

I remember the great cosmic sea above as the stars glittered in unison. It was the night before the war's end, before the commander of the Myrmidons died so mercilessly under the same moonlit indifference of the heavens.

I thought that the sea of stars heralded good fortune, that glory and splendor stood waiting before us like kings, each offering us a jewel-encrusted cup from which to soak in the unblemished taste of wine. But our commander perished. It was all over then. Hades began to mock us as our courage was in retreat.

The Trojan war shook us to the core, and my heart still trembles mightily upon hearing its fierce mortal echoes. I thought that I was always prepared for war, that the Myrmidons would rush into the chaos as a river of armor froze and then stood waiting for the warriors of Greece to fight.

No demigod dreads death. But being mortal, a Myrmidon walks in the shadow of a demigod in order to make peace with death, the rushing dark of it, the unabated truth of the blackness ultimate. Achilles is dead. The Myrmidons have all fallen apart from me, the recipient of fate's undeserved succor. They emerged from the ants on Zeus' sacred oak. Zeus made them vast and innumerable as the ants on the oak. Ants became men and populated Aegina. But now they are nearly without number.

Myrmidon, the Thessalian King, is our great ancestor. I feel that I am Aiacos, Achilles' grandfather, who found himself living on an island alone. Zeus gave him comfort by turning ants into people and thereby allowing Aiacos to have company. The Myrmidons were the first to build ships with sails, but now history recedes with a mere, wistful blink. I stand here on the verge of pure, static zero. No thoughts nor memories can I marshal.

The ten-year siege of Troy has yielded an afterimage: the blood-rimmed bowl of the ocean being chased by a blankness too beautiful to be called oblivion. History has already marched ahead. And I, an Ant man among the dead shadows of other Ant men, drown in its unparalleled shade.

A Myrmidon is an Ant man as he fights with a vast contingent of men. He is never supposed to follow without a lead. He is a man fighting with other men when death breathes the multiplied breath of the enemy. For mortals on a battlefield, foolishness outlasts fear. I was astounded by my own survival. I stand here alone on a pristine beach. The wind whispers. I trudge along the shore in the hope of catching an echo in that whisper.

It seemed that nothing could move the impenetrable heart of Achilles. But now Achilles briefly resurfaces in my memory, his battle cry piercing the ungodly din of voices on the battlefield. Achilles' eyes gleam fiercely under the blinding sun, but then he becomes frozen. A sudden dimness conceals the sharpness of his gaze, and his battle cry fades into a numbing silence. Achilles assumes the stone-like taciturnity of a statue, his strained lips sealed by marble. Something in that dimness drags his shadow back into the abysmal depths of Hades.

The Myrmidon prince perished as he stood beside me. The arrow reached his heel, and he instantly writhed in agony. I felt that he saw his life's beautiful brevity become manifest before his dying eyes. Somehow I knew that in the moment before he became completely motionless, his heart moved more freely than ever.

Achilles' dream seemed to defy the order of the world as immortality shone with undimmed defiance on the horizon of his heart. In that moment, time began to yield to timelessness. I saw this dream reflected in his eyes as the last spark of life fled from his features.

I imagine Achilles rising to the throne abdicated by an Agamemnon unfit to rule. An Agamemnon driven mad by the voices of the gods. Achilles sits on the throne and motions for me to come forward. The distance between us no longer seems godlike. I, foolish mortal that I am, once again yield to a foolishness that outlasts fear. I approach Achilles as he continues to wave me onward. Then everything dissolves, and I see the past recede. I find myself vainly pursuing destiny's stolen bride. No, it is not Helen. It is a world displaced from its shore.

I must regain my purpose and rush past the all-encircling gloom. The Trojan Aeneas escaped with other Trojans before the Greeks sacked the city of Ilium. I must find Aeneas. But something else awaits than a fugitive Trojan. I need to find what remains of a world that still beats inside me.

The war echoes. It lets loose a torrent of tears, seemingly misplacing the war ships canted at ominous angles on the otherwise unblemished beach. I am washed ashore now. All memories of Ilium leave me. There is only the strange noise of an ocean coming to being, a body of water transfixed by the mere fact of its own existence.

“You are free.”

