



The Rage of Achilles

Rage—Goddess, sing the rage of Peleus' son Achilles,
murderous, doomed, that cost the Achaeans countless losses,
hurling down to the House of Death so many sturdy souls,
great fighters' souls, but made their bodies carrion,
feasts for the dogs and birds,
and the will of Zeus was moving toward its end.
Begin, Muse, when the two first broke and clashed,
Agamemnon lord of men and brilliant Achilles.

What god drove them to fight with such a fury?
Apollo the son of Zeus and Leto. Incensed at the king
he swept a fatal plague through the army—men were dying
and all because Agamemnon spurned Apollo's priest.
Yes, Chryses approached the Achaeans' fast ships
to win his daughter back, bringing a priceless ransom

and bearing high in hand, wound on a golden staff,
 the wreaths of the god, the distant deadly Archer.
 He begged the whole Achaean army but most of all
 the two supreme commanders, Atreus' two sons,
 "Agamemnon, Menelaus—all Argives geared for war!
 May the gods who hold the halls of Olympus give you
 Priam's city to plunder, then safe passage home. 20
 Just set my daughter free, my dear one . . . here,
 accept these gifts, this ransom. Honor the god
 who strikes from worlds away—the son of Zeus, Apollo!"

And all ranks of Achaeans cried out their assent:
 "Respect the priest, accept the shining ransom!"
 But it brought no joy to the heart of Agamemnon.
 The king dismissed the priest with a brutal order
 ringing in his ears: "Never again, old man,
 let me catch sight of you by the hollow ships! 30
 Not loitering now, not slinking back tomorrow.
 The staff and the wreaths of god will never save you then.
 The girl—I won't give up the girl. Long before that,
 old age will overtake her in *my* house, in Argos,
 far from her fatherland, slaving back and forth
 at the loom, forced to share my bed!

Now go,
 don't tempt my wrath—and you may depart alive."

The old man was terrified. He obeyed the order,
 turning, trailing away in silence down the shore
 where the roaring battle lines of breakers crash and drag. 40
 And moving off to a safe distance, over and over
 the old priest prayed to the son of sleek-haired Leto,
 lord Apollo, "Hear me, Apollo! God of the silver bow
 who strides the walls of Chryse and Cilla sacrosanct—
 lord in power of Tenedos—Smintheus, god of the plague!
 If I ever roofed a shrine to please your heart,
 ever burned the long rich bones of bulls and goats
 on your holy altar, now, now bring my prayer to pass.
 Pay the Danaans back—your arrows for my tears!"

His prayer went up and Phoebus Apollo heard him. 50
 Down he strode from Olympus' peaks, storming at heart
 with his bow and hooded quiver slung across his shoulders.
 The arrows clanged at his back as the god quaked with rage,
 the god himself on the march and down he came like night.
 Over against the ships he dropped to a knee, let fly a shaft
 and a terrifying clash rang out from the great silver bow.
 First he went for the mules and circling dogs but then,
 launching a piercing shaft at the men themselves,
 he cut them down in droves—
 and the corpse-fires burned on, night and day, no end in sight. 60

Nine days the arrows of god swept through the army.
 On the tenth Achilles called all ranks to muster—
 the impulse seized him, sent by white-armed Hera
 grieving to see Achaean fighters drop and die.
 Once they'd gathered, crowding the meeting grounds,
 the swift runner Achilles rose and spoke among them:
 "Son of Atreus, now we are beaten back, I fear,
 the long campaign is lost. So home we sail . . .
 if we can escape our death—if war and plague
 are joining forces now to crush the Argives. 70
 But wait: let us question a holy man,
 a prophet, even a man skilled with dreams—
 dreams as well can come our way from Zeus—
 come, someone to tell us why Apollo rages so,
 whether he blames us for a vow we failed, or sacrifice.
 If only the god would share the smoky savor of lambs
 and full-grown goats, Apollo might be willing, still,
 somehow, to save us from this plague."

So he proposed
 and down he sat again as Calchas rose among them,
 Thestor's son, the clearest by far of all the seers 80
 who scan the flight of birds. He knew all things that are,
 all things that are past and all that are to come,
 the seer who had led the Argive ships to Troy
 with the second sight that god Apollo gave him.
 For the armies' good the seer began to speak:

"Achilles, dear to Zeus . . .
 you order me to explain Apollo's anger,
 the distant deadly Archer? I will tell it all.
 But strike a pact with me, swear you will defend me
 with all your heart, with words and strength of hand. 90
 For there is a man I will enrage—I see it now—
 a powerful man who lords it over all the Argives,
 one the Achaeans must obey . . . A mighty king,
 raging against an inferior, is too strong.
 Even if he can swallow down his wrath today,
 still he will nurse the burning in his chest
 until, sooner or later, he sends it bursting forth.
 Consider it closely, Achilles. Will you save me?"

