

THE SHADOW
OF THE
TROIJAN HORSE



Wendy Leighton-Porter

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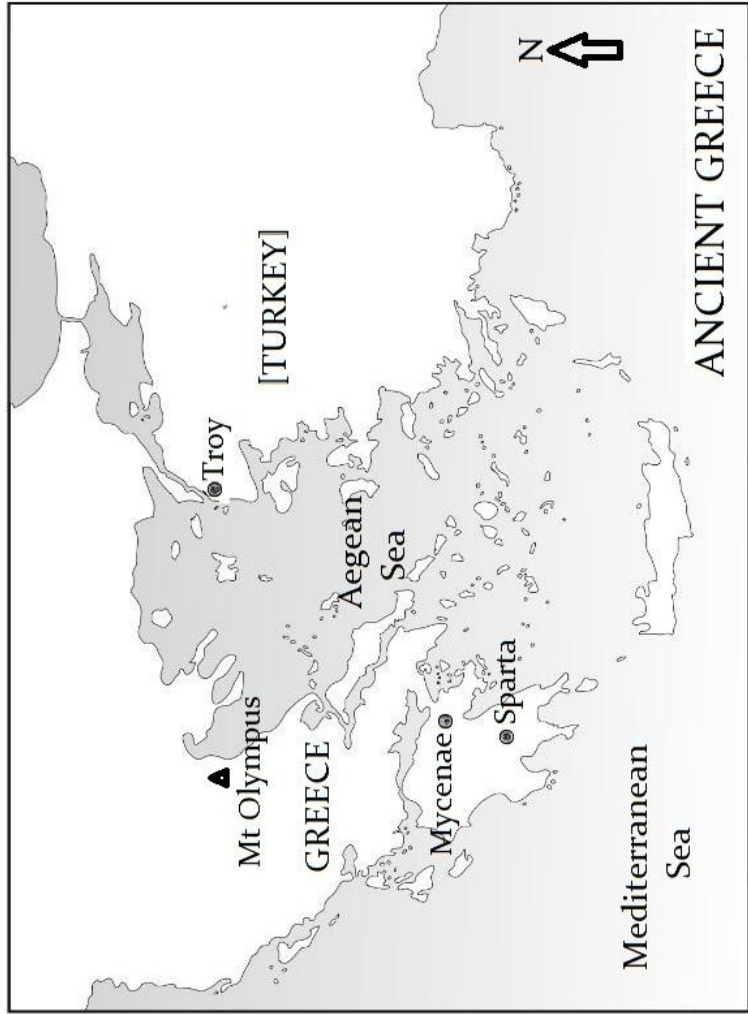
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For Gail Lautieri,
A dear friend whose courage is truly inspirational.



Prologue



From their lofty home on the summit of Mount Olympus in Ancient Greece the family of the Immortal gods looked down upon the everyday lives of the ordinary people far beneath them. Aphrodite, the goddess of love and beauty, yawned widely. She was growing tired of the game; in fact it was starting to bore her. Peering through the wispy clouds which hid the top of the mountain from sight, she craned her neck to get a closer view of the battlefield below. There wasn't much going on at the moment. Perhaps it was time to stir things up a little. She returned her attention to the game board in front of her. It resembled a large chessboard, but the pieces looked like small figures of real people. Picking one of them up, she quickly moved it into position.

'Your turn, Hephaestus,' she said casually to her husband, the blacksmith god.

He checked to see which figure she'd moved

before sliding one of his own pieces across the board to face it. 'I think my Menelaus is more than a match for your Paris, don't you, my dearest? You're not concentrating.'

Almost at once the sound of clashing weapons rose up from the battlefield and they both leaned down from the peak of the mountain to watch the fight more closely. It was immediately evident that Menelaus, the King of Sparta, was stronger than Paris, the Trojan prince, and there was no doubt that he would win the combat.

'I think you may have lost this round,' said Hephaestus smugly.

