



PART
ONE



CHAPTER ONE

Cassandra

I NEVER ASKED FOR VISIONS, I was one. In my future, I see myself regal and glorious, luminescent with the glow of my god. The priesthood encourages simpler garbs of its high priestess, but I'll change that when I'm awarded the position, donning the finest silks, the largest jewels and the brightest gold. The people will love me like I am the closest thing to a goddess they'll ever see, and no one will be able to tell me what to do or where to go or anything at all because the voice of Apollo will be heard when I speak.

'Your presence has been requested in the throne hall.'

The interruption is like an insect buzzing in my vicinity – irritating but only enough to have me lazily swat in its vague direction.

'I'm busy.'

'You're sunbathing.'

'Apollo's god of the sun – this is worship.'

'Cassandra.'

I open one eye and see Ligeia anxiously wringing a cleaning

rag through her fingers. If it were actually important, Mother would have sent two servants.

“That’s *Princess* Cassandra, if you don’t mind. And I find it very difficult to believe my presence is needed anywhere. I have brothers for that sort of thing.’

“The issue pertains to your brother,’ Ligeia says quietly, her voice lowering to the sort of whisper used when speaking of the gods of the Underworld. ‘It’s Paris. He’s here – he’s *alive*. Which means the prophecy . . .’

I lurch to my feet and run to the throne hall before she can even finish her sentence.

I know more about prophecy than most. I’m a priestess of Apollo, after all, and he’s the god of it. Also poetry, music, art, truth, archery, plague, healing, sun, light and many more things I should probably have memorized. If you’re only swearing yourself to a god because you want to keep your options open, he’s a good one to pick.

In our training, we learn several key things about prophecies. Firstly, only select individuals at the temple can give them out. Apollo can’t bless everyone – and why would he want to when the scarcity of prophecies allows us to charge a premium for them? Secondly, be vague and account for all outcomes so they cannot say you were wrong. For instance, with battle, say something like, ‘*You will go you will return never in war will you perish*,’ and let the listener decide whether they want to place a break before or after ‘never’. And finally, never engage with any matters that are *too* important – leave those to the oracles at the temples across the ocean. Anyone desperate and, crucially, wealthy enough will make the trip and declare the immense power of Apollo once they do.

Aesacus broke all those rules with *the prophecy* – because when you say ‘the prophecy’ in Troy, there’s only one you could possibly be referring to.

Mother had dreamt of a flaming torch and Aesacus, who came from a long line of seers, claimed it was an omen that the child in her womb would be the downfall of Troy.

That’s all I know. Everything else is hushed and quiet, rumours of the things they did – the way the prophecy and the baby were ‘dealt with’ and whether Aesacus really jumped from that cliff to his death, if maybe he wasn’t pushed . . .

Mother never fell apart but she never quite recovered either – her smiles distant, her eyes sad.

Which is why I’m now storming towards the throne room, Ligeia begging me to slow down and shouting about propriety. My parents are the best king and queen this kingdom has seen but when it comes to Paris, they’re still wrecked. The barest whisper of his name and their rationality dissipates.

So whoever this man is, claiming to be my brother, taking advantage of their greatest sorrow, he shall not live long enough to spin another lie.

I catch myself at the threshold.

I have seven siblings and dozens of cousins. This man could so easily be one of us.

He’s got it all: Mother’s slick black hair, Father’s long nose, bronze skin like clay in a furnace and the same lanky build all my brothers share – like muscles are climbing ivy clinging to their slender frames. I’m fairly certain if I dragged him into the sun his brown eyes would glow amber like the rest of ours do.

But Paris is dead, no matter how much my parents might pray for a miracle. Which means whoever sent this man to pretend to be my brother has put time and effort into finding someone who might pass. Whatever they want, it must be worth all that.

‘What is the meaning of this?’ I demand, strutting into the room like I have every right to. It’s empty, save for my other siblings, gathered in a watching mass, which explains why I was sent for – to bear witness, not to interrupt.

