: to smash your desert madness into ours

--Highness, I lilted. --What life is there without Great House strong. We Byblos-boats have no interest in trouble. Last moon, I traded these people medicine for amber. They wait for Alashiya wine. With that, Highness, mix your own intentions. Djahi hurt them: now they will grab any false advantage. The men who brought me to your feet know our families' ships, and generations of our sons in the fighting-line

--And their mother, Ta said. --She approves her children mortal hostages

--She knows her place, I answered, setting the crown on all my lies

--Intolerable mongrels. Show what you propose, Ta ordered

*To square you off on land and sea, and in both bury mad men's lies
that death rebirth a sacred tree, whose fruit you then can recognize*

Ta promised nothing. It surprised me he did not repeat the one promise he had made. His portly priest took me to kiss the swearing-toes of statues. They wanted Canaan's cow secure; and, a man with things to lose inside the monster coming toward them, which they believed had swallowed their fathers' monster, Hatti. Ta did affirm one thing, that I knew his river's channels, where ships might well be trapped

It was for me to present Ramses sport. If he deigned to take it, I would know, my green sail and the double-axe round my neck to mark me for capture. *Keep yourself alive,* Ta said, *and in return, we shall not interfere with this Libu trade of yours, in sylphium*

Would Ramses deign to listen, let alone deploy a double-edged ambush? He had priests and miles of shiny soldiers to feed, fabled fathers to outdo: he needed Canaan's roads the way The Lion needed Troy. And I was going to walk in one piece from between two armies? I set my teeth and sailed out the river, to swing the other blade

Nine generations of salt since a man called Minos. In Dikte Cave, where I had gone to weep Thapsos, his voice and black-heart counsel in my heart. --*What are you, boy?* --A Cretan man! --*And what is that?* --A seed; and none more stubborn in a desert. A medicine, harder than men's will. --*Really?*

There was nothing to want anymore except my father's pride in the dance he taught a son. Door, edge, beyond, I was going horns-first the way he launched himself at Athens. Time melted in my love for him, the sea before the ship's prow the world's unlimited embrace, pure wild, roiling every color like a snakeskin. Our wake across the flood and wind was a path of running spirals, the vortices circling down into the black. *Deukarijo! Dapuritojo!* It was time to ground the dance, or see what happened when they chopped me in pieces

--Iakos! --Iakos ky-ee-kee!

The islanders loved a wine-boat; and there along the sloping sands of Gaza a motley of their ships, chocked-up or on their sides, but stripped for war under citadel and buildings. Around the walls in three directions a patchwork nest of poled-up tents

spread out in acres of their colors, the reds and whites of women among black ones, raucous campfires under tamarisk and palm. A staging area fifteen thousand strong

--We thought you were the enemy, pretty green-sail!

--Alas for Egypt! I laughed as the boat was hauled in. --You bastards know I go hard on people who reject me!

What were they doing, under the great house there, where Derceto landed in her flight from unwelcome lovers, turned, and made a marriage-peace? In the mornings with dew and mist on the red-heather grasses of the fields, men were sharpening themselves and ever-younger brothers to fight the strongest army in their ken. *Shachar-shalim* there was music in the camp, work-songs, at night the feasts of flute and drum. But weapons clanged across the days

Boys learning not to panic holding a line as their fathers hacked hard at them with their forward-weighted slashers. Scared beginners exhilarated, giving back hard and harder to survive a Kemeti with a jaw-hook blade. Skirmishes to see how long you last against an enemy gang of four, who mean to smash your bones and beat you to death with thick blunt rods. Fifty boys hurling themselves forward at a time to launch their javelins, and taking more barked commands as the long spears whooped like a bull-roarer's voice across the air

--Draw, boys, charge, get on them! --Move, before their arrows cut you down!

And then what, gentlemen? I threw wine at slackers wading toward the boat, and gave only greeting on the way up to Gaza. The walls had grown since Pyrrha's day, and the red-pillared terraces of the house of Derceto and Dagon stood seaward above them, the greatest Gazan building spared in occupation. Its sanctum held a horned four-corner altar, a small stately hall whose peace the sailors and sand-crossers honored alike. Good hostels here, working travelers for spice of Sutu caravans; hill-families looking for healers and dream-tellers, trading-clans at gather on communion-benches, and no Baal to botch the works

But Gaza was the barking-dog north of Kemet's front door, the Wadi Ghazzeah; and the gate that faced the Canaan road, these peoples had smashed, to throw Kemeti governors out the other

I walked into a laughing motley of the camp spread out in front of the steps of Derceto's pillared portico, enjoying a tiny woman's insults of defiance from the threshold: it was a woman of sixty named Diwia shouting at them, chief priestess of Gaza, a houri frail as a bird in saffron robes. Twelve Great Years, a hundred moons this house had helped my wines along

--Idiots! Ruled by nothing! Get out! Get out of the precinct!