'Perhaps this round,' answered Aphrodite with a small sigh. 'But not the game.' She was holding her trump cards, or rather pieces, behind her back and wasn't ready to use them just yet.

The war between the Greeks and the Trojans had been dragging on for ten long years. It was partly Aphrodite's fault to start with and the whole thing had all begun with a beauty contest, believe it or not. Maybe it was time to put an end to the conflict once and for all, she thought. For now though, she wasn't quite ready to lose one of her main pieces and so she decided to resort to a little trickery. When Menelaus grabbed hold of Paris' bronze helmet, she caused the chinstrap to break so that

the helmet came off in Menelaus' hands. Paris was suddenly enveloped in a fine mist and Aphrodite spirited him off the battlefield back to the safety of the royal palace, leaving Menelaus wondering where he'd gone to.

'Really, Aphrodite,' said Hephaestus. 'There's no need to cheat, my love. I'd have let you win if I'd known it meant that much to you.' Secretly, however, Hephaestus knew that victory would ultimately be his, for fate had already decreed that Troy must fall. He clutched the winning piece behind his back. Just like Aphrodite he wasn't quite ready to bring it into play.

Most of the gods had taken sides when the war between the Greeks and the Trojans began, although Zeus, the head of the Immortal family, remained neutral along with Hades, the god of the Underworld. For the others, however, it was just a game and they were all ready to help their players wherever possible.

'What have you got behind your back, Aphrodite?' asked her husband. 'Not more trickery, I hope.'

'Not at all,' she replied with a secretive smile. She brought her hand round and slowly unfolded it to reveal four small figures standing on her palm; two boys, one of whom was wearing glasses, a girl with long fair hair and, last but not least, a handsome, pale-coloured cat with startling turquoise eyes.

'What on earth are those?' asked a bemused

Hephaestus, struggling to contain his laughter.

‘You’ll be laughing on the other side of your face soon, husband,’ retorted Aphrodite, rather annoyed by Hephaestus’ scornful attitude. ‘These are my secret weapons. What have you got anyway?’

With a flourish Hephaestus opened his fist and showed Aphrodite what he’d been holding so tightly. It was a miniature horse made of wood, standing on a wheeled base.

‘And that’s the best you can do is it?’ sneered Aphrodite.

‘You just wait and see,’ answered Hephaestus knowingly. ‘Your Trojans won’t know what’s hit them when I decide to use this piece and as for your pathetic little group you’ve got there ... well, they won’t stand a chance against it. This will win the war, you mark my words.’ He smirked as he closed his fist once more around the little horse.

Aphrodite clutched her handful of small figures protectively. He must be bluffing, she thought. How could a mere wooden horse be so important? Nevertheless, he sounded so certain that she felt a shiver of doubt run down her spine. For now she put her group of pieces in a drawstring bag made of silk, which was attached to the golden belt around her waist. She would keep them safe until she was ready to use them.

Chapter 1



Jemima's eyes snapped open and she looked hopefully around her bedroom. She could have sworn she'd heard her mother's voice saying, 'Happy birthday, darling.' She gave a sigh of disappointment when she realised there was nobody there. She must have been dreaming. She wasn't totally alone, however, and she stretched out a hand to stroke the creamy-coloured fur of the large, handsome cat that was lying alongside her. At once a pair of sleepy aquamarine eyes opened and regarded her affectionately.

The cat smiled as he whispered, 'Happy birthday, Jemima,' in a soft voice.

Today was July 29th and it was Jemima and Joe Lancelot's eleventh birthday. They were twins and had lived with their uncle, Richard Lancelot, ever since the mysterious disappearance of their parents several months before. Everyone was convinced that James and

Isabel Lancelot were dead, but Jemima and Joe knew differently and were determined to find them.

Jemima got out of bed and padded across to her chest of drawers. She rummaged around in her top drawer until she found what she was looking for. Clutching an envelope and a brightly-wrapped parcel she made her way over to the door.

