

Chaeronea

Kineas ran from the *andron* into the peristyle courtyard, shouting for his father.

“Eumenes! ” he called, and then “Pater!” as he grew desperate. The porter was awake, standing by the gate with a club in his hand, chatting to a pretty Thracian girl, and two of his mother’s house girls were making heavy work of getting water from the fountain, calling over their shoulders to other girls in the street outside the gate.

“Xiphos!” Kineas called to the porter. “Xiphos, where is my father?”

The porter shrugged. “No idea, boss. Went out to the ships – early.”

Kineas turned and ran up the steps to the *exedra*, scattering maids.

“Hipparete?” he called. “Melitta? Elpinike?”

His sisters responded from behind the *exedra* door. In normal times, only women were allowed in the *exedra*. These were not normal times.

“Is Mater sober?” Kineas asked.

Melitta opened the door. She was pretty – prettier than most girls, a good catch – wealthy, well connected, and probably better educated than most women of her class. “You can’t come rushing in here,” she said. She pushed hair out of her eyes. She had a spindle in her hand. “Mater is – well enough. You mustn’t go shouting her condition to the world.”

Kineas shrugged with a young man's indifference to the frailties of others. "I need Pater. Has he been here?"

Melitta slipped all the way out the door, so that she stood at the top of the steps, looking down into the courtyard. Kineas thought that she looked like an eager deer hound on a hunt—sniffing the air for the next adventure. Or a horse kept too long in a stable—

"What's the crisis, brother?" Melitta asked.

"Philip of Macedon is at Elateia!" Kineas said.

Melitta made a face. She shrugged. "I have six women spinning and two carding. Is Philip going to arrive soon enough to stop me from weaving?"

Kineas shook his head in exasperation. "This is important!" Kineas said. "The state could fall!"

Melitta looked over his shoulder. "Thais! Get your ass up these steps this instant and don't spill a drop of that water."

Kineas found it remarkable that his sister, the mildest and most maidenly woman of her generation, had the same skills of leadership that he had. A smile forced itself on to his face, even as Thais pushed past him with an adolescent mixture of petulance and sexuality. She flounced her chin at him and pushed her hips against his and then opened the door too hard and made it crash against the wall of the exedra.

Melitta rolled her eyes. "We bought her for you, dear brother. Remember that."

Kineas blushed. Even as a grown man, he found such things brought a blush to his skin. "Melitta, this could be the end of Athens. I need Pater."

Melitta nodded. "I'll have the slaves keep watch for him."

Kineas nodded. "Perhaps he is ahead of me," he said. "I'm going to the assembly." He looked down into the courtyard, at the gnomon standing on its table. "It is already the ninth hour. The Assembly is already meeting."

"Why aren't you there?" Melitta asked.

"Lykophon ordered all the *phylarchs* to assemble as soon as he heard the news." Kineas couldn't help keeping the pride from his voice. He was a phylarch—commander of a troop of the cities elite cavalry. For a man of twenty-five, this was a signal honor. "We met at dawn."

Melitta leaned up and kissed him. "Listen, big soldier," she said. "Mater is useless, and I have ten women to keep in line. So you go play Assembly, and I'll get the wool woven." Her hand on the door, she relented. "I'll have Thais watch for Pater," she said. "Promise you'll come and tell me what happens?"

Kineas squeezed her hand. Then he dashed down the stairs, pausing only to hand his sword to Xiphos. No one carried a weapon in the assembly. Fights were common enough as it was.

Melitta leaned over the balcony of the exedra. "And take Niceas!" she called.
"The streets aren't safe!"

#

The assembly had been in session for almost an hour when Kineas pushed in, scanning the crowd for his father's face. Men around him cursed as he pushed past over benches. Eventually he caught sight of his father – all the way across the amphitheater.

His best friend, Diodorus, was nearer to hand, easily recognizable by his fiery red hair and heavy build.

"Stop stepping on people and sit down!" Diodorus said, grabbing his *chiton*.
"Where have you been?"

