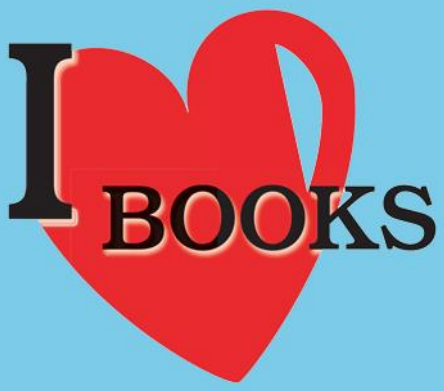


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extracts from

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the young prince. The leaders were desperate to find him, for Calchas, chief among the soothsayers who sailed with them, had said that they would not take Troy without him. Then Odysseus, who was not called the Resourceful for nothing, blackened his beard and eyebrows and put on the dress of a trader, turning his hair up under a seaman's red cap, and with a staff in one hand and a huge pack on his back went up to the palace.

When the girls heard that there was a trader in the palace forecourt, out from the women's quarters they all came running, Achilles among them, veiled like the rest, to see him undo his pack. And when he had done so, each of them chose what she liked best: a wreath of gold, a necklace of amber, a pair of turquoise earrings blue as the sky, a skirt of embroidered scarlet silk, until they came to the bottom of the pack. And at the bottom of the pack lay a great sword of bronze, the hilt studded with golden nails. Then the last of the girls, still closely veiled, who had held back as though waiting all the while, swooped forward and caught it up, as one well-used to the handling of such weapons. And at the familiar feel of it, the spell that his mother had set upon him dissolved away.

"This for me!" said Prince Achilles, pulling off his veil.

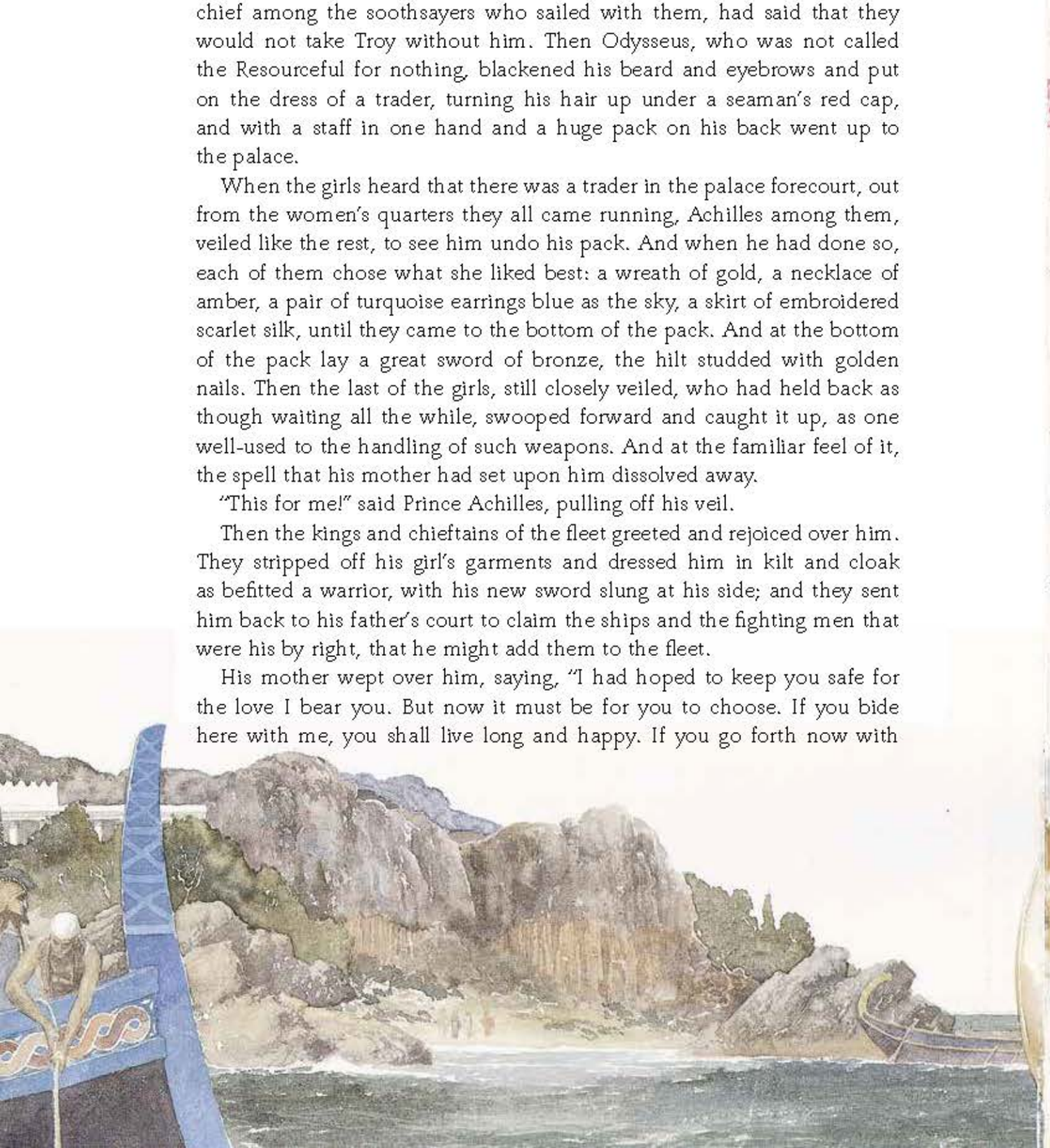
Then the kings and chieftains of the fleet greeted and rejoiced over him. They stripped off his girl's garments and dressed him in kilt and cloak as befitted a warrior, with his new sword slung at his side; and they sent him back to his father's court to claim the ships and the fighting men that were his by right, that he might add them to the fleet.