‘I’m going to see if Joe’s awake. Are you coming, Max?’

‘Okay,’ he answered with a yawn and jumped down off the bed to follow her. Anyone who didn’t know about the adventures the twins had experienced since the beginning of the summer holidays would probably have been stupefied to hear Max speak. To Jemima, however, the fact that her cat could talk seemed absolutely natural. He wore a special bird-shaped charm on his collar which allowed him to do this and the twins also wore identical ones around their necks, which enabled them to understand and speak any foreign language wherever they went. This had come in very handy on their recent trips to the lost city of Atlantis and ancient Crete.

Jemima opened Joe’s bedroom door and went in. She found her brother sitting up in bed with a faraway expression in his eyes, looking a little glum.

‘Hi Joe. Happy birthday! I got you this.’ Settling herself down on his bed, she handed him the card and

present. Max jumped up and nuzzled Joe's face, wishing him many happy returns.

'Thanks,' said Joe to both of them. He leaned over the side of the bed and ferreted about underneath it for a moment or two, before re-emerging with an envelope and a gift-wrapped parcel which he thrust into Jemima's hands. 'I got you something too. Happy birthday, Jem!'

They both opened their cards and presents. Joe had bought Jemima a tee shirt which his friend Charlie's mum had helped him choose when she'd taken the boys out a couple of days before. Jemima was delighted. It was decorated with silver butterflies and it was really pretty. It was even the right size.

'Oh cool, thanks Jem,' exclaimed Joe, as he tore the wrapping paper off the present she'd given him. It was the latest "James Bond" DVD, which he'd wanted for ages. 'Jemima, something weird happened just now,' he suddenly said, putting the DVD down for a moment. 'I was still half-asleep, but I was sure I could hear Mum talking to me. She sounded so real I expected her to be here when I opened my eyes.'

'I know,' replied Jemima. 'I heard her too. I think she just wanted to let us know that they're thinking about us, especially today.'

The twins regarded each other sadly for a moment and then Joe nodded. 'We're going to find them,' he said

confidently. 'Maybe not today, but definitely soon.'

'Yes,' said Jemima, doing her best to smile. 'Come on, let's go downstairs and see if Uncle Richard's still here or if he's gone to work.'

The twins, closely followed by Max, headed for the kitchen. The door from the hallway was closed and, when they opened it, an unexpected sight met their eyes. Uncle Richard and his housekeeper, Mrs Garland, were both waiting for them with big smiles on their faces.

'Happy birthday!' they chorused cheerfully. A large blue balloon with a number 11 on it was tied to the back of Joe's chair and Jemima's chair had a similar one attached to it, but in pink. The table was covered in colourful parcels which looked very exciting.

Uncle Richard hugged each of them in turn. He adored his niece and nephew and wanted to make today special for them. It was their first birthday without their parents and he knew they were bound to be feeling a little sad.

'Come and sit down,' he said. 'Presents before breakfast, I think.' He picked up a square box and put it in front of Jemima. Beautifully wrapped in metallic paper, it had a huge pink bow on top. Jemima reached out and lifted it up to read the label. On it were written the words: "For the fairest". She turned to her uncle and gave him a quizzical look.

‘All will be revealed,’ he said enigmatically, as he rested a hand on her long blonde hair. Jemima carefully opened the package – she didn’t want to tear the lovely wrapping paper. Inside was a smart white box and, when she lifted the lid, she gave a gasp of wonder. Resting on a white velvet cushion lay an elegant silver bracelet, attached to which was a dainty little charm in the form of a golden apple. She could just about make out some tiny letters engraved on the surface of the apple, which read “καλλιστι”. She hadn’t a clue what it meant though.



‘Oh, it’s gorgeous,’ exclaimed Jemima. ‘I absolutely love it. Thank you so much, Uncle Richard.’ She jumped up and kissed him.