"Lykophron ordered all the phylarchs to assemble as soon as he heard the news," Kineas said, repeating the same words he'd used to his sister.

Diodorus served in Kineas's troop. "Splendid! So we'll fight?"

Kineas shook his head. "Lykophron wants us to be ready," he said. In fact, Lykophron had summoned them for political reasons. "What's happened here?"

Diodorus shrugged. Just past him, Graccus, another rich young man who served in the cavalry, flipped his long dark hair over his shoulder and grinned. "Nothing. First the nothing was silent, and then the nothing became noisy. The *thetes* are restless. They know Philip will treat them like slaves."

Behind Kineas, his *hyperetes*, Niceas, grunted. Niceas was a free man – he was, in fact, a thetes, the lowest voting class. Diodorus, Kineas, and Graccus were *hippeis*, members of the richest, most powerful class. Niceas served in the cavalry not because of his own wealth, but as a soldier-servant to Kineas. He served as trumpeter, and sometimes he gave orders – he was a better rider than most of the aristocratic troopers.

Graccus flipped his hair again, and batted his eyelashes at Niceas. “Don’t hide behind your origins, Niceas. You don’t have to grunt. We know you possess the power of speech.”

Niceas straightened his back and looked out over the assembly. “Look,” he said in disgust. “Demosthenes is going to the rostrum!”

The aristocrats groaned together.

Graccus leaned past Kineas. “You can’t imagine that we’ll fight the King of Macedon!” he said to Niceas.

In the bench below them, a man turned. “Shut up!” he said. “Demosthenes is speaking.”

“I hear an ass braying,” Graccus shot back.

“Fuck you, you long-haired ass-cunt!” the man said, and he started to climb the benches, but his friends pulled him down.

“What’s he saying?” Diodorus asked.

“Blah blah blah war with Macedon,” Graccus said. “Blah blah Macedon. Blah.” Graccus affected to listen carefully. “More like the sound of a man breaking wind, if you ask me.”

“Shut up!” shouted another man. He was standing in the next bench above them, and he punched Graccus in the shoulder.

“Not a great day to be an aristocrat,” Niceas said.

Kineas reached out and took Graccus by the shoulders. “Silence,” he said. “I wish to hear.”

Graccus returned the smile of a naughty child caught in a wicked act – unrepentant, and looking to be the center of attention. “I’m sorry,” he said.

Kineas rolled his eyes. “Punch him if he makes trouble,” he said to Diodorus.

“Will you *ephebes* shut up so a *man* can listen to the assembly?” asked a farmer in the next bench.

“We were at Byzantium, with Phokion,” Diodorus shot back.

The farmer nodded. “Not bad. I’ve been out fourteen times – understand? Now *be quiet*.”

“I wish Phokion were here,” Diodorus said. They were all his pupils – he taught them swordsmanship and all the military arts. And he was the head of the pro-Macedon party in the city. But he was away with the fleet, collecting taxes.

“Fucking Demosthenes,” Graccus muttered. But then he subsided.

Demosthenes had been speaking for some time, and now he raised his voice, flung his arms wide, and spoke, his deep tones and perfect diction carrying easily across the assembly.

“Bearing this in mind, Athenians, and reflecting that it is not even in our power to pretend that we are at peace, for Philip has already issued a declaration of war and followed it up by active hostilities, it is necessary to spare no expense, public or private, to take the field eagerly and in full force, wherever the opportunity occurs, and to employ abler generals than before. For none of you must assume that the same policy that weakened the power of Athens will suffice to restore and advance it, or suppose that, if you are as half-hearted as before, others will be zealous in defence of your interests. Reflect, rather, what a disgrace it would be if your fathers faced many hardships and great dangers in fighting the Lacedaemonians, but you should refuse to defend with vigor those advantages which they justly won and bequeathed to you; what a disgrace if one, with only the tradition of Macedon behind him, so cheerfully courts danger that, in the task of extending his sway, he has been wounded in every limb on the battle-field; but Athenians, whose ancestral boast it is in war to yield to none and conquer all, should renounce, through indolence or cowardice, alike the deeds of their ancestors and the interests of their fatherland.”

