

Chaeronea Part II

Kineas was riding through a forest, alone, well mounted. He could feel the power of his horse between his thighs, and the darkness did not make him afraid. He rode and rode – was he looking for something?

There was a clearing, and in the center of a clearing stood a goddess with a bow in her hand – her skin was as pale as new milk, and she wore a man's chitoniskos so that her perfect limbs showed like a young boy's in the gymnasium.

"Do you know me, hunter?" she asked.

He slid from his horse and bowed low.

She chuckled. "Do you know what you seek?" she asked. She had dark blue eyes and eyebrows as black as soot.

"No," he heard himself say.

"Then you will seek long," she said. "But in the end, you will know what you seek, and then you will find it."

Kineas could not make himself meet her eyes again. They had the empty stare of the deranged – of the veteran of a hundred fights, or the killer in the street. "And the battle, Mistress of the Animals?"

"Oh, how I like that name," she said. "Mistress of the Animals. They called me that when the world was young, and men had not yet stripped the joy from it." She glanced

away, and then looked back, although he avoided the direct impact of her gaze. "You look for prophecy, man? Prophecy will never be your friend. And that is my brother's province." She laughed, and it was the chilling laugh of the same men who would have her empty eyes.

And then he was on a high hillside. He had been there in the waking world – the slopes of Mount Kitheron, which towered over the western Boeotian Plain, where Plataea had once stood. And the Mistress of the Animals was gone, as was his dream horse, and in their place stood a golden youth with a bow, and a heavy man with a lion skin. They stood by the outdoor altar, where the Plataeans sacrificed and made the festival.

The big man spoke first. "You will never be defeated," he said.

The golden youth laughed. "But your friends will die like field mice before a cat."

Kineas awoke from his dream feeling as if he'd never put his head down on his cloak – as if he'd stayed awake all night and run a race. And the words about his friends haunted his waking minutes, and he knew the dream for a true one, the kind that the gods sent through the gate of horn to torment men.

He'd slept between Niceas and Diodorus, and he got slowly to his feet and through his cloak over Niceas – Diodorus had three or four. It was starting to rain – a light August rain that would burn away quickly enough.

Kineas walked down to the river with hundreds of other early risers, and threw himself into the shallows, making sure to be upstream of where the horses drank and the men washed their pots, and then he used a strigil to dry off and oiled himself with some olive oil from his own fields at home. The rain was cold on his naked skin, but he let it fall, and walked back up the hill to his camp. Slaves had the fires lit, and he took a mug of warm broth gratefully, drank it off, and only then pulled on a clean chitoniskos and his Thracian cloak – a fashionable garment, and practical for war, black, with big diamonds of red to mark him in battle.

Lykophron appeared at his elbow and took the cup of broth from his hands. “*Strategos* has called a meeting,” he said. “I expect we’ll fight today. Get the other officers to the muster place in an hour, and start whipping your lads into shape. I think it will be today.”

The sun was still invisible in a cold wet sky when the officers met, mounted, at the top of the hill that dominated the camp.

“Chares wants us to fight dismounted,” the *Hipparch* said to his squadron commanders. Lykophron was not a young man, and his nose was running in the unseasonable rain. He shook his head in disgust and drops of rain flew off of his leather hat – a hat so agrarian that most of the *Thetes* would have declined wearing it, even to keep off the rain.

They were gathered on a low hill at the northern end of their camp, overlooking what would, almost certainly, be the battlefield – Chaeronea, the dance floor of Boeotia. The “war field.”

Kineas adjusted his fashionable Thracian cloak to shed as much water as he could. “I take it that’s a political request?”

“We’re facing the finest cavalry in Hellas and our Strategos wants us to fight on foot. Does that sound like a *military* decision?” Lykophron grunted. “He seems to feel that the *hoplites* will fight better if they know that we can’t run away.” He shrugged, wiped his nose, and looked around. “I told him no.”

Kineas, a “well-born” of the first class, knew that there was truth in Chares’s assertion, however insulting. Cavalrymen could just ride away – and the upper classes had very little interest in the outcome of this battle.

“Sod Chares, and sod Demosthenes,” murmured Antikrates. He had seen service under Phokion and in mercenary service to the Great King, and men respected him. The man raised his head. He was wearing a fancy Thracian cap with a fur crest that was almost flat in the rain, and he pulled it off and slapped it on his thigh to drive out the water. “Hipparch, we *should* just ride away. These bastards are going to lose – and they’re going to blame us, whatever we do.”

Kineas caught Lykophron’s frown.

Lykophron turned to the other squadron commander, Diotimos, a middle aged man who raised horses for a living. “You?”

Diotimos turned his horse and looked out over the wet morning at the distant Macedonians. “You couldn’t run a farm this way, gentlemen,” he said.

“Bickering, back-biting, all that crap.” He shrugged, too—it was that kind of morning. “I don’t want to fight on foot. I didn’t even bring a shield. But by the gods, gentlemen, the assembly voted to fight, and we are men of the city.”

Kineas, the youngest of the squadron commanders and thus the last to speak, urged his horse forward a step. “I’ve heard it said that we have the best cavalry in Greece,” he said. “By the grace of the Lady Athena and the great god Poseidon, I would like to see if we can overcome Philip’s squadrons.” He caught Diotimos’s eye. “I agree with our esteemed horse-breeder. We must stop bickering and put some heart into the men.”

“There speaks youth and idealism,” Antikrates said. He gave Kineas a smile—a real one, even if it barely touched his lips. “When some of your friends are staring at their entrails, young Kineas, you’ll think twice about that idealism.” He looked around. “But old age brings its own cowardice, and I’m over forty. So—let us sacrifice to the gods, and fight—mounted.”

Lykophron wiped his face. He pointed at the sky. “Getting lighter,” he said. “The rain will stop in an hour.” He turned his horse, and the big gelding began

to trade insults – horse insults – with Diotimos’s gelding. Lykophron slapped the neck of his charger, and Diotimos curbed his sharply, and both horses relented. Lykophron did all this automatically, without a change in facial expression, but then he looked around, collecting their eyes, and smiled. “Let’s get down to business,” he said. “We can win this battle.” He looked over the ground again. “Our cavalry can stop Philip’s, and our hoplites, untested though they may be, are brave enough.”

“Except Demosthenes,” Antikrates quipped.