The crowd's core, the gang of men at arms before her wanted in: they had just this morning sacked the last Kemeti outpost south of here, called Balah, and stood

matted with battle-dust in sour sweat, blond manes tangled from their boarstooth helmets to the shoulders of their corselets. Ironheads, the vanguard of north Achaians with us, and the biggest a booted beast of a chieftain called Pagos

In the disarray since the first defeat on land, men had been settling old feud scores. With blood at every hand people seized on anything amusing; that Diwia, this morsel in a doorway, should be dressing down Pagos had many laughing bent over knees. Behind Pagos, brothers leaned on spears in mellow afterglow, oblivious to the flies at their bloody points, the wounded hanging on each other

--What did you do it for? I knew the potters at Balah. Old man artisans, boys who fetched wood for their kilns. Strong work, idiots! Leave the precinct, go!

--We want wine, and washing, Pagos answered her

--Ask for it like a man

--We just did, Pagos trifled. --Behavior for a price. Tell us, goddess, as you step aside. Are you the original whore here? Calendar girl, milk-maid, nanny? Or pure hag?

--Wanassa, you little prick, said Diwia: her answer made men afraid to laugh

--I am Pagos. You know what we have done, bigger towns than this. I am Pagos, son of Bom. Death is afraid of me. I live! he bellowed for his men. --Now, aside

--Nothing doing, drunk, said Diwia, and she lifted her left hand outward upon Pagos, trembling her crooked middle finger on the air. It was a poison gesture old and

feared in common through the crowd: even some of Pagos' brothers had lived to see it work, and they averted their eyes

--Step up, son of Bom, and never again lie sweet in any garden. Your pleasures finished, knife's-edge all the touch you ever feel. Come in, and be cut from every cousin: world wreck your sleep with worry and revenge. Nothing, nothing but yourself---Step up, and be buried with the dogs!

Pagos handed his blades to kinsmen and cracked his knuckles. When Pagos' boot touched the third stair, Diwia said *Come in, then---Have you met Dagarat?* And one enormous human being stepped from the dark inside, an Annakim

A brother of old Canaan's warrior-guild, that chose out only giant men to train: I saw twenty in my father's day, and this was the biggest. He wore the guild's green-plumed helmet that showed them from a mile, and his eyes were black, big and solemn as a bull's. Black beard hung like a wolf's coat down his chest, under there was a man's weight of plate; and that was between the hilts of two heavy swords, whose blades reached down to his calves, in guards of bronze. Dagarat filled the doorway over Diwia

--Amateur, Haunebu sea-scum, Dagarat said to Pagos, who halted. --You keep this lady from her day. Leave. Or show me the weapon you will eat

--Quite a familiar, for a lady with no power! answered Pagos. --Well, Dagarat, a pleasure to take a tree down. But all of us, tomorrow, fight Kemeti. Pharaoh's armies, as

big as you. Better you should die against them

--Confused little blondie, said Dagarat's solemn face. --Our guild dislikes your odds tomorrow. Annakim come here to wash. To pray, and eat, and trade, and dance the girls of Gaza---while you die. The Canaan towns you burned, Pharaoh's spiders ran from, carrying couches. So, spider, if you live, show this door your face again. Skin you for a sunshade. Puh! Then you never grow up

Pagos, flummoxed by the match, chafed there, a little tired now, but the mocker's face he turned to his followers found them smiling into his. And then the sudden noise of voices from behind turned the crowd from Pagos: they were what-news shouts from more of our chieftains coming in from camp through Gaza's southern gate. Viri the Danaan priest-chief came up beside Neos of the Kari; Doku of the Libu's Tehenu, and more with Fotya the weary south Achaian

Pagos dropped his shoulders, turned his back on Dagarat, and laughed his way back down to take charge, as ever, of the next distraction. Diwia and Dagarat turned their backs as well and slammed the door

--What word, Pagos?

--Gentlemen, the King's Highway is cleared

--The road is *warned*, now, the whole Wall of the Prince! Fotya objected

--Blast, Pagos! said Neos; and for a Kari, even to speak Pagos' raider-name was

anger. --Do you know what Ramses' armies are? A lame horse still twice our kick. Do you like your house a sand-dune under sails?

--Such good, wise kings everywhere you look, Pagos complained

--Only the wine-man is good, Doku put in, with a long Tehenu smile

--Is that Iakos? Pagos said, turning round to look down at me. --Grand, let the bards sing. You're the one they say breeds the balls out of bulls. What news then, you sorcering blackguard?

When he was finished, I said hello carefully all the way around; and then, that I had just left wine on the table of The First Vizier, rebel-breaker. Out with that came Afti's weaving, and I hung it in the sun between my hands

--I ask that no one touch or try to take this. This is where we are. Tonight it can show the council where Ramses waits to finish you

--Talk, Pagos ordered: a flash in his eyes saw Afti's weaving hanging in his tent, but he settled into his booted stance as great judge. --Smell a lie, eat your tongue

--Eat my children in your fathers' pie too, I answered, despising his pile of blue guts. --You'll find them every tent of this fine place you princes made

--Hide this now, tonight, tonight! Doku demanded, all deferential smiles; and that, with wine, landed me near their circle round the fire. No one expected the prayer with the bowl in my hands

Bad blood and good came out. The old woman Padi of the Lukka was last to speak. A child had been offered. A shiver ran through us, and the men's holy curses faded. Then their silence again, and the sound of the sea. Waves breaking, fish running, birds, the world, untouched for all their smashing down of things. This time what they smashed would be there still when blood was done. I asked permission to give them my ships' eyes and ears