The speaker looked around, as if surprised to find that even one Athenian might espouse such cowardice.

“He should be in a chorus,” Diodorus said.

Graccus’s hands were white knuckled on his knees. “He should die,” he said. “He is killing Athens with this talk.”

Niceas spoke up for the first time. “Philip of Macedon is a danger to everyone,” he said. “Shouldn’t we fight him because it is the right thing to do?”

“When you are a small boy and there’s a bully in the street, do you go up to him and pull on his dick?” Graccus asked.

Niceas grinned. “You beat his head in,” he said. “That’s what you do with a bully.”

The other men laughed. Because they had done just that, once, and rescued Niceas.

Graccus laughed so hard he had to wipe his eyes. “You should be an orator, Niceas!” he said. “You have the right of it.”

“Poseidon!” shouted the laborer in the lower tiers. “Can’t you long-hairs keep quiet?”

Kineas nodded to the man, and leaned forward to listen.

Demosthenes seemed to turn to face the three aristocrats. Again he raised his voice, and it carried over the crowd as if a god was speaking.

“Not to detain you longer, I say that we must be prepared for war, and must urge the Greek states, by our action rather than by our appeals, to join our alliance; for all words divorced from action are futile, especially words from

Athenian lips, in proportion as we are reputed to be more ready of speech than all other Greeks.” He stepped down from the orator’s podium and went back into the crowd.

The four young men walked out of the *Pnyx* together and down the hill. Men were scattered everywhere in groups of three or four, some arguing at the top of their lungs, but most standing silently.

“War,” Diodorus said. He pulled his *chlamys* closer, as if he was cold.

Graccus shrugged. “So what? We won’t go. We’re against fighting Macedon.”

Kineas gave his friend a look. Suddenly he understood some of what Lykophron had said. About duty, even when you didn’t agree with the state. “I think we’ll go,” he said.

“Poseidon!” Graccus raised his hands to heaven, “Lord of horses! Against Philip? We’ll be killed! Who’s going to fight him – Demosthenes?”

Diodorus rubbed his red beard between his fingers. “Whatever happens,” he said, “It will never be the same. Not for us.” He shrugged. “Win or lose, there’s a lot of war ahead for us.”

Graccus shook his head. “Why?” he asked.

Diodorus ruffled his hair, which annoyed Graccus, who punched him. Graccus carried a lot of muscle – he was a first class pankrationist, and his playful punch rocked Diodorus, despite his own frame.

Diodorus rubbed his arm. “Why don’t you ever pay attention when Phokion talks?” he asked.

Kineas laughed. “Because he liked looking at the boys instead,” he said.

Niceas grumbled something.

Diodorus stopped in the street and struck a pose. “Listen,” he said. “If we somehow defeat Philip, he’ll be back next year and the year after. He has a huge army and all the treasures of Macedon and Thrace at his call. We’ll have to fight for every colony we have overseas. You and I know it.”

The others nodded, even Graccus.

“But if we lose,” Diodorus shrugged. “We have good cavalry. Next to the Thessalians, the best in Greece. So—he’ll ask for us as part of his ‘reparations.’ We make great hostages—right? And we’re not actually bad soldiers. So we can expect to ride around with Philip for a few years, destroying all our allies and the freedom of Hellas.”

“By Athena and Hermes of the orators, wily Odysseus,” said Graccus. “I thought that you were a gentleman. You sound like Demosthenes! You make it sound as if Philip’s unification is a bad thing!”

Diodorus shrugged. “Bad?” he asked. He made a show of rubbing his thighs. “Either way, we’ll spend the next years in the saddle. Not running our businesses, and not getting laid.”

Graccus made a sign with his fingers – a sign that indicated that a certain kind of man could get laid quite often in an army camp. This time Diodorus hit Graccus – the blow was sudden and hard. Graccus stumbled, and suddenly Niceas was between them.

“Gentlemen?” he said, his deep voice clear and calm.