“He’s in the fifth rank. We won’t lose because of him, anyway.” Lykophron nodded, as if to himself. Then he rubbed his beard. “Get a full cup of hot wine in every trooper, and then muster. We’ll be on the far right, and we’ll probably start the dance right here on this hill, and then –” he pointed at the woods to his right, “we’ll send a squadron through the woods and trounce their *psiloi*. That’ll make Philip come forward – I’ll try and meet him with this hill under our hooves, and with the phalanx right here bitching his files.”

Antikrates nodded. “I can see it,” he said. “How wide is our front?”

“With the Thebans and all the allies,” Lykophron said, “we have a little over four thousand files.” Kineas knew that a hoplite file was eight men, all stacked one behind another in a close array. So the hoplites of the army made a total of thirty-two thousand men.

Antikrates looked out to the left, where the River Cephissus flowed across the flat fields of Boeotia. “Thebans on the left?” he asked. “So we’ll just fit.” He nodded. “We really have four thousand files?”

Lykophron nodded.

Antikrates gave half a grin. “Well,” he said, “we may win this yet. So you’re going to tease the bear until he commits his cavalry at this hill, and then we hold him as long as we can, while Demosthenes’ bravery breaks their infantry.”

Lykophron gave a rueful grin. “That’s my plan,” he said.

Diotimos nodded. “Good. Let’s get about it. The morning is wasting.”

Kineas, the youngest, had little to add. But he felt his spirits rising, despite the rain. He pushed his flat *petasos* hat back on his head. “Who goes into the woods?” he asked. “That squadron will need an early start.”

“That’d be you, lad,” Lykophron said. “You have all the youngest men and all the most expensive horses.”

“Don’t ruin your fancy clothes riding in the woods, now,” Antikrates sneered. Then he relented. “You’ve got the men for the job.”

And in that one sentence, the reality of command fell on Kineas. He was going to command those men – those *boys* – and all the rest of the army would depend on him. His heart seemed to stop beating, and he loosed a long and very loud fart.

“Smells like you’re an officer to me,” Antikrates joked and turned his horse for camp.

The other officers laughed, and then they were trotting down the hill, calling for their *hyperetes* and planning for the battle.

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The mug of hot wine helped, and so did Niceas, who was immediately on top of the practicalities of a long ride through woods.

“Cloaks, feed bags, and every man to wear boots or have his legs wrapped in felt,” Niceas snapped, and went off to see to it that he was obeyed. Athenian cavalrymen – especially the youngest and most aristocratic of them – were wont to fight in as little gear as possible, as that was considered to be the most honorable and most heroic. On muster days, Lykophron usually cursed the artists and vase painters who showed heroic horsemen wearing a simple chitoniskos and a petasos hat, with bare feet. He wanted men who dressed like Thessalian nobles, in heavy cloaks, bronze breastplates, and helmets.

Kineas had used a mixture of peer pressure and outright envy to manipulate the richest troopers into armor – by wearing it himself, shiny, outrageous and expensive. He had a gilt breastplate with inlaid silver nipples shaped to the muscles of his chest, and a gilt helmet shaped like the head of a lion in imitation

of his ancestor, Herakles. He had a heavy-bladed sword and a pair of heavy spears, and he wore boots – high Thracian boots with fur stockings under them, hot on a day like this but protection against other horses in the crush of a cavalry fight.

But getting Athenians to wear their armor was another thing, especially on an August day that had started chill and now promised to be sunny and hot as Tartarus.

“Boots!” Niceas was shouting. “Don’t come to muster without them! Your slaves are to take up slings and go with the psiloi on our flank! You – Thereus – roll your cloak like a man. Anything you leave on the ground, you’ll never see again – whether we win or lose. Right? Clean chitoniskos – Plyeus, how many times have I told you that thing is filthy? Fuck your mother, Timeas! A dirty chiton pollutes the wound – you know that.”

Diodorus was splendid in tinned bronze with a silvered helmet and a leopard-skin saddlecloth over his shoulder. “Ever wonder how he gets away with it?” Diodorus asked.

“No – I’m just glad he does.” Kineas smiled and scooped more hot wine out of the bronze kettle. “Wine?”

“All the gods!” Diodorus said, and spilled a libation. “He’s the only Thetes I know who can shout orders and insults at every young blood in the city and be obeyed.”

“Are you wearing a clean chitoniskos?” Kineas asked, and Diodorus laughed.

“Nervous?” Kineas asked.

“What do you think?” Diodorus said. He held out a hand, and it was shaking.

Graccus came and watched Niceas with admiration. He had on a plain bronze breast and back-plate that had been his father’s, and he wore a leather hat instead of a helmet – but he rode a magnificent horse, and he had high boots. “I love him,” he said. “I wish I could give orders like that. Even my slaves don’t obey me.”

Sokles came up with Lykeles, both in armor. Lykeles had a leather cuirass that gleamed white in the new sun, with silver decorations – each shoulder had silver figures of satyrs ravishing nymphs that were very graphic.

“Nice,” Graccus said.

“I like to think about something besides all this glory and death,” Lykeles said.

“And a new helmet!” Sokles pointed out. Lykeles had a new helmet in the Attic style, with hinged cheek pieces and a high crown.

“We’ll look good, whatever happens,” Graccus said. “I wish I had new armor.”

Sokles, splendid in head-to-toe bronze, with a breast plate, thigh guards, and greaves over his boots, looked like a hero from the age of Gods. "It's more heavy than I thought," he said. But he knew he looked the best of all his friends, and that made him stand straight despite the weight. "I hope my horse can bear me!"

Niceas came back. He had a plain breastplate and a leather hat, like Graccus. "Everyone got a feed bag and something in it?" he asked.

All of Kineas's friends nodded or agreed.

Niceas gave a snappy salute to his master. "Ready as they'll get, sir," he said.

"Mount up," Kineas agreed. He pointed to the hill. "Muster on the right of the *hippeis*, top of the hill. Look for Lykophron."

Niceas saluted again. Then he turned. "Say your good byes, girls," he said.

They all clasped hands, every one of them conscious that they would not ever forget this morning – would never forget the camaraderie or the fear.