I hear these words not once but twice. The voice becomes insistent, repeating these words over and over again. I glance up sharply to see if anyone is there, but there is only the endless blue of the sea. Then I hear them again. The same words. “You are free.” I can feel a look of confusion spreading across my face. The words arise again with distinct clarity, as if spoken directly into my ear: “You are free.”

Drawing a deep breath, I feel that a part of me is moving freely across the sea. I feel that my heart has already made it to the other side of the ocean. The voice seems to speak these words directly to my heart now. It sounds as though it is a mermaid speaking loudly in the distance, a pure soft voice that is hardened by the swift-moving waves.

When enraged Achilles, bruised and intemperate in his demeanor, sat alone on the beach after sparring with Agamemnon, I went to plead with him for his return. The Greeks needed him to fight the Trojans. There was no other way. In what remained of his blind, all-consuming rage, Achilles shouted obscenities and waved me away with a crude gesture. I instantly turned away, but I still hoped that he might come around even in the last moment.

The Myrmidons could not even fathom the notion of not fighting alongside him. We needed to walk in his shadow, to embrace it and forge unyielding glory from it. The demigod sat on the beach under the blazing afternoon sun. He needed to be alone. I did not question his pride nor his anger. I walked away and looked back to see him stare at the sea. Achilles hoped that Thetis might emerge give him solace in his deep isolation and anger.

Achilles observed the sea for hours, waiting for Thetis to rise from the restless waters in order to help immortalize him. But it was too late. His eyes remained fixed on the flawless surface of the ocean, and he must have wondered whether Thetis was secretly ensconced in layers of brightness within the unfathomable deep. Achilles trudged along the beach and saw waves slapping on the sand.

Now, I stare at the sea, but know that no goddess will emerge to breathe soothing relief into my tormented heart. And the demigod's mortal flaw has consumed him entirely.

A ghost on the shore, that is what Achilles has become. The waves pass through him. He waits for his goddess mother to emerge from the waves. He sees the surface begin to rise, the ocean's bowl spinning before his frozen gaze. The water heaves and spirals with a light spectacularly grey. The voice reaches him unheard, splitting the silence. The water surrounds him now, its silver light moving upon the silence in his heart.

The indecipherable deep was reduced to a mere voice. He is fully whole once more, for the voice fills his demigod heart and restores its iron solidity. The voice is inaudible to anyone but him. It informs him of his imminent death, and the limitless glory that follows it. *You must fight now*, the voice says. *You must die young in order to be remembered forever*. The voice leaves his querying heart becalmed.

The heaving blue, silver-grey wall begins to subside, becoming a wave in the sea's aimless embrace. The sea recedes from him, as though compelled into stillness by his fortified solitude. But now the demigod's solitude wanes like a moonless tide. He is ready to go to war. The Myrmidons wait for Achilles on the fringe of the beach, each one awaiting the confident rhythm of his tread. They wait for him to emerge from the shade of uncertainty.

Achilles envisions their sharpened gazes becoming entwined upon his moment's return. The Ant-men long for his wordless return. But before he can restore full confidence in their bruised hearts, the image of Thetis reaches him from across the reflected sun's horizontal glare. Her beauty trembles like the flame that once burned the flesh of his heel.

Thetis' eyes are nebulous orbs bursting into blue worlds entire, the

unfathomed silence of the deep that leads him away from inaction to a life shortened sweetly by destiny's blade. Achilles eagerly awaits the moment of his glorious death, for immortality echoes in his heart's ineffable yearning. I walk back across the beach. Whatever is left of the sea's stillness now inhabits me. Achilles has become a shadow.

I feel as though I am still running behind Achilles as he leads the Myrmidon contingent onward. An inimitable dread lived in his shadow, in the fading whisper of his name's last spoken letter. It punctured the airy silence and then went its deep, untrodden, inaudible way. But it remained fixed in the stony interior of every fear-deprived heart, the heart of those who joined me in battle. All Myrmidons spoke it, forging the strength from which to feed their fearless advance toward the enemy. Their memory enshrined it, kissing the unknown behind syllables well-known, as if shedding off layers of untold complexity in a mere moment.