“Okay, I’m over it,” Diodorus said.

“That hurt,” Graccus said.

Kineas was tied of them. “I’m going to find my father,” he said. “Where’s Lykeles?”

Graccus shrugged. “He sat with Sokles.” Graccus looked around. “They want to go to a *hetaera!*”

Diodorus smiled. “Some day I’m going to buy a hetaera,” he said. “And keep her just for myself.”

Niceas grinned. “They’ll end up getting their wallets sucked instead of their members, those two. I’ll go rescue them.” Niceas had started life in the brothels of Athens. He knew how they ran – whereas Sokles, scion of the ancient *Alcmaeonidae*, probably didn’t even know where the brothels were. He and Lykeles were from the Demes – sons of rich farmers who seldom came to the city, except for festivals and cavalry drill.

“Meet me at the house?” Kineas called, and Niceas waved a hand.

Kineas walked on, Diodorus at his heels, and found his father by the public fountain at the base of the Acropolis, far from the Pnyx and already deep in argument about Philip's demands. Eumenes was tall, taller than most of his generation, and still had something of the Boeotian look of their Plataean ancestors. His iron-gray hair, worn short, contrasted with his almost-white beard. He was obviously angry.

"Demosthenes is insane!" he said as Kineas approached. "He needs to be— arrested. Or exiled. Where is Phokion?"

Kineas stood at a distance from his father and waited respectfully until his father indicated, by a motion of his head and a twitch of an eyebrow, that his son could join the older men. Kineas couldn't help but notice that few of the other men agreed with his father.

"Where were you this morning, young man?" Eumenes asked his son.

"I was summoned by Lykophron for duty," Kineas said.

Eumenes nodded. "Duty to the state is all very well," he said. He pulled at his beard as if he had more to say.

Kineas realized that one of the men was Stratokles, a rising man among the political class—and no friend to Kineas or his friends. Stratokles looked at him and raised an eyebrow. "You are of your father's view?" Stratokles asked.

Kineas didn't know what to say. It was a rude question – no man, no matter how grown, would disagree with his father in public. “My father is the head of my household and the head of our political faction, as well,” Kineas said.

Stratokles smiled. “So you do not, in fact, agree.” His smile was almost a leer. His expression showed that he felt himself to be more intelligent than any of the other men in the group.

Kineas turned to face the older man. “I do agree,” he said. “I agree with my father, both in emotion and intellect. Nor is it seemly for a man of your position to question me in public this way.” He stood square on to Stratokles, like a boxer entering a contest.

Eumenes put an arm around his son's shoulders. “Well said, lad. And you, Stratokles – go rouse the rabble. You'll get nothing here.”

“Nothing but talk of treason,” Stratokles said.

“It is not treason to speak against Demosthenes,” Eumenes said. “Or for Phokion.”

“In time the people will execute Phokion,” Stratokles said.

“Only if someone bears false witness against him,” Kineas put in.

Suddenly Kineas had the orator's full attention. “What do you say, *boy*? Is that an accusation?”

“Why, Stratokles – feeling a little guilty?” asked Diodorus. He didn’t hesitate to join the older men, as he had already served in magisterial offices and had a small but growing reputation.

Stratokles turned on his heel and walked away, sandals slapping on the cobbled street.

Diodorus chuckled. “It’s good to have an enemy you can really dislike,” he said. “That man sells his speeches and lies to further his political ends. He is far more dangerous than Demosthenes.”

Eumenes shook his head. “Better to have no enemies at all.”

Diodorus shrugged. “Sir, you’ll have to teach us that lesson again. And I don’t think we sought the fellow’s hate. He brought it to us for nothing.”

Kineas nodded. “He found us,” he said. Stratokles had avoided duty with Phokion the year before, in the hard campaign around Byzantium – and had nearly lost his citizenship for it. He hated Phokion, and he hated Diodorus for prosecuting him in the courts. Kineas shrugged. “I’ve never done anything to him.”

Eumenes shook his head. “Shall we go home?” He looked at Diodorus. “Fancy breakfast?”