Diodorus and Kineas embraced first. "My family is yours," each said – they were guest friends, pledged to support each others families if either died. And then Kineas embraced Graccus, who was shaking, and then Sokles, who was a mass of bronze and who seemed to see the whole thing as a lark. Lykeles was grinning ear to ear, and after he embraced Kineas he flung his javelin in the air and caught it.

“I feel like Akilles!” Lykeles shouted. ‘I’m going to kill every Macedonian bastard I see!”

Sokles grinned again. He had the Iliad memorized, and he liked to quote it off in great swathes. He was popular for this trick at parties and doubly so in the boredom of the camp, and the night before he had recited almost the whole of the death of Hektor for an audience of hundreds.

And then Niceas and Graccus embraced, and stayed that way a long time.

Kineas looked out of the circle of his friends, where final handclasps and embraces were being exchanged all through the camp, and further towards the river, where the men of Athens and Thebes and all the allied cities were doing the same rituals of friendship and piety – the same rituals that their fathers and grandfathers had done.

Kineas grinned at Niceas. “You think they did the same at Marathon?” he asked.

“And Troy, no doubt,” Niceas said. “Plan to be the last on parade?”

“Ever wonder what you’ll be when the war is over?” Kineas asked his hyperetes. “Plan to learn a trade?”

“What, am I fired?” Niceas asked. “You don’t need a servant to do all your thinking for you anymore?”

Kineas was getting his charger, a big, ugly red gelding called "Militiades" who had the brute strength of an ox. He pulled up his picket stake, tossed it into his food bag, and then vaulted onto the horse's broad back.

Militiades grunted as he landed, but the big horse's feet didn't move.

"I thought you might – want something different." Kineas shrugged.

"I want to own a brothel – nothing too fancy, all slaves, for a distinguished clientele." Niceas smiled wickedly. "I plan to earn the money looting the dead. So I need a little more war, thanks. May Ares hear me, and Aphrodite."

"You're a bad man," Kineas joked. He clucked, and Militiades began to walk up the hill.

"No, I'm a good man who tells the truth. Who wants to be a leather worker? Or make sandals? We kill men and take their money – and we're heroes!" Niceas gave a nasty laugh. "I made enough out of the Byzantium campaign to be a hoplite – did you know that? I could have bought a farm!"

The troopers were falling in as fast as they could push their horses into position. They looked as if they were a squadron of the Macedonian King's Companions – his precious *Hetaeroi*, the men who guarded his body in battle. There was more gilt and silvered armour in Kineas's troop than in the rest of the Athenian army put together.

Kineas laughed ruefully. “We’re going to attract enemies like shit attracts flies,” he said.

Niceas grunted. “You don’t see me wearing all those plumes,” he noted.

Kineas had a horsehair crest, two great plumes of heron feathers, and a pair of silvered bronze wings. He raised an eyebrow. “I’m an officer,” he said.

“Oh – you hate wearing all that fancy armor, I know,” Niceas said.

Kineas formed his men in twelve files, ten deep – almost a perfect square.

Lykophron trotted over. “You ready?” he asked. Over his shoulder, the Macedonian army was coming onto the field, and Kineas’s stomach flipped over and then back, and he farted again.

Lykophron took no notice. “As soon as your men are in hand, you go,” he said. “Philip’s a canny old fox, and he may already be watching us.”

Kineas struggled to remember everything he needed to remember. “What – how – ur –,” he paused and collected himself. “When should I attack the enemy psiloi?”

Lykophron shook his head. “Up to you, lad. Do it when it looks good. You don’t need to kill a lot of them – they’re Agrianians, tough bastards, and smart, so as soon as you get in among them, they’ll run like rabbits. Don’t pursue too far, and don’t get cut off. But –”

“Yes?” Kineas asked eagerly.

“Try to get Philip to come for you. Then run like a hare with a pack of dogs on her and rally behind the hill. And then come and help me, because I’ll be fighting for my life!” Lykophron laughed. “You look as if you’d seen a ghost. War is easy, lad. It’s real life that’s hard. Keep your shit together, hit the psiloi and then cut and run. Can you do it?”

Kineas nodded, although he felt cold and his shoulders were shaking. This wasn’t like following another trooper at Byzantium. This was like being a Strategos. “I can do it,” he said.

“Then Athena ride at your shoulder. Now, go and get the job done.” Lykophron slapped his shoulder and rode away, and Kineas was alone with the battle.

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They filed off from the top of the hill, riding down the back of the ridge to remain concealed and entering the woods on a track made by generations of wood gatherers or charcoal burners. The woods were wet, and all their magnificent armour was slick with water after a few minutes of riding under the weeping trees.

The track wound slowly east and north—the wrong way.

Niceas shook his head. “We needed a guide,” he said.

Kineas shrugged. "Phokion says guides are often worse than no guides – a man with no guide can always use his sense of direction. We need to go south and then west." Kineas pointed into the trees. "That way."

Diodorus pulled off his helmet. "Let me go," he said.

Kineas halted the column. "Go!" he ordered.

Diodorus took Lykeles, the best tracker and hunter of their group, perhaps of his generation, and they were away into the gloomy trees.

There was a roar from the west, and then another. Kineas grinned, because it was an Athenian sound – the roar of approval of the hoplites after the sacrifices. And then his nerves closed in again, and his stomach clenched as if there was a fist around it. "Less than an hour until they are formed," he said.

No one answered him. He was on a trail in the woods with a hundred riders, but he was *alone* with the problem of time and distance.

He looked at Niceas. "Dismount and hold horses," he said. He remained mounted himself.

Another roar, like the crash of surf on a distant beach.

"Thebans?" Graccus asked.

Niceas shook his head. "Macedon," he said, and that was another cause for fear.

Kineas looked at them, and wondered who would die. Was there a sign from the gods? Some men said there was.

His hands were shaking, and his knees, where he clenched them on his horse's barrel, felt weak.

Kineas had faced battle—had fought on foot, in the phalanx, and on horseback—but he had never had to make any decisions before. Even as a file leader, his most difficult choice had been a question of where to picket his file's horses.

"Athena and Artemis, guide me," he said. He was still mulling over why Artemis, the virgin goddess, the mistress of animals, the slayer of young women, had come to him in a dream. Herakles he understood—he was ancestor. Apollo loved to interfere in the paths men chose. But Artemis?

"Coming back," Niceas said.