--Lie, and you will, came a promise: I stood up with Afti's weaving

--Kemet lies this way, westward. His army is two forces. Here, he waits you with chariots and skirmishers: here, where an arm of the shore swings out into the great sea-lake, Sirbonis. March yourselves beyond his hide on that neck of land, he sees your marching-dust, and out he springs behind you

--You know what Pharaoh calls a division, four thousand men and a thousand chariots. But men say now that one division, these days, is almost half his strength. They do not love the sea. His ships are few and a weak river escort. Pharaoh's seconds, then, wait for you on land beyond the great lake's western arm. He aims himself to drive you into that five thousand for the slaughter. Cousins, years my eyes know these places. Hold Ramses himself to that neck of land. And hurl the ships where his strength is not: at this city, here, Pelusium

--The fort is middling strong, but no one trapped inside it controls the harbor, or

the works worth having. Most years, after Nile flood, the river's miles of salt mud protect it. This year, the waters run high, and two arms of Nile make the place an island. So---cut off the fort. From there, you can rule half the river, half his trade. In time, marry this with all our Libu kin. Before he knows it, Ramses will have to deal---in grain, or farms, or what you ask

--And blood decide this, you will still be here, like him

--Not at all like him. Growing grapes on his grave

--And this, I will eat your tongue, is truth?

--Did I say, do this and conquer? You can throw yourselves under his golden wheels. Or you can fight for once as if you know what for

So I sat down, drank, and hoped to see the light of my last day. Nobody told me to leave, or not to leave. Nor spoke to me again till they were done

It was not that they believed me. They had come of age fighting from ships, kicking over rotten things, taking only to abandon; had suffered enough to be looking for a place to rest and live. The words, and Afti's circle of the world, simply kept haunting the talk every side. This and that plan they liked better; but what if the little wine-man were true of speech?

The river was a sea people's way into the land. The warriors on foot had to hit Ramses hardest, for their thousands of women, children, and elders of their families

were going to be strung out behind them on the wide-open dust of Sinai. The beating they had taken made it sure they were going to face at least four thousand men with a thousand chariots. Why should Ramses not be waiting there? The bait best for tempting him was their families back of the fighting-line. On land all they needed was a standoff, to keep one fist pounding on his door while their other took Pelusium. Worotu, Shardana's man, stood up: then Neos of the Kari, and Fotya beside him

--We come, said old Wilios the priest, --but you will all be trailing Trojan boats

When they started to ask whose ranks were for Ramses himself a second time, it was done. Veda the woman of Cyprus drew a flint knife that all of them used to cut their palms, and the blood-oath Pyx and Padi made had everyone press their palms to each other's, both hands, with eyes conjoined like people consenting to a dream. The women caught the drippings in their cups; and to Viri the Danaan went the the honor of pouring. Because, even counting wooly Pagos and his Ironheads, the Danaans were the craziest of all--to his twigs and berries this Viri went to council naked as the moon, as all of them did till dressed like women screaming into battle. The blood went mixed with dregs of wine into the fire, and this time, all the cups. It meant that tomorrow, they would have new cups, or never again need one

The word spread through the dawn. Diwia, on the citadel with Dagarat, watched the great surround of encampments shaking out their scaly folds. To the man and

woman, people understood that the fighters on land would be paying for Pelusium. That was what brought them, in the midst of breaking camp, to the making of the largest circle, three ranks deep, that any had seen before. *We want to sing our thanks before the deed*, Veda said; and so they sang, and the men took off their headgear, and looked at the dust

The circle gave one ferocious shout thousands strong, and then dispersed to morning's work in the rising light. But you could hear the sea and the people's breathing with it, the clank of a weapon, the creak of a cart. And if I kept my blood cold, I was not sorry, because I also felt again the exquisite pleasure they were feeling at war's edge, the flame of forever in their senses. The loss of which was why every one of them was here. What monster had stunted us, to find life most in death's unnatural face? Was it not time to look this in the eye and turn again?

The men and the people on land had a ten-day march to the looked-for battle point, and filled their bags and bellies at the wells. To us on the ships it was an easy two days to Pelusium; so the men and people marched to be seen, and we hauled up our sails for disappearing. When the sun broke, the best ship-borne warriors had fanned out on the sea, Trojan, Cyprian, Pelasgian vessels and Qari, Shekelesh, Shardana, Lukka; mine like a tender to their host, and Diwia's citadel behind against the sun

I tell what I learned of the battle on land from broken pieces. The Ironheads led

that march toward Ramses, they were men with nerve against horses, and Pagos would not have it any other way. Behind them flanking the great road, Tehenu and Meshwesh, sand-crossers who knew the wild fights that swirled across the open: at rear guard, then, Fotya's south Achaians and Danaans, and the rags of what this had become, a motley of picked-up arms in hands of men coming from the stripped farms and torn-up towns of Canaan. At first the oxen-carts were at their heels, and the walking wounded, and people old and young with half the company of Danaans fallen back to keep them moving. A few miles over stones and prickly scrub, and the long unruly line of them separated back along the road, the elders this time keeping their distance at the edge of the warriors' dust, and glad to have no Shekelesh feuding in their midst. The killings since their last defeat had ended, or so it seemed