Diodorus nodded. “I happen to be at your service.” Then he grinned. “As long as you feed me.”

#

Life seemed to return to normal for a few weeks, but those in the know – which included every trooper in the *hippeis* – knew that Demosthenes had gone to Thebes to negotiate an alliance, and that Stratokles had gone to Sparta to do the same.

Philip hung fire in Phokia, neither advancing nor retreating. The air of threat was all too real, and men muttered darkly in the streets. The classes showed openly their distrust, the one of the other – the *zeugitae* or “yoked ones” who were the *hoplite* class, the farmers and the merchants – they distrusted the poorer *thetes* and the rich *hippeis* with equal fervor. The *thetes* feared the loss of rights they would incur if ever Philip took over, and the *hippeis* feared the opposite.

The cavalry met twice to drill, and both times the *hipparch*, Lykophron, held a full muster, requiring every man to show his horse and arms. At the second muster, Lykophron took Kineas aside.

He was an older man, one who had seen service under the great soldiers – with Iphicrates and Phokion. He’d served in Egypt, and he was a far better soldier than the common run of aristocratic *hippeis* officers. Kineas was prone to worship him, despite the fact that he drank too much and wasted his family’s fortune on giving symposia and flute girls.

“Kineas,” Lykophron began, and then he left off, as if puzzled how to come at his subject.

“Sir?” Kineas stood with both hands holding his *longche*, a spear just a little taller than he was. He leaned on it.

“If we’re ordered out – will you come?” Lykophron looked at him. “Will you march, lad?”

Kineas shrugged. “Of course. It is my duty.”

“Even if your father is against it, now?” Lykophron asked. Kineas could hear the strain in the man’s voice and he was sorry for it. Lykophron was usually in command of any situation. It was painful to watch him struggle.

Kineas nodded. “Yes.”

“Think, lad. This matters. Will you give me your word?” Lykophron’s breath was faintly scented by wine and cloves.

“I swear it by Herakles my ancestor.” Kineas touched the blade of his spear.

Lykophron stepped back as if the oath were too powerful. “So – well. So. Just so. I apologize, lad. Too strong. Listen, though – I’m going to switch the troops around a little. In the squadrons. Here’s your new list – look them over.”

Kineas took the scroll with sudden apprehension. He wasn’t too young to know what this had to mean. “You don’t trust us,” Kineas said.

“Humph,” Lykophron said. “There’s some I don’t trust, lad. And that’s no lie.” He looked up, and met Kineas’s eye. “I trust you. Don’t make me regret it. I’m dividing the muster into four parts – almost one hundred fifty men in each. You’ll command one.”

Kineas unrolled his scroll. He read down the names – Niceas, Diodorus, Graccus, Lykeles, and Sokles were all in his squadron. So were all the other rich young men. All of them. “I won’t have any of the older men?” he asked.

“Or any of the professional soldiers,” Lykophron said. Athens kept a core of professional cavalymen to train her troops, and there were more who had simply *become* knights during the endless campaigns in Thrace.

“But –,” Kineas looked at his mentor.

“I’m getting ready to fight Philip’s cavalry,” Lykophron said. His voice was perhaps harsher than he meant it.

“You’re putting all the young men in one squadron – to be expendable?” Kineas asked.

“I’m putting all the rich kids in one squadron where they’ll obey you because you are one of them,” Lykophron said. “And where, if they refuse service, they won’t screw the rest of my troops.”

Kineas blushed. “Surely it is not that bad,” he said.

Lykophron was silent. After a moment, he said, “It is that bad, Kineas. It is *that bad*. Men like your father want to arrest Demosthenes and hand him over to Philip for peace. I’m afraid. I’m afraid of the orders I might receive. Understand me? This city needs us – her knights, her cavalry. To fight well, despite any political misgivings.”

Kineas met his eye. “I agree,” he said.

Lykophron nodded. He looked away, at a group of ephebes mounting their horses in the distance. "Stratokles hates you. He was angry that I promoted you. Any idea why?"