Kineas could see the riders approaching. He could also hear the noise of Time's chariot wheels grinding along, turning and turning and never back up, so that he hesitated—have the men mount now, or wait until he'd talked to Diodorus?

Phokion said you saved energy for battle by making as many of your decisions in advance as a man could make, hubris or no.

"Mount," Kineas barked, his voice unnecessarily harsh.

Diodorus rode up. "Nasty but doable," he said.

"Where's Lykeles?" Kineas asked.

"I left him watching the edge of the field." Diodorus said. "It's going to be single file and slow."

"Ares," Kineas grumbled, "Let's get started, then."

The squadron of Hippeis made good time for the first three hundred horse-lengths, but then they were on rocky, marshy ground – somewhere nearby there was a spring among the rocks. They passed an ancient altar, green with moss, and many of the men, despite their educations and their fashionable atheism, made peasant signs, or poured wine from their flasks on the old stones.

Time lay heavy on the altar. And by some trick of the hillside, no sound of the mighty armies just a few stades away carried into the bowl where the altar stood.

"The old gods are close to this," Niceas said.

Kineas raised his voice. "We mean no harm. And we will disturb your precinct as little as we may. Let us past!"

He pushed his horse into motion and rode to the head of the file, passing around the altar. On the far side was a young doe, standing alone, apparently unafraid of the column of horses and men.

Kineas flung himself from his horse and bowed, just as he had in his dream. "Lady – Mistress of Animals!" he said.

No one laughed. And men dismounted throughout the column. Some knelt, and others craned their necks to see.

The doe nodded, her head going down almost to the ground and then rising again in fluid grace. And then, unhurried, she turned and walked away, vanishing behind the altar.

The silence lasted for a hundred heart beats, and then there was chaos.

“Mount up!” Kineas shouted.

Niceas suited the word to the action and got up on his charger’s back.

“Did that really happen?” asked Graccus.

“What an omen!” Sokles said. “A white hind?”

“She wasn’t white,” Kineas said.

“As white as milk,” Sokles said reverently.

“You all just paid your respects to a deer in the woods,” Diodorus smirked.

“By all the gods, you soldiers are a superstitious lot. I know peasant farmers with more philosophy.”

“You dismounted,” Niceas said.

“I was just being polite,” Diodorus grinned.

“We need to move,” Kineas said, and rode off.

After the altar, they seemed to move faster, perhaps because the ground leveled off, or perhaps because the horses seemed curiously able to pick their

way through the difficult ground. There were fewer rocks, regardless of other factors.

Kineas could hear the battlefield again. He was listening with doom in his heart for the sound of the Athenians singing the *Paeon*, a sound that would suggest that he was too late to perform his mission. Even now, both sides would be sending their light troops – the psiloi – into the no-man’s land between the armies to throw stones and javelins at each other, to use bows and slings in an attempt to gain an advantage and harass the enemy’s heavy infantry.

He heard successive cheers from both sides, and then silence – a heavy silence, like the sound of a wind at sea.

And then Diodorus was tugging at his elbow, and Lykeles was riding at a dangerous pace among the trees, right for them.

“Lykeles?” Kineas shouted, and his friend waved his arms.

“I think he wants us to be quiet,” Niceas said.

Kineas turned. “Halt,” he said. “Keep quiet!”

The order was passed back along the file as Lykeles came abreast of Kineas and saluted.

“The enemy has put psiloi right into the woods,” he said. “I just evaded them.”

“Ares and Aphrodite,” Niceas said.

Kineas felt his stomach heave. Trapped in the woods by light troops – a nightmare. He looked at the ground, which, despite its slope, was firm and almost free of rocks and gullies. Around them were heavy oak trees, which towered away above them to a sky that was nearly blue.

“We could fight in here,” Kineas mused. “Form up! Form the cavalry column – get it done.”

Several of his file leaders were trying to complain that it couldn’t be done amidst the trees.

Kineas shook his head. “Shut up and do it. Leave intervals for the trees – leave intervals between files. We won’t face hoplites or even cavalry. That’s it!” he said, as Niceas pushed the whole length of his spear between Graccus and Sokles. “That’s a good interval.”

The column was coming up fast, now, as Niceas and Diodorus helped to sort them out. They were in order – and they had practiced forming by files, so it was less of a disaster than it might have been.

There was a low rise in front of them – not much more than the height of a horse, but enough to screen them visually from the psiloi for a few more minutes.

Kineas turned to Niceas. "As soon as they're formed," he said, "we go forward. Lykeles – dismount, go forward, and watch. Shout if they're going to charge us."

Lykeles saluted – suddenly, salutes weren't part of a *game*.

Nine files formed. Now ten. Kineas wondered if his men would panic.

Phokion believed in speeches. Which was more important – silence, or a speech?

"Listen up!" Kineas yelled. "We're going to charge through the trees. Concentrate on your riding. There's no underbrush here and no bad ground under our hooves. Don't worry about killing – just stay mounted and keep moving. Order doesn't matter a damn – when you see one, and you can make a jab, kill him. Otherwise, keep moving and follow the man in front. I aim to cut my way through them and out onto the field. And then we'll just see –"

He was almost done, and Lykeles was waving frantically, and running back from the edge of the low rise.

The twelfth file was just jostling into line.

"Walk!" Kineas called.

"They're just over the rise!" Lykeles called. "They can hear us!"

“Trot!” Kineas called, and put a javelin, a heavy one, in his right hand. It was his favorite, the veteran of two fights and a dozen hunts, with a long, sharp head and a heavy shaft.

Their hooves were quite among the leaves, and then they could see the psiloi.

Not just psiloi, but Thracians and Agrianians – hundreds of them in a pack, like wolves, running together. There were two – big men with beards – and axes – just ahead.

“Charge!” Kineas roared, and Niceas blew the trumpet he carried.

The charge went two horse-lengths before the two forces met with a sound that echoed through the trees – screams and grunts and the clatter of weapons on the boards of shields, which all the infantry carried – the neighs of horses, and the bellows of the barbarians.

They were good men, strong and swift and bold, but they did not have horses, and they were not packed together in a shield wall like the Thracians formed to fight hoplites or cavalry, and the horsemen got in among them immediately.

Kineas rode Miliadiades between the two bearded men and struck overhead with his spear at the man on the right of his horse, who caught the blow easily on his shield and swung back his ax.