And the matchless runner reassured him: "Courage!
 Out with it now, Calchas. Reveal the will of god, 100
 whatever you may know. And I swear by Apollo
 dear to Zeus, the power you pray to, Calchas,
 when you reveal god's will to the Argives—no one,
 not while I am alive and see the light on earth, no one
 will lay his heavy hands on you by the hollow ships.
 None among all the armies. Not even if you mean
 Agamemnon here who now claims to be, by far,
 the best of the Achaeans."

The seer took heart
 and this time he spoke out, bravely: "Beware—
 he casts no blame for a vow we failed, a sacrifice. 110
 The god's enraged because Agamemnon spurned his priest,
 he refused to free his daughter, he refused the ransom.
 That's why the Archer sends us pains and he will send us more
 and never drive this shameful destruction from the Argives,
 not till we give back the girl with sparkling eyes
 to her loving father—no price, no ransom paid—
 and carry a sacred hundred bulls to Chryse town.
 Then we can calm the god, and only then appease him."

So he declared and sat down. But among them rose
 the fighting son of Atreus, lord of the far-flung kingdoms, 120

Agamemnon—furious, his dark heart filled to the brim,
 blazing with anger now, his eyes like searing fire.
 With a sudden, killing look he wheeled on Calchas first:
 “Seer of misery! Never a word that works to my advantage!
 Always misery warms your heart, your prophecies—
 never a word of profit said or brought to pass.
 Now, again, you divine god’s will for the armies,
 bruit it about, as fact, why the deadly Archer
 multiplies our pains: because I, I refused
 that glittering prize for the young girl Chryseis. 130
 Indeed, I prefer *her* by far, the girl herself,
 I want her mine in my own house! I rank her higher
 than Clytemnestra, my wedded wife—she’s nothing less
 in build or breeding, in mind or works of hand.
 But I am willing to give her back, even so,
 if that is best for all. What I really want
 is to keep my people safe, not see them dying.
 But fetch me another prize, and straight off too,
 else I alone of the Argives go without my honor.
 That would be a disgrace. You are all witness, 140
 look—*my* prize is snatched away!”

But the swift runner

Achilles answered him at once, “Just how, Agamemnon,
 great field marshal . . . most grasping man alive,
 how can the generous Argives give you prizes now?
 I know of no troves of treasure, piled, lying idle,
 anywhere. Whatever we dragged from towns we plundered,
 all’s been portioned out. But collect it, call it back
 from the rank and file? *That* would be the disgrace.
 So return the girl to the god, at least for now.
 We Achaeans will pay you back, three, four times over, 150
 if Zeus will grant us the gift, somehow, someday,
 to raze Troy’s massive ramparts to the ground.”

But King Agamemnon countered, “Not so quickly,
 brave as you are, godlike Achilles—trying to cheat *me*.
 Oh no, you won’t get past me, take me in that way!
 What do you want? To cling to your own prize

while I sit calmly by—empty-handed here?
 Is that why you order me to give her back?
 No—if our generous Argives *will* give me a prize,
 a match for my desires, equal to what I've lost,
 well and good. But if they give me nothing
 I will take a prize myself—your own, or Ajax'
 or Odysseus' prize—I'll commandeer her myself
 and let that man I go to visit choke with rage!
 Enough. We'll deal with all this later, in due time.
 Now come, we haul a black ship down to the bright sea,
 gather a decent number of oarsmen along her locks
 and put aboard a sacrifice, and Chryseis herself,
 in all her beauty . . . we embark her too.
 Let one of the leading captains take command.
 Ajax, Idomeneus, trusty Odysseus or you, Achilles,
 you—the most violent man alive—so you can perform
 the rites for us and calm the god yourself."