He was the Myrmidon prince, the one that led a mighty contingent into a mass of Trojan infantrymen. Rivers of iron moved through him, streaming through his every vessel as glittering rays shone off an unyielding armor of bronze. But now he is a mere shadow swaying from one corner of my vision to the other.

The sound of galloping horses, clashing shields, and blades swirling in a sea of bloodied bodies comes to me, lifting me from the darkness I believe awaits me in this unknown land. The loud hissing of waves and a wind-swept horizon bursts into chaos. Gleaming, golden dust scatters across my dimmed mind, and then it fades into a rimless ocean.

Memory rebels against oblivion. It fights off the sulphurous breath of the netherworld. And Helen's blue eyes dissolve the precious white wall between me and the world entire. Horses move again, causing seismic ripples of sound that drift into my intangible ears. The walls of Ilium begin to fade. Helen appears too beautiful to behold now, racing behind the ephemerally white sun of dreaming. My eyes become unkissed by the perfect sight of her.

It is as though I became a Myrmidon only yesterday. I became part of the Myrmidon contingent, which included men from Pelasgian Argos, Alus and Alope, Trachis, Phthia, and Hellas. Hellas was a place filled with some of the most beautiful women. I fell in love with one of these women, but the call to battle was too great to resist. The opportunity to have Achilles as a leader was unlike any other. Achilles led the fifty ships of the Myrmidons, who embraced war as they had nearly forgotten it due to a dull, ordinary life.

The Myrmidons joined another contingent, which included the Hellenes and Achaeans. Another contingent was comprised of men from the island of Nisyros, Carpathus, Casus, and the Calydnian Isles. The leader of the contingent was Antiphus, whose brother, Pheidippus, was also its leader. The brothers were the sons of Thessalus, who was the son of Heracles.

Now the shore awakens me. The pristine beach greets my eyes once more. I hear a voice: "Rise." I look up and see a shadowy figure looming over me. "Rise, Myrmidon." I try to gather the strength to rise, but is to no avail. I feel someone gently prodding my leg. "Please leave me alone. I beg

you.”

“You are a Myrmidon. You must rise.” The voice reminds me of Achilles as it is firm and imperious in its insistence. But then the voice becomes lighter. I hear the voice softening, and I realize that the ocean has affected my hearing. I now hear the voice as it is, undisturbed by the ocean's sounds. I rise and try to maintain my balance.

I remain firm on my feet and peer into familiar eyes. It is my beloved. I left her in order to fight with the Myrmidons. I gaze upon her nymph-like beauty. “Is...is it you, my love?”

She remains silent for a few moments, but then she says, “Troy has fallen. And you are lost here, in a land unknown to you.”

“But how can you be here?”

“You must go beyond the shore.”

Then I remember Achilles as he stood before Agamemnon, who said that he would keep the slave girl Briseis for himself. Achilles was consumed by rage. This rage was unlike any other rage. A demigod's rage.

The Myrmidons looked on as Achilles walked away and immersed himself in isolation. They could not fight without him. They refused to fight without him. The Myrmidons believed that going to Troy was their ultimate destination. They embraced the prospect of dying for their commander.

I look back to see if my beloved is still there, but there is no sign of her. The words echo in my mind: *beyond the shore*. I can see Achilles and Odysseus in my mind.

I am Odysseus now, seeing the unknown through his eyes. I can glimpse secret realms from a distant corner. A mist hovers over the sea, concealing the ocean. My mind reflects the dimly reflected image of the ocean that is in my eye. The mist dissipates, and I look upon the sea. I can still see through the eyes of Odysseus, and I still cannot see anything beyond the mist. The mist remains. I can still see it even though it has gone. My mind can see it. I look back at the distance I have travelled. In my heart, I feel that I am getting closer to home. But the distance I have to travel seems to expand into greater distances. The unknown remains as it was. There appears to be no destination. The more distance I travel, the more distant my destination becomes.

The untravelled distance before me far surpasses the journey. I look back at who I was before the journey, and the more I look back the more distant the future becomes. The unknown greets me here and now, between past and future. It becomes part of me and tells the story of my past self while at the same time informs me of what is unreachable. The only thing I know is that I am not traveling right now. I am frozen somewhere, and my mind tries to penetrate an unknown boundary. That boundary speaks of my former self, telling me how the endless journey began.