‘It’s a present for a young lady. You’re growing up and, now that you’re eleven, I didn’t think you’d want

something for a little girl.' She beamed at him. Jemima's second parcel contained a book. It was a large volume entitled: "*The Story of Ancient Troy*" and was filled with brightly-coloured illustrations. 'You seem to be developing an interest in myths and legends,' explained Uncle Richard who was a professor of archaeology and knew all about those sort of things, 'So I thought you'd like to read this.'

'It looks great,' said Jemima enthusiastically. 'Thank you ... for both my presents.'

'Your turn now, Joe,' continued their uncle. He placed a large parcel in front of Joe. 'You've mentioned this maybe once or twice, I think,' he said with a smile. Joe ripped off the paper and whooped with delight. It was an Xbox 360 and he'd been going on and on about wanting one for ages.

'Oh wow! Thank you, Uncle Richard. This is fantastic. It's just like Charlie's.'

'I know,' replied his uncle. 'I must admit Charlie gave me a bit of help choosing it – and you'll find there's something to go with it in your other present.' Joe attacked the wrapping paper impatiently and, ripping it off, he uncovered a game for his Xbox - "*Warriors: Legends of Troy*".

'Cool,' said Joe appreciatively. 'Wait till Charlie comes round. I can't wait to have a go with this.'

Uncle Richard affectionately ruffled Joe's sleep-tousled fair hair. 'Breakfast first though,' he said and began to help Mrs Garland clear away all the wrapping paper from the table. Mrs Garland was also extremely fond of the twins and enveloped each of them in a motherly hug as they helped her lay the table.

'By the way,' said Uncle Richard. 'At lunchtime we're going out for a pizza, followed by the cinema, with Charlie and his mum, if that's all right with you two.'

'Yay,' they both chimed. This was proving to be a brilliant birthday.

A couple of hours later Jemima was absorbed in her new book and Joe was busy setting up his Xbox when the doorbell rang. It was Charlie, their friend from next door, who'd accompanied them on their amazing trips into the past. He was clutching two gifts, one for each of the twins, and Mrs Garland sent him upstairs to find them. They were both in Joe's room, together with Max who was enjoying a post-breakfast nap on Joe's bed; or was it a pre-lunch snooze? It was difficult to tell with Max, as one tended to run into the other.

'Hi you two,' said Charlie, as he stuck his head around the door. 'Happy birthday!' He waved his two gifts at them. 'Max and I chose these together for you.' He handed one to Joe and the other to Jemima, as Max opened one eye to watch the proceedings. The twins

eagerly tore off the paper to reveal two picture frames. Jemima's contained a photo of herself with her friend, Varna, and their two cats, Max and Mia. Joe's was a photo of himself and Charlie surrounded by the whole of Varna's family.

'These are really lovely, Charlie,' said Jemima. 'Thanks. They look great in the frames.'

'Yeah, thanks,' said Joe. 'We'll get Uncle Richard to hang them on our walls for us.'

What nobody else knew, apart from the three children and Max, was that Charlie had taken these photos when they'd travelled back in time. They'd rescued Varna and her family from certain death in the lost city of Atlantis and had then met up with them again in ancient Crete where the family had settled to start a new life. So you could say the photos were, in fact, several thousand years old.

'I see you got your Xbox then, Joe,' said Charlie.

'Yeah, thanks for helping Uncle Richard with it. Look at this game – it's brilliant. We'll have a go with it later, shall we?'

Jemima also showed Charlie her bracelet and her book. Charlie narrowed his eyes thoughtfully when she showed him the apple-shaped charm and told him about the words written on the label of the gift box. Something rang a bell, but he couldn't remember exactly what for

the moment. Just then they heard Uncle Richard calling to them. 'Are you three ready to leave? Charlie, can you go and fetch your mum?' The twins rushed to put their shoes on while Charlie went back next door to collect his mother.