Miliadiades kept going, however, and Kineas spun in the saddle, using the momentum of his spear’s rebound to get it over his horse’s neck and plunge it

down into his other opponent, a younger, larger man with a blond beard full of gold wire – and his spear went *over* the man’s crescent shield and into his neck even as his own spear glanced harmlessly off of Kineas’s breastplate, skidded past his arm and lacerated his neck without bringing him down – and then Miltiades was doing as he had been taught, carrying Kineas clear of those opponents before the axe could bite into his hindquarters. He knocked a man flat when he was foolish enough to step in front of him, avoiding another horseman, and Kineas killed him with the same economy, a single blow to the face, right into the opening in the man’s open-faced helmet.

But the fight was thickening. The enemy was not giving way, as infantry usually did when caught in the open. Perhaps the trees leant them strength. Perhaps they didn’t know that they were beaten. Perhaps they had been told all their lives that they were safe from cavalry in the trees.

They outnumbered the Hippeis three to one, and now they pressed in on all sides.

Niceas was stabbing underhand with his spear, and he killed, roaring as he went, his horse dancing as her rider killed.

“Like that? How do you like that? Try this? No? That killed you,” Niceas kept up a steady commentary as he pressed forward.

But he missed an axe man, and the man wound up for a heavy blow. Kineas threw across his horse, right handed to the left – the easiest throw, and it had power. The big spearhead went right through the man’s near side and emerged from his hip – he screamed and fell, punched off his feet.

Kineas had no time to switch hands with his second spear. He ripped his sword from under his left armpit as someone in the melee cut his thigh and then he felt another blow to his knee and Miliadiades gave a scream and a hop and then kicked out savagely with all four hooves, front and then back.

Kineas cut and then cut again, different men who seemed to be trying to get *under* his mount – trying to gut the gelding? Or hamstring him? He cut down again and caught a man on the hip, then whirled the sword overhead – the *Harmodius* cut that Phokion taught – and put the whole weight of his body into the fore-cut, so that the meat of his blade cut into the top of his opponent’s shield and straight on into his leather cap and the bridge of his nose, and blood sprayed over Miliadiades and Kineas as well.

Then they broke. Kineas wasn’t the only man to have killed, and the ground behind them was littered in barbarians – brave men, but foolish, who should have viewed the open woods as a death trap. And Kineas’s troopers began to whoop and call like the aristocratic hunters they were, chasing men down in the trees and killing them.

Kineas had never seen a killing madness come on men before – he had been in skirmishes, or long fights where exhaustion and tactics broke the foe. He'd never seen fresh men – scared men, who a moment before had been fighting for their lives – become merciless killers. And they were his own men.

He roared for them to rally, but they went on killing and he felt the pull himself – the desire to expiate his own fears in a glut of sticky blood on his hands. Already, his sword ran with the stuff, and when he raised it over his head to demand that his men rally, the thin, gluey blood ran down his sword, over the hilt and onto his fingers and arm. The lifeblood of other men.

“Rally, you fucks!” Kineas bellowed like an ox going to sacrifice.

Their inexperience was against them. More than a dozen – more than he would have lost in a bloody defeat – rode off into the dark vastness of the lower woods, killing the remnants of the two bands.

The rest were sheepish – or drained. Some vomited onto the ground. Other men – the veterans of a campaign or two – drank wine and their eyes said that they weren't actually there. Or their eyes shifted around, ignoring the mess of blood and shit and flesh on the ground.

“We're not done yet,” Kineas said. In fact, the fight in the woods might not even help with the task on which he had been sent. “Lykeles!”

Lykeles pushed forward and saluted. His thighs were bleeding. “Sir?”

"I'm all turned around. Where's the field?" Kineas asked.

Lykeles paused, and a look of terror flitted across his face—and then he sat back and breathed in and out. "Got it," he said. "We moved downhill when we fought. The field is back that way—we're in a saddle."

"Make sure," Kineas said. He could tell that his men—at least the younger ones—weren't ready for another fight. Another decision—leave the unfit? Or wait for them to recover?

Decisions shade decisions. He needed Lykeles to *know* where they were, not guess. "We'll rest here a minute," Kineas said. "Go find us the field, and a way to get on it quickly."

Diodorus rode up. His helmet was gone.

"That was a nice helmet," Kineas said.

"No idea where it went. I don't even think I got hit in the head," Diodorus said.

Kineas picked his way back, following the trail of bodies, leaving Niceas to get them into files, until he found the axe man with his best spear through him. The man was still alive and in agony, the spear right through his kidneys.

Kineas slid from his horse, shy of the kicking man. But he wanted his spear.

He grabbed the haft and the man screamed. Kineas let go, feeling foolish. The man was an enemy and that was his best spear. He grabbed the haft again, and the man roared like a lion at bay.

Kineas pulled savagely, and the spear didn't budge.

The Thracian lay in a widening pool of blood. The stuff was leaking into the ground, filling the spaces between the gravel – some already dark, some still bright red, and the dying Thracian seemed to shy away from his own blood. He was muddy with it, and leaf-loam stuck to him.

Kineas grunted and pulled again, this time putting his foot on the wounded man's lower back – and the spear moved, and the man thrashed like a gaffed salmon or a deer caught just the same way – Kineas knew that a deer with a spear through him could cause lethal damage – the Thracian had a knife in his hand, and he thrust backhanded at his tormentor and somehow, Kineas felt for the man, knew that he was, in fact, the oppressor in this morality play.

He stepped back, the haft still in his hand, effortlessly avoiding the weak slash of the little knife. Then he took the spear from his left hand and killed the man with one clean, accurate stab to the back of the head – the spear point went right through the skull, and the man slumped in his own blood, and excrement poured from his bowels, and he was dead.

And then Kineas pulled the spear from his body – both of them – and cleaned them on another corpse, because he couldn't, just then, look at what he'd just done. And had done before. And would do again.

#

Lykeles got back before he'd rejoined himself. "We came farther than I thought," he said. "And both sides are formed. The field's thick with psiloi."

"Ares!" Kineas cursed. "Let's go!"

He ran back to his horse, and made himself mount – both of his legs were cut and he felt as if he'd run a ten-stade race, but he got mounted and resolved not to dismount again until his day was done.

"Files!" he called. "First file – follow me!"