Kineas shrugged. "No idea. Diodorus prosecuted him last year, for cowardice—"

"By Zeus—of course. And Diodorus is untouchable. Whereas you are not. Watch yourself, lad. You'll be safer on a battlefield."

#

Six more drills, and the assembly met again. Kineas had never seen the Pnyx so full that the amphitheatre overflowed onto the hillside.

Demosthenes announced the alliance of the Thebans to rapturous applause—
from some.

"Zeus Sator, doesn't he know that they betrayed us again and again? Thebes cares nothing for Greece!" said Graccus.

Lykeles, the tallest and gangliest of Kineas's close friends, was no less vehement. "Persian-lovers. Thebes—they destroyed Plataea. They are the enemies of liberty."

"Next Demosthenes will tell us that the Persians are our allies, too," Diodorus said. "Mark my words. Listen."

They listened, and indeed, Demosthenes assured Athenians that the Great King would help defray the cost of the campaign.

“Just so you know which side we’re on,” Diodorus said with disgust.

The assembly voted – for war. Overwhelmingly.

And then they elected their generals – the *stratego*i who would command the phalanx on the day of battle. It was the Athenian way – to fight, and fight soon.

Phokion was still away. Kineas had begun to suspect that his other hero was away on purpose – was away avoiding the catastrophe that Athens was fast becoming – and Kineas thought less of the old man for it, with the judgment of youth.

The assembly elected Chares. Chares was a veteran, and a brave man, and a devoted admirer of Demosthenes. But, as most of the military men present knew, he was not a general.

And then the assembly elected Lysikles as the second general – a political non-entity – and Stratokles as the third.

As the assembly erupted into cheers and hoots of derision, Diodorus shook his head. “We might as well go down in style,” he said.

“What?” asked Graccus. “What are you saying?”

Diodorus shrugged. “Demosthenes is right – for Athens. He’s wrong for Greece. But Greece is not a city. And Athens will be *nothing* if we bow down to Macedon.”

Lykeles sneered. "A moment ago you told us we were going to side with the Persians. You know what a poser Demosthenes is. He's a coward."

Diodorus shrugged. "As aristocrats, we're fools to fight Macedon." He looked around at each of his friends, and then he shrugged again and his eyes came to rest on Kineas. "As Athenians, it is our duty."

Kineas nodded. "I'll do my duty," he said.

Graccus looked at him, and then at Niceas.

Niceas spat. "Odd. I'm the only thetes here and I agree with every word the fox just said." He looked at Graccus. "I'll go."

Diodorus nodded. "As will I. You know I will."

Lykeles crossed his arms and shook his head. "You boys have drunk too much spring wine or something. Dionysus got your wits? I won't go—I'll go off to the farm and go hunting."

Sokles nodded. "I'm with you, brother." But his brows furrowed. "I don't like this."

"We swore as ephebes," Kineas said.

"What a simple man you are, sometimes," Sokles said. "You're not married. I have farms and wives and slaves to look after. And Philip is my father's guest friend."

Diodorus looked angry. “That’s doesn’t mean *anything*. Phokion is the old king’s friend and his guest friend, he made war on Philip all last summer – even though he didn’t want to. Because we elected him as *Strategos*.”

Graccus listened unhappily, his head turning like an owl’s, and then he stomped off. “I’m going to the gymnasium,” he said. “Maybe I can work this out of me in sweat.”

#

“You must not go. Indeed, you will not go,” Eumenes said, again and again.

And for the first time in his life, Kineas found himself acting against his father’s wishes. It was a bitter thing for a young man – a man who, in his own way, had just achieved the signal success he craved. He would command a squadron in battle. Unless he died or did very badly, he would, in turn, be hipparch, because none of the other phylarchs were aristocrats with the political backing that Kineas had.

But beside that, Kineas had come to agree with Diodorus that it was his duty.

And his father did not agree.

“Philip is going to crush us,” Eumenes told his son. “Like mice before a lion. His army is professional – not a bunch of effeminate youths who want to throw flowers at pageants.”