They'd had a great day. Even Uncle Richard had enjoyed himself. Talking and laughing with Charlie's Mum, Ellen, he'd been the most laid-back they'd ever seen him. Now the twins had gone upstairs to get ready for bed. Joe was playing with his Xbox and Jemima was reading her new book. With Max by her side she lay on her bed flicking through the pages and looking at the colourful illustrations. Suddenly something caught her eye.

'Aha,' she said aloud, as she began to read: 'The Judgement of Paris and the Golden Apple.' She worked her way through the chapter. Now she understood the significance of the little charm on her new bracelet and the label which had been attached to the box. She smiled as she admired the bracelet which was still on her wrist and then she turned to Max. 'I'm going to read you a bedtime story, Max. Listen to this.' Max snuggled down on Jemima's duvet and listened intently as she told him

all about the Trojan prince called Paris, the golden apple and the beauty contest between the goddesses.

Chapter 2



Two days later the twins, Charlie and Max were up in the room on the top floor of Uncle Richard's house, where their parents' possessions were being stored. This was where they'd found the book which had transported them back in time to Atlantis and ancient Crete, and today was the day they'd decided to have another look at it and see where it might take them to. The twins were desperately searching for their parents and fervently hoped that they'd find them this time, wherever it happened to be. They knew their Mum and Dad were trapped somewhere in the past and were unable to return without the key; the very key which Jemima now wore on a chain around her neck.

Joe fetched the carved wooden box which contained the old book off the shelf while Jemima, Charlie and Max sat waiting with a mixture of nervous expectation and excitement. Joe set it down on the floor

between them and lifted the heavy book out of the box. Then Jemima took off her necklace and inserted the key into the keyhole which was cleverly concealed within the intricate golden pattern which adorned the cover of the book. As the key turned, the children heard a quiet click as the mechanism was released. The book seemed to take a deep breath once it was unlocked and it sat quivering, waiting for them to open it. Joe and Charlie both took hold of the cover, lifting it gently. They'd already seen the first two chapters, so the book automatically opened itself at the beginning of Chapter Three.

As before, the page was beautifully inscribed with fine italic writing and illuminated with bright colours like a medieval manuscript. The title was a very strange word, however, which none of them recognised:

HARJORSTONE

The word was spelled out in tiny gemstones which appeared to be glued to the page, but the children knew this wasn't actually the real title and that the jewelled letters would behave rather oddly. You could slide them around on the page, rearranging them until they spelled out what the title was really meant to be. The only bit of help you got was a poem written underneath which gave you important clues.

Joe put his finger on the sparkly letters and started

moving them around. It felt weird because they glided across the page, but at the same time they still seemed to be firmly attached to it. Soon all the letters were in a complete jumble and Joe had several attempts at producing recognisable words with them, but his best result was **JOE RON TRASH**.

‘That’s rubbish,’ said Charlie. ‘Literally! Let me try.’ For a few minutes he moved the letters up and down, backwards and forwards, round and round, but discovered that there weren’t many words you could actually make with them. He settled on **ONE SHORT JAR**. ‘I think you’d better have a go, Jemima. We’re not doing very well here.’

Jemima moved closer and studied the letters before starting to rearrange them. Despite her best efforts the most she could come up with was **SHORTER JOAN**. ‘Hmm, this is really difficult - much harder than before. Do you want to try, Max?’ Last time they’d let Max have a go and it had been quite a good attempt. ‘But remember...’

‘I know, don’t worry,’ he said to Jemima, ‘I’ll keep my claws in so I won’t scratch the page, before you say anything.’ He placed a big paw on the jewelled stones and began to shuffle them about. He was leaning so far over the page that his large furry head and enormous triangular ears hid what he was doing. Every so often he

uttered little cries of ‘Oh’, ‘Ah’ or ‘Aha’, before making cross, exasperated sounds as he started again.

‘This is impossible,’ he moaned. ‘I’ve got three letters left over and I can’t make them into a word.’ Jemima looked down at what he’d done. **ROAST HEN**. Unfortunately he was left with **O**, **R** and **J** and he looked extremely put out.