 Their weapons streamed through Balah the second day, and found almost nothing of The Wall of the Prince but his wrecked doorstep. Looters they let flee to cry their coming. That day, the last of the land-men's two thousand warriors were making their way across and through the broad deep wadi of Ghazze. Fotya's south Achaians were descending into it to cross. A garden of a place with fig trees, date-palms, even willows nursed by trickling water and the half-shade of the wadi. Crossing through, nobody noticed that the Danaan rear guard had quietly become one force again, behind and now above Fotya's Achaians. And there the four hundred Danaan men with Viri

stabbed into their backs without a cry of hate or warning. They broke the south Achaians' ranks in half with a first push coming down the slopes, and speared and stabbed every man between, the stealth and shock quickly crippling their numbers

The Meshwesh closest to this uproar of murder only watched: some of the forward warriors heard and ran back screaming curses. By then Fotya was down under two spears in the middle of the stream. It was more than a fight born of insult, because Viri made sure that his men kept on stabbing every man they could reach: even when Fotya's Achaians broke away forward into the Libu's hundreds, beside themselves with rage. Pagos, his guard come back from point, and Doku with his men, began to stone the Danaans: the elders and the women as they came on put their children to it. It stopped Viri's men without killing them: they could not afford more waste of strength. In an hour the Danaans had killed three-fourths of Fotya's men

The blood drew vultures. Pagos and Doku told Viri, march or die. There would be no talk now on a feud as old as sons and fathers in the islands. Nothing was forgotten, nothing would be. But this day, once the word got through ranks, the Danaans' attack became a crime in common to the others. To a man they wanted Viri's fighters moved up front, where all could see them turn their madness on Pharaoh

And the force deployed again across the wadi, out onto the great plain along the sea in sharper ranks, Achaians together now at front, Danaans between them and the

Libyans fanning out thirty men across, spears down out of the sun. Hunting Ramses, waiting Ramses, the shimmering gleam of his gold mirage. Waiting to see what they would see at the end of war's road

They camped without one fire and kept pushing westward. Each day the people with their ox carts kept a better distance. On the tenth morning, The King's Highway brought them in sight of a wide reach of land stretching into the sea at their right arm

They wanted to smell him on the air, his horses' dung. They spread out their columns wide as could be and took that way, at the double-run. Starting to shout, to lift their spears and scream surprise as they ran on; hoping to trap Great One in his ambush-hide among this place's little hills, to catch him with a thousand chariots confined, their backs to the ocean, ranks of men crying out to him

They found nothing but the land, cattails, sunny estuaries, reefs of sand that shifted with the moons. When their charge had spent itself, and the wind carried off their curses and their dust toward the ocean, they heard Ramses' chariots behind. It grew from a sound coming toward them like the metal land's mountains gathering their feet. A rumbling that rose to outright thunder, as if the ground were speaking to the sea

They saw pennants and the horses' plumed heads first on the shimmering horizon. Now in the trap, they had not thought of how to fight this place. The ranks of chariots gave no time, charging on them full-stride with warriors, spears and archers

steady-upright in their rattling cars. Local princes, garrison-commanders, elite *maryannu* the best in Pharaoh's pay, they were the face of practiced death

There had to be fifty chariots across the front ranks of them with hand-to-hand men charging screaming at their sides. When hundreds of the first began to shear off left and right, more and more of them to cut off all escape, they saw that the chariots' ranks in the center were still more than ten ranks deep. And still unfolding, three or four men at the sides of them brandishing blunt rods, hook-blades and half-shields, javelins. In they came, screaming above their own clattering roar. It began to rain stones, hooked throwing-sticks, barbed arrows

Ramses was not there. Whoever the general was, he watched from a chariot inside five hundred men of a guard, and he halved his other seven into companies two hundred strong for finding weak points, crushing in their flanks and butchering them

None of the cranes forgot they were dying to hold this strength here, Ramses or none, and they died screaming names of family, making Kemeti men pay hand to hand for each small hill, falling back to the water. Less than a thousand reached the stony edge where, reduced to targets, they laid their arms down, and hoped to survive Kemeti rage

The general pulled back half the chariots and skirmishers still on their feet to regroup and go after the families. Hearing their roar rise and fade out there on the

coastal road, a sound as deep as bleeding Earth went through the Libu and Danaans. Men of war had come to the limit of their mystic bond. Life purged itself into the sea

Pagos son of Bom and all their wishes died there, at the front where he trapped himself with his smiling friends. Doku, Viri, and the Meshwesh leader named Merire like his fathers. Battered south Achaians, hundreds of Danaans and Canaan's men, dressed to be seen, permanently humbled, given over to the sword. By the distant holy hand of their own true man's man, king, god and favorite of the god. By the strong justice of the Earth's most exalted servant of priests, grain-hawkers, killers and dead statues. The sun blazed straight into wide-open eyes

For years to come it crippled his omnipotence, killing so many who fought back so hard. A thousand sons of The Nile among two thousand island corpses, three hundred horses on the sand. Bellies gaping out crimson coils of snake, heads crushed in, curled up where they bled to death without an arm. Feasting flies and vultures on the peace their choices built