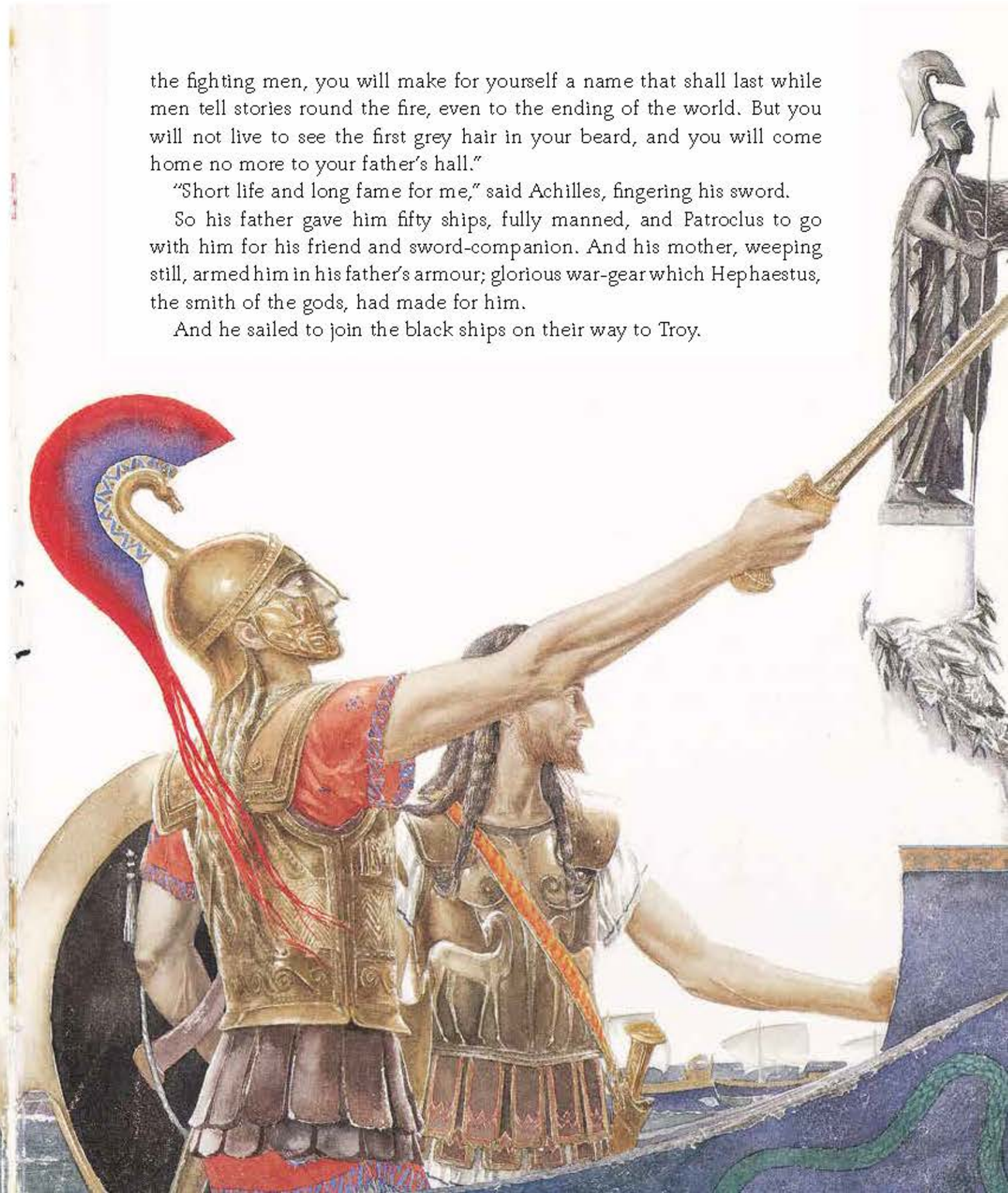
His mother wept over him, saying, "I had hoped to keep you safe for the love I bear you. But now it must be for you to choose. If you bide here with me, you shall live long and happy. If you go forth now with the fighting men, you will make for yourself a name that shall last while men tell stories round the fire, even to the ending of the world. But you will not live to see the first grey hair in your beard, and you will come home no more to your father's hall."