‘I might have known you’d find something to do with food,’ laughed Jemima. ‘But it’s obviously not right - we can’t have letters left over. Let’s have a look at the poem and see if that gives us a clue.’

They all turned their attention to the small rhyme written at the bottom of the page:

***“It started with an apple and ended with a horse.
Accepting gifts from Greeks was a big mistake, of
course.
The gods just left them to their fate; the war came to
an end.
The mighty city was destroyed and death became
their friend.”***

‘I don’t believe it,’ exclaimed Jemima, turning towards the two boys. ‘That must be more than a coincidence, don’t you think?’ Charlie glanced at Jemima’s bracelet as he realised what she was saying.

‘I knew the golden apple and “For the fairest”

reminded me of something,' he said. 'I just couldn't remember what. It's all to do with Troy, isn't it? The story's coming back to me now.'

Joe's face was flushed with excitement. 'That's so weird. Uncle Richard's just given us all those presents connected with Troy and now it looks as if we'll be going there. I still don't understand what an apple's got to do with it though.'

'Even I can tell you all about that,' said Max rather smugly. 'I know the story.'

'Well, let's just rearrange the title first,' suggested Jemima. 'Just to make sure we're right. What do you think it's going to be?'

'It's got to be something to do with Troy,' began Charlie. 'Trojan ...'

'... horse,' finished Joe. 'The wooden horse of Troy.'

Jemima started moving the letters around again to spell **TROJAN HORSE** and as the final "e" slid into position all the jewelled stones began to twinkle like fairy lights. The children looked at each other with satisfaction. They'd solved the puzzle yet again. Instantly a loud sigh escaped from within the depths of the book and a sudden breeze seemed to blow through the room, ruffling their hair. As it did so they became aware of the sounds of clanging metal, like swords and shields clashing against each other, and they heard angry shouts

which seemed to be coming from afar.

They all knew what was about to happen next and they turned to watch as a strange misty cloud appeared behind them, filling the room. It seemed very dusty, but they could just about make out shapes and colours which gradually became more defined until they were looking at a scene which could have come straight out of Jemima's new book.

'Wow,' said Joe excitedly. 'Those two blokes are just like ones from my game. The same clothes and weapons and everything.'

It was extremely strange seeing two warriors locked in deadly combat in a room in your house and rather frightening, to tell the truth.

'I'm not going in there,' stated Jemima emphatically. 'We'll all get killed.' When they'd been to Atlantis and ancient Crete they'd got there by walking into the misty cloud. There was no way she was stepping into the middle of a battlefield with swords and spears being waved around. She peered through the mist. 'Oh good grief,' she cried. 'There are dead bodies lying all over the place. No, no, and no.' She bent down to pick up her necklace from the floor, fastening it back around her neck. Suddenly she was caught off balance as Joe grabbed her by the wrist and yanked her to her feet, hauling her towards the vision before she could do anything to stop

him. She screamed loudly, but her voice tailed away as they both disappeared inside it. Charlie turned to Max and gulped.

‘We’re going to have to follow them,’ he said shakily. Like Jemima, he wasn’t too keen on the idea of venturing into the middle of a battle. Max felt the same, but he was desperate to go with Jemima; he couldn’t let her face all that danger without him. Charlie picked up the large cat and stepped hesitantly into the mist.

Chapter 3



‘You idiot,’ yelled Jemima as Joe let go of her wrist. ‘I’m not staying here, I’m going straight back.’ As she dusted herself down and prepared to return to their own time, Charlie suddenly appeared before her with Max in his arms. ‘Oh great,’ she snarled. ‘Now we’re all here, about to get killed. You’re both mad. I’m taking Max and we’re going home. You two can stay if you like, but count me out.’

They were surrounded by the heroes of Greece and Troy who were busy fighting to the death on the dusty plain outside the city walls, slashing this way and that with their lethal weapons and uttering terrifying war cries. As the children stood looking helplessly around them, spears and arrows whistled past in all directions – the frightened youngsters didn’t know which way to turn. Jemima found herself rooted to the spot, too scared to move.