And none of this our ships knew, nor the harbor of Pelusium. When they came in from the darkness, the cranes carved into the ships at prow and stern were too close to the water, so heavy the packed-in men at arms aboard. And they knew what the sea would do to most bows they had. But there was no plan without disadvantage, and it hardened them. Beneath a red crack in the sky, they opened their jaws in a great

crescent fanned out in front of the fort, to show their teeth. When lookouts had counted a hundred boats, they dropped their master's ensign, and hoisted a weaving that made Worotu and the Shardana shout

The garrison's soldiers were sons of a Shardana clan following their hired-on fathers' work, who fed their children where a Pharaoh lacked men, but not gold. So it seemed, with good signals. So the more readily the ships, in earnest to have this place by noon, dropped sail and oared their ways up into the channel of approach. They saw how close-in we had come, that the port and the works worth having lay beyond the fort's real reach: the fort was for launching bold strikes when men inside it liked the odds. Ahead of the ships packed with Kari and Shekelesh and Trojans, further in, the land was the land: a narrow beach and wild thorn brambles below the fort's steep slope, and along the shoreline both sides of the built-up places, heavy waterside tangles of trees, and swaths of high grass that tumbled into river-mud and rocks

My ship, like them for now, had dropped its green sail, but stopped rowing, and we slid into the way of two Cyprus boats. They waved us off with high signs: there was even laughter ship to ship, for as usual, Shardana and Shekelesh oarsmen had started to race their ships inshore. To a man, first thought was speed of taking over, to get back to sea and return to guard the families. But there looked to be nothing to bother them cutting off the fort. And so the ships followed each other's turns and then hulled past

their cousins' ships just in front, turning shoreward each, the standing men growling and jostling to get their bristling weapons free of crowding on the decks. Ships crammed with Cyprians and Kari, Pelasgians made their turns; and past them, taking along full-throat curses mixed with laughter, went the boats of Chimaros The Flame and Lukka's people. Rowing hard for the mud-brick fishing town just up the river, still asleep in the summer morning twilight

The three flamed arrows that suddenly shot from the fort's roof looked like welcome, and a shout of answer rose from the ships almost rail to rail sliding into the riverbank. But I saw from my boat at the turn in the channel's mouth that their flames had not hit the water when, at once, black swarms thick as insects shot up out of the grasses and the tangled groves facing and flanking the ships. They were arrows, light javelins with them, and then whistling stones and throwing-sticks. When the first jammed-in men went down, the boat-captains and the warriors' officers screamed crossed-purpose orders

As a few pulled their ships back, men fighting to get off the decks were landing in mud or chest-deep water: boats shoved back by oarsmen found no room to turn among the others. Another swarm came down with better aim, and ships began to rock with the tumult of death and men turning round to help their wounded. And still the Pelasgians and Cyprus' best thrust their ships in, with the shield of every man up over

his head, and the one roof clattering with stones and arrows: they forced their vessels in among floundering ones and to the river-banks, and the black-haired young men of Pyx's people leaped and poured from the prows with their sticking-spears and knives. Lean Cyprus men in their crane-feathered crowns and leather corselets swung long swords about their heads, furious to drive their men's axes and fighting-spears into the land, to get them scrambling up over the crumbling mud-banks and break the rain of arrows coming down. And they were following Shekelesh, Shardana and Kari hand-to-hand men first ashore, the horned-helmet men with the nerve to get closer and so in under the volleys: that was the roar of slaughter beginning to rise just inside the trees up-river from the fort. For where they beached, they found a fast way in upon the ranked Kemeti bowmen, and they at first were easy kills with swords

Then, Kemeti warriors, a company of first-rank men they called shock troops, stood up out of the pastures beyond the works of Pelusium's dye-tanks, where they had lain upon their bellies. Ramses' hand-picked giants, to a man Pagos' size, bare-chested and quick behind their shields with short hooked hacking-blades, a handful of javelins: they came in hard on the Shekelesh, charging through the retreat of their own bowmen, and two hundred fifty of them began to push Shardana and the rest full-back to the river, leaving Neos of the Kari on the ground. It worked because five hundred other skirmishers, a full battalion had rushed out to fight on the crumbling mud edge of their

land, to keep the Cyprus best confined against the shore. If they managed to climb where the river-bank faced the ships, they were dying before they found their feet

The stones and sticks and arrows weltered down. Few seemed to notice the fort hoisting Ramses' gold again, because the cranes were still fighting so hard to find the edge and make this work. When the ensign climbed the sunrise over the fort, a third-wave Kemeti company of hand-to-hand men hit the river fresh and fierce. Soon there were plenty of Cyprus bodies to clamber on in the mud below the riverbank's crest. Their spears were finding marks, but not enough

The fresh Kemeti at them were not yet pressing to get at the ships along the bank: they wanted the boats on the water to keep struggling to disembark their men, the ones already stippled with arrows and trying to untangle and withdraw. Now the soldiers protected by their fight hurled heavy grapple-hooks on lines that caught quick and snapped tight. Cut the lines, and more hooks came down among more arrows: the Kemeti were dragging the jammed-up ships into the shore to make a killing zone