A dark glance

and the headstrong runner answered him in kind: "Shameless—
 armored in shamelessness—always shrewd with greed!
 How could any Argive soldier obey your orders,
 freely and gladly do your sailing for you
 or fight your enemies, full force? Not I, no.
 It wasn't Trojan spearmen who brought me here to fight.
 The Trojans never did *me* damage, not in the least,
 they never stole my cattle or my horses, never
 in Phthia where the rich soil breeds strong men
 did they lay waste my crops. How could they?
 Look at the endless miles that lie between us . . .
 shadowy mountain ranges, seas that surge and thunder.
 No, you colossal, shameless—we all followed you,
 to please you, to fight for you, to win your honor
 back from the Trojans—Menelaus and you, you dog-face!
 What do *you* care? Nothing. You don't look right or left.
 And now you threaten to strip me of my prize in person—
 the one I fought for long and hard, and sons of Achaea
 handed her to me.

My honors never equal yours,
 whenever we sack some wealthy Trojan stronghold—
 my arms bear the brunt of the raw, savage fighting,
 true, but when it comes to dividing up the plunder
 the lion's share is yours, and back I go to my ships,
 clutching some scrap, some pittance that I love,
 when I have fought to exhaustion.

No more now—
 back I go to Phthia. Better that way by far,
 to journey home in the beaked ships of war. 200
 I have no mind to linger here disgraced,
 brimming your cup and piling up your plunder.”

But the lord of men Agamemnon shot back,
 “Desert, by all means—if the spirit drives you home!
 I will never beg you to stay, not on *my* account.
 Never—others will take my side and do me honor,
 Zeus above all, whose wisdom rules the world.
 You—I hate you most of all the warlords
 loved by the gods. Always dear to your heart,
 strife, yes, and battles, the bloody grind of war. 210
 What if you are a great soldier? That's just a gift of god.
 Go home with your ships and comrades, lord it over
 your Myrmidons!

You *are* nothing to me—you and your overweening anger!
 But let this be my warning on your way:
 since Apollo insists on taking my Chryseis,
 I'll send her back in my own ships with *my* crew.
 But I, I will be there in person at your tents
 to take Briseis in all her beauty, your own prize—
 so you can learn just how much greater I am than you
 and the next man up may shrink from matching words with me, 220
 from hoping to rival Agamemnon strength for strength!”

He broke off and anguish gripped Achilles.
 The heart in his rugged chest was pounding, torn . . .
 Should he draw the long sharp sword slung at his hip,

thrust through the ranks and kill Agamemnon now?—
or check his rage and beat his fury down?

As his racing spirit veered back and forth,
just as he drew his huge blade from its sheath,
down from the vaulting heavens swept Athena,
the white-armed goddess Hera sped her down: 230
Hera loved both men and cared for both alike.
Rearing behind him Pallas seized his fiery hair—
only Achilles saw her, none of the other fighters—
struck with wonder he spun around, he knew her at once,
Pallas Athena! the terrible blazing of those eyes,
and his winged words went flying: "Why, why now?
Child of Zeus with the shield of thunder, why come now?
To witness the outrage Agamemnon just committed?
I tell you this, and so help me it's the truth—
he'll soon pay for his arrogance with his life!" 240

Her gray eyes clear, the goddess Athena answered,
"Down from the skies I come to check your rage
if only you will yield.

The white-armed goddess Hera sped me down:
she loves you both, she cares for you both alike.
Stop this fighting, now. Don't lay hand to sword.
Lash him with threats of the price that he will face.
And I tell you this—and I *know* it is the truth—
one day glittering gifts will lie before you,
three times over to pay for all his outrage. 250
Hold back now. Obey us both."

So she urged
and the swift runner complied at once: "I must—
when the two of you hand down commands, Goddess,
a man submits though his heart breaks with fury.
Better for him by far. If a man obeys the gods
they're quick to hear his prayers."

And with that
Achilles stayed his burly hand on the silver hilt
and slid the huge blade back in its sheath.
He would not fight the orders of Athena.

Soaring home to Olympus, she rejoined the gods
aloft in the halls of Zeus whose shield is thunder.

260

But Achilles rounded on Agamemnon once again,
lashing out at him, not relaxing his anger for a moment:
"Staggering drunk, with your dog's eyes, your fawn's heart!
Never once did you arm with the troops and go to battle
or risk an ambush packed with Achaea's picked men—
you lack the courage, you can see death coming.
Safer by far, you find, to foray all through camp,
commandeering the prize of any man who speaks against you.
King who devours his people! Worthless husks, the men you rule— 270
if not, Atrides, this outrage would have been your last.
I tell you this, and I swear a mighty oath upon it . . .
by this, this scepter, look,
that never again will put forth crown and branches,
now it's left its stump on the mountain ridge forever,
nor will it sprout new green again, now the brazen ax
has stripped its bark and leaves, and now the sons of Achaea
pass it back and forth as they hand their judgments down,
upholding the honored customs whenever Zeus commands—
This scepter will be the mighty force behind my oath: 280
someday, I swear, a yearning for Achilles will strike
Achaea's sons and all your armies! But then, Atrides,
harrowed as you will be, *nothing* you do can save you—
not when your hordes of fighters drop and die,
cut down by the hands of man-killing Hector! Then—
then you will tear your heart out, desperate, raging
that you disgraced the best of the Achaeans!"]