Meanwhile, high up on Mount Olympus, Aphrodite had removed her four little figures from their silken bag and had set them down gently on the board in front of her. The brown-haired boy with the glasses was holding the cat, whilst the two blonde children appeared to be arguing. Oh dear! She wondered if she'd done the right thing by bringing them into the game whilst a fierce battle was raging. She'd better make sure they were safe. She waved her hand over the board in a circular motion.

Just as Jemima was about to grab Max from Charlie's arms, it felt as if a tornado was sweeping across the ground towards them. Sand and grit swirled high into the air and the warriors all threw down their weapons, so that they could protect their eyes from the dust storm which was enveloping them. It was the strangest sensation, thought Jemima, as they were swept upwards and spun round and round, almost as though they were in a tumble-drier. They had the distinct impression they were flying through the air and, when they dared to open their eyes again, they discovered they were no longer on

the plains of Troy in the midst of all the fighting. Instead they found themselves standing in the quiet, peaceful surroundings of a grand building. Jemima felt rather dizzy and took a deep breath, hoping she wasn't about to be sick. She didn't know how they'd got there, but was very relieved to be away from the dangers of the battlefield.

'I'm still really, really cross with you,' she said to her brother through clenched teeth. 'That was a totally stupid thing to do. What if I hadn't picked up the necklace with the key?'

Joe looked alarmed, before glancing at the chain round his sister's neck, relieved to see it was there.

'Yes, it's all right. I've got it,' she snapped. 'But just stop and think before you do something like that again. It was completely irresponsible.'

Suddenly a voice came from behind them. 'Ah, here you are at last. I've been expecting you.'

They whirled around to see a young woman with long jet-black hair, who was smiling as she beckoned them towards her. Dressed in a full-length white dress and wearing an elaborate golden headdress, she looked very regal. They were a little unsure of what to do, but she seemed so friendly that Jemima took a step in her direction.

'Don't be afraid,' she said warmly. 'I won't bite, you

know.'

They all approached her, wondering who she was and when they drew close, she clasped each of them by the hand. 'Welcome to Troy, Jemima, Joe and Charlie ... oh, and Max of course,' she added, seeing the affronted expression on Max's face when he thought he was being left out. They were stunned. How on earth did she know who they were? 'You're wondering who I am and how I know your names,' she said with a laugh. 'I'm Cassandra, the daughter of King Priam.'

Now Jemima understood. She remembered something she'd read in her book. Cassandra had the gift of prophecy and could see into the future. The only drawback was that she'd once been punished by the god Apollo who made sure nobody ever believed her predictions. How terrible, thought Jemima, to know that something bad was going to happen, but not to be able to warn anyone about it.

'Aphrodite sent me a sign that you'd be coming,' said Cassandra. 'And I'm so glad you're here because I desperately need your help.' The children were astounded. How could they possibly be of any use to her? They'd only just arrived and didn't really know much about Troy. 'Come with me,' she continued. 'You must be tired and hungry after your journey. I'll take you to the rooms I've had prepared for you, so that you can wash off

all that dust and then we'll have something to eat.'

Max's ears pricked up at the mention of food. *Now she was talking!* They all followed Cassandra as she led them through the palace until eventually she stopped in front of a closed door. Throwing it open she entered a large and richly decorated room.

'You'll be staying here,' she said. 'There are two other rooms through there,' and she indicated two doors which led off the main chamber. You should be quite comfortable, but if there's anything you need just ask one of the slaves.' Joe, Jemima and Charlie looked at each other with raised eyebrows. They certainly hadn't expected any of this. Cassandra went to the door and clapped her hands, summoning a servant. 'Bring some food,' she commanded. Turning to the children, she indicated some bowls of water and linen cloths that they could use to freshen themselves up. 'I'll be back soon,' she said, before sweeping out of the room.