We saw the first crane-headed boat tip over fighting to resist, a Kari boat packed with axe-men and rowers and supplies. Seasoned, trained, determined men reduced to thrashing and fumbling to pull each other from the shallows. And still, the ones who got ashore picked up weapons and scrambled into fight-lines along the bank. They went in enraged, defiant of despair that they were not even getting near Kemeti's

strength, which kept pouring down at them in fifty-man platoons. And it carried them, for they cut their way forward into farm-boys and scrap-weapon porters thrown into the line. But this was just to wear them down, they were fighting Ramses' battle plan, the land and the trap laid into it

Shekelesh and Shardana men regrouped their hacking-swords, took charge of the Trojan spearmen still up, and a last hundred Kari---and they struck hard again to make this push work. They had to kill enough to let their brothers take the fort behind their lines. And thirty yards hacked inland showed them that the soldiers hurling grapple-hooks and heaving on the ropes were Shardana, in disc-crowned helmets of their own, down already from the fort. And they, with plenty to prove against wild kinsmen for the somewhere-watching master of their gold, began to die because the sight of them lit such rage. What stopped the Shardana from taking the fight inland was a cry of hundreds from the struggling ships. Kemeti boats were coming round the turns at both ends of the channel

Three ranks of warships three-across were lunging downstream from the town double-fast with their oars, and ten more with lions bellied-out on their sails were rounding the vast westward turn of the land along the sea; fanning out to block and tighten down Pelusium's door. All sides of them, like skirmish-runners, a host of smaller river-boats, trade-galleys, skiffs, every one riding low with men, more archers,

sickles, and bristling spears. A thousand roaring voices pounding their weapons and the rails of their lion-headed prows

We saw them first from where we floated and I got enough green sail down to signal, then brailed it up again, and down and up; and still we sweated, bobbing there till the sea-side half of their fleet plowed into the river's mouth, shooting us a few contemptuous arrows. Chimaros and the Lukka were nowhere even to complicate the closing trap: their heads were riding spears coming down the channel. At the sight and the cry of the closing ships it seemed every man understood, they were going to lose the sea, and the cranes began to fall back and down over bodies toward their boats. As if they could have moved their vessels, where so many oarsmen sat shot with arrows, brains torn out by stones and throwing-sticks

They kept trying, even when Kemeti ships plowed sideways into them, threw hooks and started to board them ten yards from the bank. Thunder of feet as they landed and grappled deck and hold, the weapons' hacking clatter: their screams as they still fought became astonishment, as if it were impossible that so much strength go down so easily, impossible to fail and leave their families spoil, and lose the world. Cranes tried to row and haul against the hooks that dragged them toward the mud. More boats capsized, Kemeti jumped from rails onto men thrashing chest-deep in the shallows; and arrows kept on falling, killed their own as well as cranes. Men began to

break off now to try to swim the channel for the open waves. They got as far as wounds and battle-gear allowed, and then they disappeared

--Iakos? --Sir? --The crew speak, sir. --Let's get out of here! --Let's help them!

Before my eyes the world a killing floor beneath black sun. Man and mother's son in tangled heaps along the mud, bobbing meat for crocodiles. I stood there agape at the prow, appalled at the scale of what my hands had helped to happen. No. This was not what it took to be a man, to be a people. Before my eyes the staggering stupidity of what men, forgetting, refusing to learn, must come to; and I, the first and worst. For all that I had done against loss and change, I had fought them on kings' terms, and handed them again the day. Koreter still laughing in my ears: *You will never be free of us*

We dragged aboard some swimmers, then rowed for a line of ten men in crane-feathers pushing a ship's mast out to sea. Spotted. A fast half-dozen Kemeti skiffs drew round us, shot the sail full of arrows, heaved their hooks in. I broke the chain around my neck and tucked little Labrys in my cheek. Once they speared the men swimming and cut away arms that clung to our boat, they noticed our drinking-wares, and came aboard to club and beat us with their fists till we went down. No one seemed to know or care what a green sail or double-axe meant. From there, as when a person is long sick, and half-recalls the daemon-places traveled, I remember broken things

Being dragged to land. Beatings along a gauntlet line of clubs and little gaming-

knives and spit. The men still whole and strong dragged up from the killing-place, their elbows roped behind their heads whether or not it pulled bone from socket. Their naked torsos muscular, ripped with knives in endless lines, paraded in humiliating bondage to the sun. Shoved and shoving each other into pens, a narrowing warren of wood-staked pens like a labyrinth, pain the guide: we were sorted by our looks, and told to point the leaders, or we all went to the mines. Nobody pointed, and Kemeti's soldiers laid on skillful wounds, knowing their order that we live to work. When they separated even men holding onto each other, I lost the whole crew of my boat

A solid two thousand had come in by ship, a thousand killed or going to die. Along the handling pens the local princes, garrison commanders, the officers and mercenaries and quarry-masters too, each with his merciless Melas eye. The last of the gates between pens was a man's arms wide. Men shoved to the left became slaves of mines and temples and estates: shoved right, as I was into the greater group, there was marching yet and plenty of weapons circling our rage and uncertainty. Nobody passed through without a hot iron's brand to his left breast. *Criminal, invader*, it said: *bury me in the belly of a jackal's bitch*