Diodorus swung his horse and they were off, reverting to a long column of riders in single file – fewer than a hundred men, now, between losses, men off hunting Thracians, and men whose horses were lame or dead. Kineas sent the last back to camp.

Sokles had a long cut across his left arm where he'd blocked a blade with his fancy new armour, but the rest of his friends were less wounded than he was himself.

It took too long, though. It all took too long. The sun was high in the sky before Kineas heard the Athenians singing the Paeon and saw the light at the edge of the trees. He cantered forward, reckless, too hurried to wait, and men behind him sped up – and all of a sudden, the chariot wheels of time spun faster – too fast to control.

There were men at the edge of the woods – more psiloi, and all of them enemy. They were slingers, throwing their stones at a distant target, and there was no time to form his men.

These weren't hardened fighters like the Thracians. Kineas raised his spear. "At them!" he called, his voice hoarse. He tapped Miltiades in the flanks with his heels and the brute responded with a surge of his hindquarters and they were among the nearly naked men – most of whom didn't even have a spear or a knife.

Kineas killed two before Diodorus joined him, but they had no fight in them and Greek gentlemen didn't waste their time killing each other's servants. Thracian barbarians were another thing – but these were Greek boys, or slaves, and they ran – and the Hippeis let them go after killing a dozen.

"Follow me!" Kineas said, because he could already see the fight beyond the woods. Then he was out on the main field – he'd gone far too deep, and he was

on the flat, and the Macedonian infantry were close – much closer than his own Athenians, who were still atop the ridge, two stades away.

The Athenian hoplites were formed, though. And they were just beginning to come forward. They were singing the Paeon for the second time, and they looked unstoppable as they marched.

Kineas couldn't see what was happening on the Theban flank. But he could see – and understand – that Lykophron was concealing his two squadrons behind the steepest part of the ridge, and that Philip had sent his psiloi to probe the apparently empty flank of the Athenian phalanx, scenting a trap like the wily old fox he was.

Kineas and his eighty troopers were too few to goad Philip into an attack, far too deep in the enemy lines, but they were right on time.

He laughed, twirling his good spear so that droplets of blood flew from it in an arc over his head, and he felt the power come on him – he had done it. Whatever happened, he hadn't failed to get in position.

“Form the rhomboid!” he called.

There was Philip's cavalry – tucked in at the edge of their phalanx, watching his little band of riders the way a wolf watches a fawn. Kineas lacked the men to make a charge – although he had scattered hundreds of unarmed slingers.

But the power was on him, the *daimon* of combat that he'd heard described by his father and Phokion and twenty other men but had never felt himself. He was invincible – a god – Herakles come to earth.

"Form the rhomboid!" he shouted again. "Diodorus, if I'm killed, it's all yours."

"All this?" Diodorus laughed.

"All this," Kineas grinned. "I'm going to go and goad the Macedonians into charging. Get ready to run."

Diodorus grinned. "Ready to run it is. How are you going to goad them, exactly?"

Kineas laughed. "Watch me!" he yelled, and thumped Miliadiades, so that the big horse leaped straight from the stand to a ponderous gallop.

Kineas rode forward, through the defeated remnants of the enemy missile troops – whom he ignored – right down the edge of the enemy phalanx, so that he could see individual men, see that the left file leader had a gold wreath and bad teeth. Every head in the left file turned, and still he rode past them. He pulled up in the angle formed by the left of the Macedonian phalanx and the front of a glittering troop of armoured cavalry.

"Coming to change sides?" a man jeered.

“I am Kineas son of Eumenes son of Marathoniois of the Lamptreus!” he roared, and the power was in his voice and it did not crack. “My fathers fought at Marathon and Plataea against the Medes, when you Macedonians licked their spit. I challenge any of you to come and fight me, man to man and horse to horse, in the old way, or I call you cowards, despicable weaklings, and barbarians.”

Men in the left file of the phalanx laughed – the challenge wasn’t meant for them, and they liked seeing the *Hoi Polloi* fighting.

A voice in the ranks of the enemy cavalry told his men to *ignore the boy*.

“Persians humped your mothers and they liked it!” Kineas called. “Chastity in Macedon is a woman who can remember how many have spilled their seed between her thighs!”

Some of the infantrymen were jeering, now. And they weren’t jeering the Athenian.

As Kineas drew breath for another insult – he knew hundreds of these, from listening to men describe these combats all his life – he saw that a man had been chosen. Or had chosen himself. A Macedonian burst from the ranks of the Hetaeroi, a young man with a sickle for a nose, a golden helmet, and javelin in his fist, and the moment he was clear of the press he flung it at Kineas.

Kineas swallowed his insult and pulled on the reins – Miliadiades could step *back* and he did. Then Kineas made him rear, and the javelin plunged into the earth between his charger’s forefeet.

As soon as the big horse’s feet were back on the ground, Kineas got him moving. He wasn’t the fastest horse, but he was responsive – Kineas, so proud of his looks, would never have ridden an ugly horse unless its other qualities were beyond reproach – and he turned Miliadiades to the right. Away from the Macedonian while the man changed weapons, and then inside him – still turning, like birds fighting in the air, and then they were hurtling at each other, three horse-lengths apart and the man raised his sword –

Kineas tossed his spear – a soft throw, a curved trajectory – the man ducked to avoid it and the big spear went over his shoulder, into the rump of his horse and he was down in a clatter of hooves and arms. Kineas trotted in tight circle, watching out for another opponent, and he rode by and plucked his good spear out of the downed beast’s rump as he rode. The rider stayed down – probably knocked unconscious, and Kineas raised the spear over his head and screamed that war cry, “*eleu-eleu-eleu-eleu!*” as he rode.

He could see an old man in a magnificent iron breastplate trimmed in gold – Philip himself. Riders surrounded the man, all watching him.

He laughed. He had their attention. “That man was no coward!” Kineas called. “Was he the only one, or are there more *men*? Persians are brave, or so they say in Athens. Didn’t they get any *brave* men on your mothers?”

Kineas happened to have his eye on Philip – he saw the old man frown, and a man near him looked at his lord and then cantered out into the fighting area. He had a long spear held in both hands, and he rode like a centaur – like a god. Philip was shouting at his men, but Kineas was too busy to listen.

