

HEROES AND HOUSEHOLDERS

Great heroes and warriors perform their deeds
finally, for us—ordinary, everyday householders,
who have in Virgil's words, "hearts that
do not want great fame," but are content
with a modest home, soft beds, tools,
and utensils in place of weapons. I stand
holding a lethal knife, sharp enough
to kill the enemy who has never yet,
to my good fortune, entered
this small but well-equipped kitchen.
Chop-chop, chop-chop I go
on the hardwood butcher block table.
The forged, stainless-carbon blade could
have served Patrocles or Achilles himself. I pray I'll
never be so violent. I don't use it
to fend off Trojan warriors, making my brutal
way into a war-distraught city, but to render
vegetables mouth-sized and fit for human
consumption in soups and casseroles. This fluted
fennel is next to go into the stock. Off
come the soft thin ferny leaves,
chop chop goes the balanced blade into
the hard white stalks. Prometheus, legends say,
carried his stolen fire from heaven
in a stalk just like these. It must be
true. A smokey licorice taste suffuses
the moist, hot onion even today.
Boiled down to stringy tenderness, carrying
nothing but a sweet, robust broth,
it sits in my cast-iron, white-enameled
pot, courtesy of Le Creuset, above
regulated, paid-for Promethean fire
brought to me now by Con Edison

—Steve Turtell