

herself with some of those in her secret; and by their professions of belief and confidence she was enabled to evade enquiry<sup>1</sup>. She added a few words suitable to the supposed circumstances and withdrew.

All this time her partizans in the country, favoured by the darkness and their knowledge of the facts, were using their advantage. One party had hastened to the landing-place to receive the king and his companions, and were now already on their way thence to the castle, a distance of some miles, conducting him, his soldiers, and his captive Cassandra as in triumph<sup>2</sup>. Others were assembling in and at the fortress itself, while Aegisthus with his band was descending from the hills, ready to push forward at the last moment. It was no doubt one of the merits in the 'combination,' upon which he prided himself, that personally he ran scarcely any risk at all, even in the event of failure, still quite possible, as was soon to be seen.

Left to their own reflexions, the seniors could not fail to perceive, even with such light as they had, the weakness of the evidence laid before them. They remembered the state of the country and felt vaguely uneasy. It was possible certainly that Troy was really taken, but much more likely, considering all things, that the queen was the victim of some imposture or delusion, which would soon be exposed<sup>3</sup>. They were in this mood when they perceived signs of the king's company approaching in the distance and at the same moment the entrance of one who by his appearance seemed likely to know the truth. The king had sent forward a herald.

This incident, probable as it was and not to be prevented, was no part of the conspirators' design, and extremely dangerous to them. With the first words of the herald, the queen's whole story fell to the ground. Here was the crisis. If the elders had been sagacious, prompt, and bold, if, putting together all that they knew, they had argued from it to a remote consequence and acted instantly upon the inference, they and the king might perhaps yet have been saved. But criminal plots would seldom or never succeed but for the weakness or error of those concerned to prevent them. And in this case the default was certainly pardonable. The queen could not be altogether right, not right at all as to the beacon-message. But so the elders had already presumed. And what did it matter, when as to what seemed after all the main fact, she was now confirmed? Troy was really

<sup>1</sup> *v.* 363.

<sup>2</sup> According to the Greek 'hypothesis', the king enters in a chariot, Cassandra and some of the spoil in a

second chariot. This is possibly a genuine piece of tradition.

<sup>3</sup> *vv.* 481—493.