They marched and shoved and prodded us, south was all we knew. Garden died away from the land, the smell of water. Men crammed around me grew delirious with shock of their defeat, thought of nothing but steps forward, not to fall beneath the

spears. Every mile we walked, more sorting of our peoples and the brotherhoods across them: for Pharaoh was a river to his people. I saw that Balios had come through, the chief of Pyx's Pelasgian men, and Makhi, Veda's Cyprus captain. Kuro the Shekelesh leader who tried so hard to break the archers; and Sama, Meshwesh priest who led their war, and sang as he kept walking of his Rainbow, Bride of the Sky. I did not know if I could die out here, nor how a man could more deserve it. The last Danaans, shunned even now, kept tight as weapons shepherded our columns east, into the metal land. Some men, dreading the Sinai mines, ran off till laughing chariots took them down

When they ladled us water two days on, I had drifted in with twelve young Pelasgian men who spoke a Cyprus tongue, with old Crete words: *Pulesati*, they called themselves, and Labrys tattoos on their left breasts. Zakkala? They had heard the name, and I theirs. There was nothing to do but wait. We kissed that water from each other's hand with oaths of help: at night we huddled all but naked shivering in sand, our skins ablaze, and the drinking guards' cookfires sang. *And look how weak the new moon*, our men said: *we should have known*. We talked, or some men talked, the only comfort outside sleep. A Pulesati man of thirty with his arm in a bloody sling, half-dead beside me. It could have been Squiddy

--You had an uncle or something, in Ugarit, a kinsman of your name. Now, there was a priest like the fighting ones of Libu. I used to go there with my uncle's trade. He

got the stories. The man I speak of came there an exile out of Cyprus, in the last bad burning time. Had a bit of gold, they say, from some old hoard tucked in his wraps. Knew his papyrus too, so the temple of Dagon there took him on. Ten years, and there he was high priest, imagine, in a city like that. Nice little building that was, with a porch and a pillar to it. Big front steps, and an altar always burning on the roof, the smokes good to see from Fennel Harbor

--Well, it was hard times in Ugarit just before she burned. Desperate people made a crooked place. And this man, this priest---had nobody, wanted none, just kept the smokes going, scratching some pile of parchments, running festivals. Now. There was this cat---you know how they hang about, for mice in the grain-jars, and scraps off sacrifice---this one cat, he called her Golden Eyes, because that was the most beautiful part of her. She took a half-tame shine to this man. Nights, she'd hop up on his table while he tried to scratch his parchments; and days, he let her lie about the precinct

--My uncle used to get angry, for how this priest talked to his Golden Eyes right through holy points of business. *Keep those mouses from my grain-jars, you! Or no dish of milk tonight!* Well, one day, the priest chanced to catch somebody kicking her out of the way coming in. He went back inside---and people thought, just to make the big man wait for entrance---and out he comes with a scimitar, my friend, to take your arm off. He could swing one, too. This crazy priest, he says *The man who troubles her will find no*

god to honor here! All I can tell you is what my uncle, old, told me. That Dagon's house was the last little place of decent peace in Ugarit. People knew he was a monster, they accepted what he was, to have the place: for all the rot they lived in by those times, they wanted something like that in their midst. Of course it ended when he peevd somebody royal that way. He slipped out before they speared him. Huh! With Ugarit ashes, I guess it came out even! Things look different when you see how they turn out

--Selah! men mocked around us in the dark. --How will this turn out! Cheer up the lizards and scorpions! --Argh! The stars have shut their eyes. --This is the bottom, dung and fingernails to work with. --What is anybody going to make of this!

--Dark as midwinter night. I see a grateful altar. To our limitations. I mean, each other. From bondage to ourselves, our own deliverance

--Shut that mumbling mouth! --He talks like a priest. --Like a tomb. --Like a priest inside a tomb. --Shut up the gibbering!

The men who kept walking for three more days with only the water inside them made it back to the families. Brigades of chariots broke into squadrons of ten along the highway and shot a dozen crazed men down when they ran from our column toward the sea. Here, they salted in a thousand trussed-up prisoners, the living third of island men broken and captured in the fight on land: then they turned around the ox carts and the old and the women and children, and marched eleven thousand of us back to the

ruin of Balah, on the road toward Gaza. When we got there, no water till our rabble raised up tents, the sooner to get people working, sun to sun, rebuilding Ramses' door

The guards were hundreds, armed and angry, but kept their distance under orders, that we might recover near the well and be more useful. In that late summer moon Ramses showed himself, whom none of us had ever glimpsed. By that time a few of the leaders left among us had been spied out, because of mere attention from the families---scorn, or honor. When Ramses rounded up the last they could identify, they were hacked into disarticulated pieces before his shaded chair. Like his men, Ramses took home penises that had a knobby crown: if a penis was hooded, he took hands. The festival they made that night around our bodies was named for him, commemorated each year of his power. In the morning, the labor-chiefs came at us angry, seeing how many people in the tents knew how to die without a weapon