“We’re not that bad, Pater,” Kineas protested, trying to make light of it, but his father would not let go.

“The casualties will be high. Why should I lose my son? My *only* son? So that the thetes can preserve their precious rights? What do they do to earn them, anyway?” Eumenes shook his head.

And Kineas set his jaw. “They row,” he said. “At Salamis and every battle since. They row the ships that make us the lords of the sea. What do we do, Pater? We, the precious aristocrats? We serve on horseback! When the battle goes bad, we *ride away*. Ask a thetes what he thinks of us in battle. When the ship sinks, few of them *swim home*.”

Eumenes looked at his son in shock and then took a deep breath. “Leave my house,” he said.

Kineas was not angry enough to follow suit. “No, Pater. I apologize for arguing against your wishes.” Kineas was too dutiful a son to hold his father’s rage, much less to push against it – and yet –

“Then you will not serve!” Eumenes said.

Kineas found himself crying, and that, somehow, made him angrier. “Do I disobey you in anything?” he asked, and the bitterness was there in his tears. “When have I ever disobeyed? I am still at home, unmarried, because *you would have it so!*” He wiped his eyes quickly on the hem of his chlamys. “But as I obey you, so I must obey my oath to the gods. I swore to serve this city. I will serve.”

And then he turned and walked out of the andron before his father could exile him from the house. Or so he feared.

That night he went to a symposium at Graccus's house, brushing wordlessly by his father in the peristyle.

"Don't you march tomorrow?" Graccus asked as he took his friend's cloak.

"And you with me," Kineas said. He raised a hand. "Don't tell me if you plan otherwise—I'm an officer of the city. And I mean to do my duty."

Graccus frowned. Then he shrugged. "Let's enjoy ourselves," he said.

And they did. There was wine—cut three times, for a while, and then cut twice, and then once. Kineas shared a couch with Diodorus, while Niceas lay with their host and Sokles, who drank harder than the rest of them, bounced around from couch to couch to the despite of his partner, Lykeles. There were other young men there—Chabrias, Adeistos, and Kimon, all men who fenced at Phokion's and had served in the Byzantium campaign, as well as a pair of metics, both Thracians, who had served on the same campaign and now sold hides in the city.

Graccus, as host, forbade any talk of the coming war. They poured libations to the gods, and then they drank, and talked of farming and horses, the things all of them understood, even the Thracians—and then they listened to Lykeles read poetry—new stuff, about love and wine, and they laughed. And Graccus got up,

thoroughly drunk, and sang them the tale of Breseis from the Iliad, until they all clapped for him.

There were flute girls, because Graccus was rich enough to get ten of them, and they played delightfully, and then a pair of them danced – first the sort of dances that flute-girls did, with much hip-shaking and some caresses in every quarter, and then spectacularly, the military dances, with small shields and light spears, six of them dancing while the other four played their instruments.

They were so good that all the men rose – drunk, even Kineas, far beyond their habit – and danced with them, seizing the shields and leaping in the air, turning, stabbing – Kineas almost got a light spear in his nose on one leap, and he came down in time to the music and pushed his girl back into her space. She smiled, and Kineas thought that he had seldom seen anything as beautiful.

They danced it twice, which should have sweated most of the wine out, but Lykeles insisted that they drink wine un-watered, in the Scythian fashion, and that was an end to modesty. And Kineas knew he should go home – he would be up with the cockcrow, out on his horse, leading men – and still he stayed, and drank, until he found himself standing in a corner with his dance partner under his arm and a *mastos* cup in his hand. He drank and flicked the dregs across the room.

Diodorus was enjoying one of the flute-girls on his couch. He couldn't exactly go and sit down.

“Too drunk?” his dance partner asked. She reached a small hand up under his chiton. “Not at all!” she said with a certain humor that was, to Kineas, more erotic than false seduction.

Kineas leaned down and kissed her, and she responded in kind.

He was drunk enough, and unhappy enough, that he didn’t care. But he did care – so he lifted her and carried her out of the andron and into the peristyle, where there was just one torch burning. If the porter was around, he had enough sense to efface himself.