"Short life and long fame for me," said Achilles, fingering his sword.

So his father gave him fifty ships, fully manned, and Patroclus to go with him for his friend and sword-companion. And his mother, weeping still, armed him in his father's armour; glorious war-gear which Hephaestus, the smith of the gods, had made for him.

And he sailed to join the black ships on their way to Troy.







Meanwhile Helen, who was at home among her women and weaving a great purple cloak on her loom, heard of the coming fight between Paris and her marriage-lord. She left her weaving and flung a veil over her head and hurried to the roof of the nearest gate-tower. King Priam was there already, and some of his elders with him, looking out over the plain and the two great armies gathered there.

And seeing her come, the old men murmured among themselves that there had been no shame all this while in fighting to keep so fair a lady, but that now it would be a fine thing for Troy if she were to go back to her first lord and her own people.

But Priam, who had always been kind to her, saw her flinch at their words, and put out his hand to draw her to him. "Dear child," he said, "I do not blame you for what has come to pass. It is the will of the high gods that has brought this evil between your people and mine."

But Helen wept and said, "Always you have dealt gently with me; but I wish that I had died before I left my marriage-lord and my babe, shameless as I am, and came with Paris across the sea to bring so much sorrow upon us all!"

She would have covered her face and drawn back from the edge of the roof, but Priam held her at his side, asking her the name of this one and that among the Greek heroes, to turn her thoughts a little in another way. And so they remained for a while, side by side, looking down.

RED RAIN

Dawn was indeed well up in the sky, but over the Greek camp there was little light, for Zeus had spread a churning mass of black cloud across the sky above them; though where the Trojans gathered on the higher ground the sky was clear and the light strong. And soon, from the menacing cloud roof rain began to fall: rain that was as red as blood.

But despite the evil omen, the Greeks were of better cheer than they had been last evening, for Diomedes and Odysseus had put fresh heart into them. Agamemnon their High King put on his armour with a good heart, and drew up his front-fighters on foot with their chariots ranked behind to support them; and behind again, the spear-warriors, and the bowmen and slingers on the wings.

When the Trojans came rushing down they charged to meet them. The two war-hosts crashed together, cutting each other down as reapers cut their way through a field of corn. Soon the helmets of the bravest Trojans shone deep in the ranks of the Greeks, and Greek swords were slashing and stabbing deep among the Trojans. And all the while the over-arching arrows fell like a dark and hissing rain.

At noon, the drowsy time when shepherds in the hills make no noise for fear of rousing goat-legged Pan, Agamemnon led the front-fighters in a savage charge. With his own hand he slew many chiefs in that charge, two of Hector's brothers among them. A great and terrible charge, in which foot-soldiers slew foot-soldiers and chariot men slew chariot men, and they broke into the Trojan mass as fire falls on a forest on a windy day leaping and racing from tree to tree. Driverless horses crashed here and there, dragging empty and broken chariots behind them, and before their onslaught the Trojans fell back and back until they were close before the city gates. And there, under Hector's orders, they checked and re-formed their broken lines and drew breath to face the next charge of the oncoming Greeks.