Down on the ground

he dashed the scepter studded bright with golden nails,
then took his seat again. The son of Atreus smoldered,
glaring across at him, but Nestor rose between them, 290
the man of winning words, the clear speaker of Pylos . . .
Sweeter than honey from his tongue the voice flowed on and on.
Two generations of mortal men he had seen go down by now,
those who were born and bred with him in the old days,
in Pylos' holy realm, and now he ruled the third.

He pleaded with both kings, with clear good will,
 "No more—or enormous sorrow comes to all Achaea!
 How they would exult, Priam and Priam's sons
 and all the Trojans. Oh they'd leap for joy
 to hear the two of you battling on this way, 300
 you who excel us all, first in Achaean councils,
 first in the ways of war.

Stop. Please.

Listen to Nestor. You are both younger than I,
 and in my time I struck up with better men than you,
 even you, but never once did they make light of me.
 I've never seen such men, I never will again . . .
 men like Pirithous, Dryas, that fine captain,
 Caeneus and Exadius, and Polyphemus, royal prince,
 and Theseus, Aegeus' boy, a match for the immortals.
 They were the strongest mortals ever bred on earth, 310
 the strongest, and they fought against the strongest too,
 shaggy Centaurs, wild brutes of the mountains—
 they hacked them down, terrible, deadly work.
 And I was in their ranks, fresh out of Pylos,
 far away from home—they enlisted me themselves
 and I fought on my own, a free lance, single-handed.
 And none of the men who walk the earth these days
 could battle with those fighters, none, but they,
 they took to heart my counsels, marked my words.
 So now you listen too. Yielding is far better . . . 320
 Don't seize the girl, Agamemnon, powerful as you are—
 leave her, just as the sons of Achaea gave her,
 his prize from the very first.
 And you, Achilles, never hope to fight it out
 with your king, pitting force against his force:
 no one can match the honors dealt a king, you know,
 a sceptered king to whom great Zeus gives glory.
 Strong as you are—a goddess was your mother—
 he has more power because he rules more men.
 Atrides, end your anger—look, it's Nestor!
 I beg you, cool your fury against Achilles. 330

Here the man stands over all Achaea's armies,
our rugged bulwark braced for shocks of war."

But King Agamemnon answered him in haste,
"True, old man—all you say is fit and proper—
but this soldier wants to tower over the armies,
he wants to rule over all, to lord it over all,
give out orders to every man in sight. Well,
there's one, I trust, who will never yield to him!
What if the everlasting gods have made a spearman of him?
Have they entitled him to hurl abuse at *me*?" 340

"Yes!"—blazing Achilles broke in quickly—
"What a worthless, burnt-out coward I'd be called
if I would submit to you and all your orders,
whatever you blurt out. Fling them at others,
don't give me commands!
Never again, I trust, will Achilles yield to *you*.
And I tell you this—take it to heart, I warn you—
my hands will never do battle for that girl,
neither with you, King, nor any man alive. 350
You Achaeans gave her, now you've snatched her back.
But all the rest I possess beside my fast black ship—
not one bit of it can you seize against my will, Atrides.
Come, try it! So the men can see, that instant,
your black blood gush and spurt around my spear!"

Once the two had fought it out with words,
battling face-to-face, both sprang to their feet
and broke up the muster beside the Argive squadrons.
Achilles strode off to his trim ships and shelters,
back to his friend Patroclus and their comrades. 360
Agamemnon had a vessel hauled down to the sea,
he picked out twenty oarsmen to man her locks,
put aboard the cattle for sacrifice to the god
and led Chryseis in all her beauty amidships.

Versatile Odysseus took the helm as captain.

All embarked,

the party launched out on the sea's foaming lanes
 while the son of Atreus told his troops to wash,
 to purify themselves from the filth of plague.
 They scoured it off, threw scourings in the surf
 and sacrificed to Apollo full-grown bulls and goats
 along the beaten shore of the fallow barren sea
 and savory smoke went swirling up the skies.