“Ooh,” she said. “Don’t like a crowd?”

“No,” he said as she settled onto him.

“Me, either,” she breathed. “A crowd can be dangerous for a girl. Nice to be with a gent. Give me a nice tip?”

Kineas was drunk enough to come up with a dozen responses, and sober enough not to use them.

#

In the morning, he rose with the first call of the cock, having never been to sleep. He walked into his own peristyle naked, and poured water from the well over his head until he was better – a little better. Then he went inside, oiled his skin, and dressed.

Niceas joined him and handed him a cup of wine.

"You must be kidding," Kineas said.

"Trust me," Niceas said.

Kineas drank it and felt better.

"Your father is waiting outside," Niceas said. "And your sister."

So Kineas went outside.

Eumenes was holding his son's charger, and Melitta was holding his spear and his helmet, and his other sisters had a cup of wine and a bowl of grain each.

Tears sprang into his eyes. He looked at his father, and Eumenes was crying, too.

"Come back," Eumenes said.

"I will, if the gods will it." Kineas took the wine and poured it over his spear and his helmet where a hoplite would have poured it over his shield.

Cavalrymen didn't have shields. Hipparete fed the grain to his charger, a great black beast from Persia. She was afraid of the horse, but she held her fear firmly in check as the daughter of a veteran and the sister of an officer.

Melitta led the prayers, and then Eumenes laid his hands on his son's head.

"Come back," he said again. "May the gods send you back."

"If the gods will it," Kineas said. He kissed his sisters, and then his father.

Then he mounted, leaping into the saddle as if he had not spent the entire night drinking and fornicating at a party with men who would not serve.

Niceas mounted from the mounting block. He shook hands with Eumenes – he was the household’s most trusted retainer – and laughed. “I’ll bring him back,” Niceas said. And then they rode out the gate and down the streets of the city to the fields beyond to the muster.

Kineas was not the first – there were perhaps twenty young men gathered in the dark by the time he arrived, and Lykophron, of course, already in armour.

“Kineas,” he said. The name carried a great deal of meaning – and relief.

“I am here,” Kineas said.

He gathered the men of his squadron as they came, and formed them as the sun rose, higher and higher, and gradually his fatigue and his hangover combined to make the time blur by. And none of his closest friends came. Not even Diodorus.

A pair of slaves came out of the city with his spare horse and his gear in a two-wheeled wagon hitched to a mule, and he thanked the gods for his father and his sisters, but still none of his friends came.

Niceas shrugged. “I was there,” he said. “It was quite a party. They’re still in bed.”

Off to the west, he could watch the phalanx forming – more than ten thousand men, guessing by the amount of ground that they covered.

Kineas shook his sore head. “No,” he said. “I don’t think they’re coming.”

“Get ready to move,” Lykophron said into the haze of his brain, after the sun was well up. Kineas cantered across the face of his command, surprised that so many of his men were present – disappointed at how many were absent. He had a little over a hundred.

At the eleventh hour of the morning, the phalanx marched. The hippeis waited patiently in a haze of dust and heat, the men all off their horses. Kineas had stopped looking for his friends, although he had a wound where Diodorus should have been. Diodorus should have come. He was the best of them.

Eventually, even ten thousand hoplites march off – even with each man having a slave to carry his gear and his food. The smell of dust and onions lingered on the air.

Or perhaps Niceas was the best of them. “Ready to march?” Kineas asked.

Niceas shook his head. “Nah,” he said. “You ride on without me.”

Kineas looked at the older man. “Are you serious?” he asked, and suddenly, rage was close.

Niceas curled his lip. “I think we should wait for our friends.”

And there they were – all of them, Lykeles and Diodorus in the lead, on fine chargers, and then a column of carts, and then Graccus and Sokles and a dozen other young men.

Suddenly, Kineas felt like smiling.

“We’re still going to get our butts kicked,” Niceas said.

Kineas shrugged. “Let’s go do our duty,” he said. Suddenly, he felt much better.