The Meshwesh woman Nush was still alive. All this way, she had carried a baked-clay planter hardly bigger than her head, its shape with a hint of bull's horns, running spirals round its base; and in it a tiny green fig tree. The sun pounded down on our building and at night after rations people liked to lay and pile around it, and tried to sing. And Tolema of Shekelesh was there, and Veda the grace of Cyprus, old Wilios the priest of Troy, and Padi, wicked-tongued as she was born. Padi had never shown anyone but blood the little house of Earth Mother of which she was their Keeper. She

brought it out beside the tree: I peeked inside and could not help a first pure smile. *You failed! Cheer up!* she said with high exasperated arms. *Love! Be grateful! And consent!* That was all there was, and the sound of the sea lives away

Those were days of many funerals, when women kissed the brand and wounds on any man they met. Men refused their offers to brand their own bodies likewise. *Enough*, they said, *Enough tears, even if you would not cry!* A madness had gone out of us. And still women took the brand, for the new country, especially those whose housebonds would not see it. Girls and boys, the hardest who saw the killings on the highway, stepped forward after them. Instead, their mothers charged them to remember the circle we had made. So they did, in their games, as we did in our rites. But they went on envying the mark, and made it theirs with stitching or with paint

In the heat and the labor of that place, things got better with the moons and the buildings of Balah. First we got more bread, and rags of garments to keep warm desert nights. With the seasons came dates and figs, melons and oranges, and meat or green fish. My hope was the same that I saw in others' eyes as they learned to taste these things again. When the year's last rains brought on the moon of our release, Ramses came back, and so did some of our weapons

There was no hope of finding my iron. The omen in his gesture was as dark. For Ramses' fight with us had bled his arm. He was handing us his enemies, all and ancient,

in the east: the troublers of royal roads through hills and plains of Canaan, and beyond

--Mongrel mess, your faces in the dust before me! Your seed is nothing. Your gods are wild, your bonds are water, no king, no laws, you are not normal! You will take a name, today, in the service of Great House. You will make order. You will build my monument to victory, your shame. You will keep my door. You will restore the garden of my cities you turned desert. You will turn my roads into rivers! Dogs of you, go from my sight. *Get the wealth moving!* Or there will be no grain! And the shattering just dealt you by the sun will seem a kindness

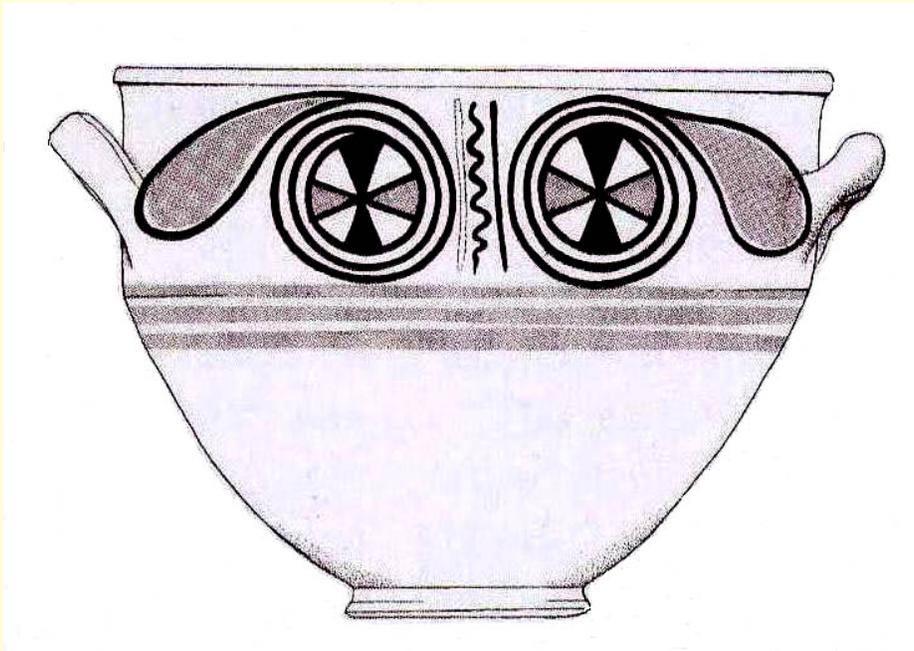
--What a boor. I'm glad he's gone, said Veda, under the rose; and when we had made our circle once more in that place, she talked with me again

--So, Iakos, what does the good wind say? We have sisters at Ascalon asking for land: I'm sure they can do better than the last two Pharaohs' visits. We should be alright, if we keep close by The Green. Earth Mother, bless the remnants of us heading north for Dor, matching sons and daughters. That name, people mean to keep: in Ponikija, Dor means *generation, family, household*. Well, Iakos, good for you---wine they will need, sylphium they won't! Ahh, but those Danaans, those vipers on the road: some people, it takes more lives than one to renounce the wishes of their weapons. I wonder now, if men think forgiveness is easier than permission? We lost our way, our law, our moons and suns. May the name *Pulesati* help us to remember!

--It's a better name than Pharaoh's names for us, I answered. --I have a girl and boy to find. Then, any boat I can wrangle, to see what help old stores can bring. Selah, I tried to laugh, --I'll be lucky to be farming, like everybody else

--There certainly is work every hand, Veda smiled in her crescent of young white teeth. --We have skills. They might let us in.

III



IN PROGRESS!

Your Feedback is Greatly Appreciated