370

So the men were engaged throughout the camp.
 But King Agamemnon would not stop the quarrel,
 the first threat he hurled against Achilles.
 He called Talthibius and Eurybates briskly,
 his two heralds, ready, willing aides:
 "Go to Achilles' lodge. Take Briseis at once,
 his beauty Briseis by the hand and bring her here.
 But if he will not surrender her, I'll go myself,
 I'll seize her myself, with an army at my back—
 and all the worse for him!"

380

He sent them off
 with the strict order ringing in their ears.
 Against their will the two men made their way
 along the breaking surf of the barren salt sea
 and reached the Myrmidon shelters and their ships.
 They found him beside his lodge and black hull,
 seated grimly—and Achilles took no joy
 when he saw the two approaching.
 They were afraid, they held the king in awe
 and stood there, silent. Not a word to Achilles,
 not a question. But he sensed it all in his heart,
 their fear, their charge, and broke the silence for them:
 "Welcome, couriers! Good heralds of Zeus and men,
 here, come closer. You have done nothing to me.
 You are not to blame. No one but Agamemnon—
 he is the one who sent you for Briseis.
 Go, Patroclus, Prince, bring out the girl
 and hand her to them so they can take her back.

390

But let them both bear witness to my loss . . . 400
 in the face of blissful gods and mortal men,
 in the face of that unbending, ruthless king—
 if the day should come when the armies need *me*
 to save their ranks from ignominious, stark defeat.
 The man is raving—with all the murderous fury in his heart.
 He lacks the sense to see a day behind, a day ahead,
 and safeguard the Achaeans battling by the ships.”

Patroclus obeyed his great friend's command.
 He led Briseis in all her beauty from the lodge
 and handed her over to the men to take away, 410
 And the two walked back along the Argive ships
 while she trailed on behind, reluctant, every step.
 But Achilles wept, and slipping away from his companions,
 far apart, sat down on the beach of the heaving gray sea
 and scanned the endless ocean. Reaching out his arms,
 again and again he prayed to his dear mother: “Mother!
 You gave me life, short as that life will be,
 so at least Olympian Zeus, thundering up on high,
 should give me honor—but now he gives me nothing.
 Atreus' son Agamemnon, for all his far-flung kingdoms— 420
 the man disgraces me, seizes and keeps my prize,
 he tears her away himself!”

So he wept and prayed
 and his noble mother heard him, seated near her father,
 the Old Man of the Sea in the salt green depths.
 Suddenly up she rose from the churning surf
 like mist and settling down beside him as he wept,
 stroked Achilles gently, whispering his name, “My child—
 why in tears? What sorrow has touched your heart?
 Tell me, please. Don't harbor it deep inside you.
 We must share it all.”

And now from his depths 430
 the proud runner groaned: “You know, you know,
 why labor through it all? You know it all so well . . .
 We raided Thebe once, Eetion's sacred citadel,
 we ravaged the place, hauled all the plunder here

and the armies passed it round, share and share alike,
 and they chose the beauty Chryseis for Agamemnon.
 But soon her father, the holy priest of Apollo
 the distant deadly Archer, Chryses approached
 the fast trim ships of the Argives armed in bronze
 to win his daughter back, bringing a priceless ransom 440
 and bearing high in hand, wound on a golden staff,
 the wreaths of the god who strikes from worlds away.
 He begged the whole Achaean army but most of all
 the two supreme commanders, Atreus' two sons,
 and all ranks of Achaeans cried out their assent,
 'Respect the priest, accept the shining ransom!'
 But it brought no joy to the heart of Agamemnon,
 our high and mighty king dismissed the priest
 with a brutal order ringing in his ears.
 And shattered with anger, the old man withdrew 450
 but Apollo heard his prayer—he loved him, deeply—
 he loosed his shaft at the Argives, withering plague,
 and now the troops began to drop and die in droves,
 the arrows of god went showering left and right,
 whipping through the Achaeans' vast encampment.
 But the old seer who knew the cause full well
 revealed the will of the archer god Apollo.
 And I was the first, mother, I urged them all,
 'Appease the god at once!' That's when the fury
 gripped the son of Atreus. Agamemnon leapt to his feet 460
 and hurled his threat—his threat's been driven home.
 One girl, Chryseis, the fiery-eyed Achaeans
 ferry out in a fast trim ship to Chryse Island,
 laden with presents for the god. The other girl,
 just now the heralds came and led her away from camp,
 Briseus' daughter, the prize the armies gave me.
 But you, mother, if you have any power at all,
 protect your son! Go to Olympus, plead with Zeus,
 if you ever warmed his heart with a word or any action . . .