'Well, what do you make of that? We've landed on our feet here, haven't we?' said Joe. He ran over to the open window. It had no glass in it, but a thin, filmy curtain was drawn across the opening. Joe pulled it back and looked out. 'Wow, come and see this,' he exclaimed. Jemima and Charlie went to join him and they gazed out over the battlements of the palace which was built on the highest part of the lofty city. Far below they could see the

dusty plain where they'd first arrived and beyond that lay the wine-dark sea, its surface obscured by hundreds and hundreds of warships. They were just like the boat they'd travelled on with Theseus to Crete, with long prows and ornate figureheads. They must belong to the Greeks.

'We'd better get cleaned up before Cassandra comes back,' said Jemima. Joe and Charlie were reluctant to tear themselves away from the window, but at last they came and gave their hands and faces a quick rinse to show willing. A few minutes later Cassandra returned with a group of slaves who were all bearing platters of food and jugs of liquid. The feast was laid out on a low table surrounded by couches and Cassandra motioned to them to sit down.

'Help yourselves,' she said. 'I won't ask the slaves to serve us, as I'd like to speak to you privately without anyone listening in.' She dismissed all the slaves with a wave of her hand.

'Please may I give some food to Max?' asked Jemima, seeing the anguished look on his face. He'd thought he was going to be left out and he was starving as usual.

'Of course,' answered Cassandra. 'Give him whatever he'd like. There's plenty, and we can always send for more if necessary.' Max's eyes lit up – he was going to like it here.

As they tucked into the delicious meal, Cassandra studied them intently; they looked awfully young and she hoped Aphrodite knew what she was doing. ‘So,’ she began, ‘You’ve come here to help me out. As you know, this war with the Greeks has been going on for ten years now and everyone’s had enough. The only trouble is that I’ve seen how it’s going to end and it’s bad news for Troy. Somehow we need to persuade the Trojans not to fall for the treacherous trick the Greeks will play on us.’

‘Is this to do with the Wooden Horse?’ asked Charlie.

‘Aha, so you do know about it,’ said Cassandra with a smile of satisfaction. Perhaps Aphrodite had done the right thing by sending these children. ‘Yes, there’s a very cunning Greek called Odysseus who is aiming to trick us with this Wooden Horse and it will be the downfall of Troy if we’re not careful.’

‘They’re planning to fill the Wooden Horse with their best warriors,’ said Jemima. ‘And then they’ll leave it outside the gates of the city as a “gift”. They’ll pack up their camp, load up their ships and pretend to sail off back to Greece. In fact, they’ll be hiding just round the headland in the next bay.’ She’d read all this in her new book.

‘That’s right,’ nodded Cassandra. ‘You’ve experienced the same vision as me. It’s so nice to meet

someone else who can see into the future.'

Charlie could also remember what happened next and he took up the story. 'The Trojans will think the Greeks have given up and gone home and they'll be so happy that they'll drag the Wooden Horse into the city. Everyone will celebrate, thinking they've won the war, but when they go to bed the warriors will creep out of the Wooden Horse and open the gates of the city. The rest of the Greek army will have secretly come back and they'll all flood in ... well, I expect you know the rest.' He didn't want to go into the gory details in front of Cassandra about how the Greeks slaughtered almost all the Trojans and burned Troy to the ground. He was sure she already knew that part anyway if she could see into the future.

'I'm really glad you're here,' said Cassandra. 'I've tried to tell my family about this so many times, but they just laugh at me. Nobody believes anything I say, but maybe they'll listen to you. We've got to make sure that the Wooden Horse stays outside the gates or Troy is doomed.'

Cassandra stayed with them until late at night and they discussed everything that they knew about the fate of Troy. It was amazing luck that their birthday presents had turned out to be so useful. Without the book and the Xbox game they wouldn't have had a clue, and Charlie had heard the story before, which also helped. This

wasn't going to be easy though. Would they really be able to change the course of history? Well, they were here now and they'd just have to do their best.