My parents sit on a plinth overlooking the expanse of the throne room. The same white stone of the palace, threaded through with glimmers of gold, curves and swirls into their thrones, like it has not been carved so much as enticed to form its new shape.

My parents are clutching one another’s hands and before I spoke they both looked so hopeful.

Now they’re glaring at me, Father even going so far as to stutter, at a loss for words.

‘Cassandra,’ my mother manages. ‘This is not your place to speak.’

‘A man claims to be the subject of a prophecy delivered by Apollo, where else should a priestess of Apollo speak?’

It’s not the first time I’ve spoken out of turn but it’s the first I’ve tried to boldly insist I have a right to, and the sheer audacity seems to still my parents.

‘A prophecy brought me here,’ the man says, a cocky smirk on his face that reminds me too much of my sister Kreousa. ‘Your lord favours me.’

‘You do not speak for my lord,’ I hiss.

‘Cassandra,’ my father says. ‘Perhaps you should gather the

other priests. If we are consulting Lord Apollo on the topic of prophecy, we should have the high priests in attendance.'

The dismissal grates on me. In the temple my royalty gains me prestige that the hierarchy of the priesthood does not technically allow.

But my family remember too well my indifference to the gods before I declared a sudden calling to join the temple the first time I was presented with a proposal for my hand in marriage. I have nowhere near the authority I'm pretending to, and unlike the rest of Troy they won't be awed into believing I do.

'What is there to consult? If this is Paris, then the prophecy comes true with him,' I push. 'If it is not, then he is a liar impersonating a dead Trojan prince. You should kill him regardless.'

Mother flinches. 'No!'

I suppose it's difficult to sentence your own son to death *twice*.

But the chances he is Paris are slim. The gods only deal in miracles when they have something to gain from it.

My brother Hector steps forward. As the crown prince, he shows no hesitation and clearly anticipates no scolding decree that it is not his place to speak.

'Cassandra makes a good point,' he says, and for a moment I'm relieved – this is what we do, the tandem we work in to protect our siblings from themselves. I'm ready to turn our efforts on our parents, but he continues: 'However, we must also consider the fact the gods do not take kindly to those who murder their own kin. Cassandra, you have studied the religious texts – do you not have numerous examples of the gods' wrath at filicide?'

Beside him, his wife, Andromache, presses her lips thin to suppress her entertainment at the suggestion I have studied anything at all – and she should know, given it was her I often skipped lessons with. I'm not exactly the most devout priestess.

'When the alternative is the prophesized fall of Troy?' I counter.

'My father would not order my death,' Paris – or whoever he is – says, like his supposed father hadn't arranged for his death the first time around.

'There is much to consider,' my father says. 'A curse for a curse. As Hector says, the gods do not take kindly to men who kill their own sons.'

I toss my hair back with a sullen huff. 'So send him out of the city and let the curse fall upon a different house.'

'That our efforts to do that twenty years ago failed suggest the gods also laugh at those who try to avoid their fates. Perhaps we simply interpreted the first prophecy incorrectly.'

I suppose my father is technically right, but I don't believe in prophecy, I don't care for the gods, and the hopeful look in my mother's eyes is breaking my heart because I can already imagine how thoroughly wounded she will be when 'Paris' vanishes with half the treasury of Troy or whatever it is this man has planned.

'Prophecy or not, we have no proof this man is who he claims to be.'

'We have no evidence to the contrary, either,' my mother says, her eyes not wavering from the man she desperately hopes is her son.

'Fine,' I say tersely. 'Then I'll pray for further guidance on the prophecy at the temple.'

THE END CROWNS ALL

By which I mean I'll make a big show of worship and then declare exactly what needs to happen.

Paris might not speak for my lord, but I sure do. And I have a feeling he's going to tell us to lock this man in the darkest cell of the dungeons.