Time and again I heard your claims in father's halls, 470
 boasting how you and you alone of all the immortals

rescued Zeus, the lord of the dark storm cloud,
from ignominious, stark defeat.

That day the Olympians tried to chain him down,
Hera, Poseidon lord of the sea, and Pallas Athena—
you rushed to Zeus, dear Goddess, broke those chains,
quickly ordered the hundred-hander to steep Olympus,
that monster whom the immortals call Briareus
but every mortal calls the Sea-god's son, Aegaeon,
though he's stronger than his father. Down he sat,
flanking Cronus' son, gargantuan in the glory of it all,
and the blessed gods were struck with terror then,
they stopped shackling Zeus.

480

Remind him of that,
now, go and sit beside him, grasp his knees . . .
persuade him, somehow, to help the Trojan cause,
to pin the Achaeans back against their ships,
trap them round the bay and mow them down.
So all can reap the benefits of their king—
so even mighty Atrides can see how mad he was
to disgrace Achilles, the best of the Achaeans!"

490

And Thetis answered, bursting into tears,
"O my son, my sorrow, why did I ever bear you?
All I bore was doom . . .
Would to god you could linger by your ships
without a grief in the world, without a torment!
Doomed to a short life, you have so little time.
And not only short, now, but filled with heartbreak too,
more than all other men alive—doomed twice over.
Ah to a cruel fate I bore you in our halls!
Still, I shall go to Olympus crowned with snow
and repeat your prayer to Zeus who loves the lightning.
Perhaps he will be persuaded.

500

But you, my child,
stay here by the fast ships, rage on at the Achaeans,
just keep clear of every foray in the fighting.
Only yesterday Zeus went off to the Ocean River
to feast with the Ethiopians, loyal, lordly men.

and all the gods went with him. But in twelve days
the Father returns to Olympus. Then, for your sake,
up I go to the bronze floor, the royal house of Zeus—
I'll grasp his knees, I think I'll win him over."

With that vow 510

his mother went away and left him there, alone,
his heart inflamed for the sashed and lovely girl
they'd wrenched away from him against his will.
Meanwhile Odysseus drew in close to Chryse Island,
bearing the splendid sacrifice in the vessel's hold.
And once they had entered the harbor deep in bays
they furled and stowed their sails in the black ship,
they lowered the mast by the forestays, smoothly,
quickly let it down on the forked mast-crutch
and rowed her into a mooring under oars.

520

Out went the bow-stones—cables fast astern—
and the crew themselves climbed out in the breaking surf,
leading out the sacrifice for the archer god Apollo,
and out of the deep-sea ship Chryseis stepped too.
Then tactful Odysseus led her up to the altar,
placing her in her loving father's arms, and said,
"Chryses, the lord of men Agamemnon sent me here
to bring your daughter back and perform a sacrifice,
a grand sacrifice to Apollo—for all Achaea's sake—
so we can appease the god
who's loosed such grief and torment on the Argives."

530

With those words he left her in Chryses' arms
and the priest embraced the child he loved, exultant.
At once the men arranged the sacrifice for Apollo,
making the cattle ring his well-built altar,
then they rinsed their hands and took up barley.
Rising among them Chryses stretched his arms to the sky
and prayed in a high resounding voice, "Hear me, Apollo!
God of the silver bow who strides the walls of Chryse
and Cilla sacrosanct—lord in power of Tenedos!
If you honored me last time and heard my prayer
and rained destruction down on all Achaea's ranks,

540

now bring my prayer to pass once more. Now, at last,
drive this killing plague from the armies of Achaea!"

His prayer went up and Phoebus Apollo heard him.
And soon as the men had prayed and flung the barley,
first they lifted back the heads of the victims,
slit their throats, skinned them and carved away
the meat from the thighbones and wrapped them in fat,
a double fold sliced clean and topped with strips of flesh. 550
And the old man burned these on a dried cleft stick
and over the quarters poured out glistening wine
while young men at his side held five-pronged forks.
Once they had charred the thighs and tasted the organs
they cut the rest into pieces, pierced them with spits,
roasted them to a turn and pulled them off the fire.
The work done, the feast laid out, they ate well
and no man's hunger lacked a share of the banquet.
When they had put aside desire for food and drink,
the young men brimmed the mixing bowls with wine 560
and tipping first drops for the god in every cup
they poured full rounds for all. And all day long
they appeased the god with song, raising a ringing hymn
to the distant archer god who drives away the plague,
those young Achaean warriors singing out his power,
and Apollo listened, his great heart warm with joy.