The man was as old as Lykophron, and he had a scar on his face and a helmet covered in gold.

He rode out to face Kineas, leveled the long spear, and charged.

Kineas gripped his good spear with two hands, as if he was going to row or paddle on the left side of his body. And he rode right at the Macedonian, and it seemed to him that the only noise on the whole of the battlefield was the sound made by his hooves and the other man’s hooves –

– Perhaps the Mistress of Animals was his patron, for the long spear point came at him like a bronze fate, right at his eyes, and then his opponent’s horse stumbled – a hole, perhaps – the spear point wavered and he brought the haft of his own spear across his body in a two-handed parry, and then he raised the butt of his spear in time to put it into his opponent’s ribs, and the man was lying in the wet grass, his horse running free.

The man got to his feet and tugged his sword from his scabbard, and Kineas swung his spear like a long club and put the man down. Then he twirled his spear and let Miliadiades come to a stop.

“Don’t let anyone tell you that the cavalry of Macedon is the best in the world,” he called, but his voice was going, and it sounded vain. In fact, he could all but hear the fates muttering at his hubris.

He reared Miliadiades again, waiting. And no more came forward.

Kineas had done what he could. He spat in the grass, turned his horse, and rode away.

The Cavalry of Macedon followed him.

They weren’t on his heels, but by the time he rejoined his own squadron, four of theirs had wheeled into line and were coming. They were at a walk.

“Oh, how I wish we could skirmish,” Kineas said.

Niceas shook his head. “Don’t even dream of it,” he said. “That was – beautiful. By the way.”

“You will live forever,” Diodorus said. Then he grinned. “I mean, if anyone saw you do it.”

Sokles shook his head. “Why you? I’m a better horseman! Hey – Kineas? Why you?”

Kineas stretched his shoulders. He felt old. "I felt the power of a god," he said simply, and most of them accepted it.

"What about them?" Niceas asked. "You planning to sprout wings from your horse and become a hero from the tales? We fighting?"

Kineas shook his head sheepishly. "No. We're running."

And run they did, to the jeers of the men of Macedon.

Flogging tired horses, they galloped away without so much as a javelin cast, and the men of Macedon roared their contempt, and Kineas could hear the hoofbeats behind him. He turned and they were close, he slapped Miliadiades's neck and got a surge of power, turned – and they were closer. If the Macedonian cavalrymen had had javelins, men would have died – but they had their heavy spears, longer than a horse, and they couldn't throw them.

When Miliadiades hit the slope of the ridge, he began to labor. Kineas's mount was the most fatigued of all, so that he fell farther and farther behind.

"C'mon, boy!" Kineas shouted.

"Herakles and Macedon!" roared a voice, almost in his ear.

Kineas turned. The Macedonian line was two horse-lengths behind him, and they seemed huge – one man was leaning out on his horse's neck, poking with his *sarissa* and trying to hit Kineas. Kineas jiggled his mount and cried "Up! Up!"

in Miliades's ear. Again the big horse surged forward, again his stride lengthened, but Kineas could all but feel the spear point aimed at his back, now.

"Another stade, boy! One more! C'mon, boy!" Kineas was shouting encouragements in the horse's ear, and Miliades stretched out his neck like a racer and his hooves devoured the hill, as if he, in turn, had been filled with the daimon of some god and had super equine powers waiting to be unleashed.

Ten horse-lengths to the crest, and the Macedonians were still two horse-lengths behind. Kineas forced himself not to look—every turn cost his charger energy, and he kept his seat, head down, thighs clenched on his sweat-soaked blanket and hips up off Miliades's back.

A frustrated Macedonian nobleman threw his sarissa and it struck without warning. The point did no harm except to leave a deep bruise as it glanced off the backplate of Kineas's cuirass, but the shaft bounced on his horse's rump and the point ripped across his shoulder and then skidded down to rip across the charger's lower breast, almost tangling Miliades's hooves before vanishing in the grass.

The pain of the shoulder slash almost unseated Kineas, and the pain of the belly-slash goaded Miliades into one last effort of panic and god-sent strength, and he flew over the crest of the ridge, opening the distance between his master and the Macedonians in his last strides.

When Miltiades fell, he slumped, his forequarters failing first and then his hindquarters, and his head went down, and then his back, and he skidded on the wet grass and then went flat. The hill had robbed him of so much speed – so steep it was, despite the horse’s godlike efforts – that Kineas was able to leap clear and land on his feet, the horse’s last gift. He kept his spears.

Lykophron was waiting at the crest with five hundred Athenian cavalry, and his hyperetes sounded the charge while the Macedonians were covering the last, steepest part of the hill, so that the Athenian cavalrymen met the front rank on the relatively level ground at the top of the ridge. Neither side had much impetus – the Macedonians had lost theirs to the hill, and the Athenians covered only a few horse-lengths in their charge – but the Athenians were well organized, tightly packed, and the Macedonian wedge was scattered.

Kineas took this in with one glance as he came on guard. He dropped his second spear in the grass and grabbed his best spear in two hands, point aimed high, and he parried the first sarissa to come at him, a lone rider – again, a parry made easy by the hill slowing the enemy riders – and swept his opponent from his mount with the butt of his spear, striking the man on the temple.

But then he was alone in the midst of the enemy. He took a wound immediately, as a man thrust his sarissa down into the heavy muscle of Kineas’s neck. It wasn’t a death wound, but it *hurt* and Kineas was never fully able to aim

or land a blow for the rest of the fight. He parried and parried, and was knocked down again and again, as men landed clumsy blows on his unprotected side and back, blows that his cuirass or his helmet absorbed.

Perhaps because he was wounded, or perhaps because he was a fool, he kept getting up. He rose, fought, and was knocked down—rose, fought, and down he went again. The third time, he had lost his spear—he loved that spear—and he found himself standing in a cavalry melee with no weapon in his hand.

Someone hit him a glancing blow on his helmet, and he went down again—a horse stepped next to him and then sprang across, a rider plunged his sarissa *down* and it skidded off his breastplate and bit deep into the mud that the horses had churned up, and Kineas grabbed the staff and used it to get to his feet. The rider went for his sword and Kineas went for his and their draws were simultaneous, so that their blows met in the air—and again—the mounted man's horse shied and he still gripped the sarissa, so that he began to lose his seat. Kineas rammed his point up under the man's armpit as he struggled for balance, but the man's joints gave as his spirit passed his mouth and he collapsed from his horse's back onto Kineas's shoulder and they fell together. Kineas struggled with the weight of the dead man, desperate to get to his feet again. He slipped the weight off and pushed a knee under himself, the way a weary wrestler does in the gymnasium.