Then when the sun went down and night came on
they made their beds and slept by the stern-cables . . .
When young Dawn with her rose-red fingers shone once more,
they set sail for the main encampment of Achaea. 570
The Archer sent them a bracing following wind,
they stepped the mast, spread white sails wide,
the wind hit full and the canvas bellied out
and a dark blue wave, foaming up at the bow,
sang out loud and strong as the ship made way,
skimming the whitecaps, cutting toward her goal.
And once offshore of Achaea's vast encampment
they eased her in and hauled the black ship high,

far up on the sand, and shored her up with timbers.
Then they scattered, each to his own ship and shelter.

580

But he raged on, grimly camped by his fast fleet,
the royal son of Peleus, the swift runner Achilles.
Now he no longer haunted the meeting grounds
where men win glory, now he no longer went to war
but day after day he ground his heart out, waiting there,
yearning, always yearning for battle cries and combat.

But now as the twelfth dawn after this shone clear
the gods who live forever marched home to Olympus,
all in a long cortege, and Zeus led them on.

And Thetis did not forget her son's appeals.

590

She broke from a cresting wave at first light
and soaring up to the broad sky and Mount Olympus,
found the son of Cronus gazing down on the world,

peaks apart from the other gods and seated high
on the topmost crown of rugged ridged Olympus.

And crouching down at his feet,

quickly grasping his knees with her left hand,

her right hand holding him underneath the chin,

she prayed to the lord god Zeus, the son of Cronus:

"Zeus, Father Zeus! If I ever served you well

600

among the deathless gods with a word or action,

bring this prayer to pass: honor my son Achilles!—

doomed to the shortest life of any man on earth.

And now the lord of men Agamemnon has disgraced him,

seizes and keeps his prize, tears her away himself. But you—

exalt him, Olympian Zeus: your urgings rule the world!

Come, grant the Trojans victory after victory

till the Achaean armies pay my dear son back,

building higher the honor he deserves!"

She paused

but Zeus who commands the storm clouds answered nothing.

610

The Father sat there, silent. It seemed an eternity . . .

But Thetis, clasping his knees, held on, clinging,

pressing her question once again: "Grant my prayer,

once and for all, Father, bow your head in assent!
 Or deny me outright. What have you to fear?
 So I may know, too well, just how cruelly
 I am the most dishonored goddess of them all."

Filled with anger

Zeus who marshals the storm clouds answered her at last:

"Disaster. You will drive me into war with Hera.

She will provoke me, she with her shrill abuse.

620

Even now in the face of all the immortal gods

she harries me perpetually, Hera charges *me*

that I always go to battle for the Trojans.

Away with you now. Hera might catch us here.

I will see to this. I will bring it all to pass.

Look, I will bow my head if that will satisfy you.

That, I remind you, that among the immortal gods
 is the strongest, truest sign that I can give.

No word or work of mine—nothing can be revoked,

there is no treachery, nothing left unfinished

630

once I bow my head to say it shall be done."

So he decreed. And Zeus the son of Cronus bowed

his craggy dark brows and the deathless locks came pouring

down from the thunderhead of the great immortal king

and giant shock waves spread through all Olympus.

So the two of them made their pact and parted.

Deep in the sea she dove from radiant Mount Olympus.

Zeus went back to his own halls, and all the gods

in full assembly rose from their seats at once

to meet the Father striding toward them now.

640

None dared remain at rest as Zeus advanced,

they all sprang up to greet him face-to-face

as he took his place before them on his throne.

But Hera knew it all. She had seen how Thetis,

the Old Man of the Sea's daughter, Thetis quick

on her glistening feet was hatching plans with Zeus.

And suddenly Hera taunted the Father, son of Cronus:

"So, who of the gods this time, my treacherous one, ✓

was hatching plans with you?

Always your pleasure, whenever my back is turned,
to settle things in your grand clandestine way.
You never deign, do you, freely and frankly,
to share your plots with me—never, not a word!”

650

The father of men and gods replied sharply,
“Hera—stop hoping to fathom all my thoughts.
You will find them a trial, though you are my wife.
Whatever is right for you to hear, no one, trust me,
will know of it before you, neither god nor man.
Whatever I choose to plan apart from all the gods—
no more of your everlasting questions, probe and pry no more.”