The Macedonian's horse was still standing over his dead rider, and Kineas thought that it would be a noble thing to take the man's horse and fight on – but he couldn't get a leg over the horse's back., and the best he could manage was to get an arm around the horse's neck to hold himself up. He could feel the blood leaking out of his neck. He had a cut under his eye – only the gods knew where that had come from – and there was blood flowing over the smooth gold of his breastplate when he looked down, like a river over a swath of flat rock. The color was remarkable.

"Kineas!" Graccus called. "Kineas!"

Suddenly, he heard other voices – saw Lykeles plunge a short spear into a man and rip it clear.

They're coming for me, Kineas thought, and he was suffused with joy. My friends came back for me. I am truly blessed.

Sokles was using his heavy, back curved *kopis* like an axe, chopping and chopping at his opponents and ignoring the futile blows that rained on his armour. Diodorus was dueling a Macedonian officer, sword to sword, their horses wheeling and biting under them.

But it was Niceas who reached him first, by the simple tactic of ignoring all opponents with a single-minded ride to save his friend. Niceas took blows on his helmet and his shoulders and shrugged them off like a boxer in the games,

brought his horse up on the opposite side of the enemy horse from Kineas like the helmsman of a trireme and leaned across, ignoring the enemy behind him and trusting Sokles to deal with the man.

“Give me your hand!” he shouted.

Kineas saw him down a long tunnel – a lengthening tunnel – and knew in his pain-addled head that he had exactly one chance to get his rump on that horse and no strength for second tries. He breathed in, a deep breath, and the tunnel vanished and his sight cleared and he pushed with his legs and reached with his hand –

– gripped Niceas’s hand across the Macedonian horse, and Niceas’s fingers locked on his wrist and he was up – no thought to it, just muscle memory and the surge of an angry horse, and Niceas’s booted foot kicked the Macedonian charger in the ribs –

A sarissa licked out and caught Niceas in the side, and he kept his seat by luck and the will of the gods, and then Sokles was there, cutting at the shaft of the sarissa – Diodorus cut the rider down – fore cut, back cut, and there was an eddy in the fight around them, and every man breathed, and suddenly the Macedonians were fleeing down the ridge with the Athenian cavalry behind them, and the trumpets were sounding for a rally.

Kineas tried to look around. Niceas had his trumpet to his lips and Kineas thought that they should have pursued, but Lykophron was bellowing to rally. It was all Kineas could do to keep on his mount.

Lykophron pushed into the knot of young men.

“Hermes – lad, you’re cut badly. Diodorus, take command. No, Niceas – I need you here. Graccus – take Kineas to the camp.” Lykophron’s attention was at the bottom of the hill. A stade away to the left, the Athenian phalanx gave a great cheer and rolled down the ridge into the Macedonian phalanx, and there was a sound as if hundreds of farm carts had collided with all the kitchen cauldrons in Greece, and the roars and battle cries were suddenly mixed with screams.

Kineas raised his head to watch what Lykophron saw, and he smiled – because the Athenian line hit the Macedonian line and *pushed* and the Macedonians fell back.

Then Graccus took the captured horse’s bridle, and that was Kineas’s last glimpse of the fighting. He let himself be led back to camp – just a few stades – and the world closed in on him as they rode. Graccus talked – praised him, or it sounded like praise – and Kineas was pretty sure that he was dying, because his vision passed away and he couldn’t feel the horse between his knees, but just heard Graccus’s voice, and then he heard the Lady of the Animals speak.

You have done enough for one day, she said.

And a deeper male voice said, *This is not your field, or your day.*

And then he heard no more.

#

When Kineas next opened his eyes, it was full day, and his body hurt – every part of his body hurt – and he lay under an awning that flapped in the wind, and men were screaming close by him.

He was completely disoriented for a moment, and then it came to him that he was in the tent where the physicians did their cutting – but how could it be morning, when he had fought all morning? Kineas tried to raise his head, and the pain in his neck was so great that he didn't get his head a finger's width off the rolled cloak beneath him.

"Hey!" said a voice. "The Greek is awake."

The accent was Thessalian, and Kineas realized that he was surrounded by Macedonians. That made no sense.

Kineas tried a deep breath, and it hurt his ribs – hurt his sides, hurt his lungs – but he didn't feel as if he was about to die. He felt as if he had run twenty stades and then wrestled in the Panathenaic Games – the utter fatigue of muscles that

leads to deep pain – but only the sharp agony of his neck seemed to be a wound. And the cold feeling of a bone hurt in his leg.

“Lie still,” said a Macedonian voice. “Unlike a lot of these poor fucks, you’ll live.” The young soldier breathed garlic on him and then put an arm under his head, raised it, and fed him a little watered wine.

Kineas spluttered, but then he drank. “Why?” he asked. “Who – won?”

“We won, of course. Zeus Sator, Greek – you thought that you could defeat *Philip of Macedon*?” The young soldier laughed.

Kineas was awake enough now to see that the young man was an aristocrat, and a cavalryman. “Tipped you in the grass!” Kineas said, and coughed.

“Yes, you did. And I saved your life when you were lying in the grass in your turn, so don’t be ungrateful. I assume you are worth a ransom?” the man asked.

Kineas was still digesting that the arrogant Macedonians had won. Which was, of course, what his father would want, anyway. And Phokion. “Worth a ransom,” he managed.

“Good. I’m Philip. But everyone here is called Philip, so you better call me Ptolemy.” The young man with the broad face and the eagle nose grinned.

“I’m Kineas.”

“We all know. You shouted it over and over. The King says it was all a ploy and you are a cunning bastard. That’s high praise, from the king.” Ptolemy laughed. “Your father rich?”

Kineas tried to shake his head, or nod, but his neck hurt too much. “Yes,” he said.

Ptolemy grinned. “Excellent! Then we can be friends. I imagine you’ll be with us a long time,” he said. “The king says he won’t let Athens grow her power back, this time.”

“A long time,” Kineas said.

And it was a long time.