660

And Hera the Queen, her dark eyes wide, exclaimed,
“Dread majesty, son of Cronus, what are you saying?
Now surely I’ve never probed or pried in the past.
Why, you can scheme to your heart’s content
without a qualm in the world for me. But now
I have a terrible fear that she has won you over,
Thetis, the Old Man of the Sea’s daughter, Thetis
with her glistening feet. I know it. Just at dawn
she knelt down beside you and grasped your knees
and I suspect you bowed your head in assent to her—
you granted once and for all to exalt Achilles now
and slaughter hordes of Achaeans pinned against their ships.”

670

And Zeus who marshals the thunderheads returned,
“Maddening one . . . you and your eternal suspicions—
I can never escape you. Ah but tell me, Hera,
just what can you *do* about all this? Nothing.
Only estrange yourself from me a little more—
and all the worse for you.
If what you say is true, that must be my pleasure.
Now go sit down. Be quiet now. Obey my orders,
for fear the gods, however many Olympus holds,

680

are powerless to protect you when I come
to throttle you with my irresistible hands."

He subsided

but Hera the Queen, her eyes wider, was terrified.
She sat in silence. She wrenched her will to his.
And throughout the halls of Zeus the gods of heaven
quaked with fear. Hephaestus the Master Craftsman
rose up first to harangue them all, trying now
to bring his loving mother a little comfort,
the white-armed goddess Hera: "Oh disaster . . .
that's what it is, and it will be unbearable
if the two of you must come to blows this way,
flinging the gods in chaos just for mortal men.
No more joy for us in the sumptuous feast
when riot rules the day.

690

I urge you, mother—you know that I am right—
work back into his good graces, so the Father,
our beloved Father will never wheel on us again,
send our banquets crashing! The Olympian lord of lightning—
what if he would like to blast us from our seats?

700

✓ He is far too strong. Go back to him, mother,
stroke the Father with soft, winning words—
at once the Olympian will turn kind to us again."

Pleading, springing up with a two-handled cup,
he reached it toward his loving mother's hands
with his own winning words: "Patience, mother!
Grieved as you are, bear up, or dear as you are,
I have to see you beaten right before my eyes.
I would be shattered—what could I do to save you?
It's hard to fight the Olympian strength for strength.

710

You remember the last time I rushed to your defense?
He seized my foot, he hurled me off the tremendous threshold
and all day long I dropped, I was dead weight and then,
when the sun went down, down I plunged on Lemnos,
little breath left in me. But the mortals there
soon nursed a fallen immortal back to life."

At that the white-armed goddess Hera smiled
and smiling, took the cup from her child's hands.
Then dipping sweet nectar up from the mixing bowl
he poured it round to all the immortals, left to right. 720
And uncontrollable laughter broke from the happy gods
as they watched the god of fire breathing hard
and bustling through the halls.

That hour then
and all day long till the sun went down they feasted
and no god's hunger lacked a share of the handsome banquet
or the gorgeous lyre Apollo struck or the Muses singing
voice to voice in choirs, their vibrant music rising.

At last, when the sun's fiery light had set,
each immortal went to rest in his own house,
the splendid high halls Hephaestus built for each 730
with all his craft and cunning, the famous crippled Smith.
And Olympian Zeus the lord of lightning went to his own bed
where he had always lain when welcome sleep came on him.
There he climbed and there he slept and by his side
lay Hera the Queen, the goddess of the golden throne.



Hector Returns to Troy

So the clash of Achaean and Trojan troops was on its own,
the battle in all its fury veering back and forth,
careening down the plain
as they sent their bronze lances hurtling side-to-side
between the Simois' banks and Xanthus' swirling rapids.

That Achaean bulwark giant Ajax came up first,
broke the Trojan line and brought his men some hope,
spearing the bravest man the Thracians fielded,
Acamas tall and staunch, Eussorus' son.
The first to hurl, Great Ajax hit the ridge
of the helmet's horsehair crest—the bronze point
stuck in Acamas' forehead pounding through the skull
and the dark came swirling down to shroud his eyes.

A shattering war cry! Diomedes killed off Axylus,
 Teuthras' son who had lived in rock-built Arisbe,
 a man of means and a friend to all mankind,
 at his roadside house he'd warm all comers in.
 But who of his guests would greet his enemy now,
 meet him face-to-face and ward off grisly death?
 Diomedes killed the man and his aide-in-arms at once,
 Axylus and Calesius who always drove his team—
 both at a stroke he drove beneath the earth.

20

Euryalus killed Dresus, killed Opheltius,
 turned and went for Pedasus and Aesepus, twins
 the nymph of the spring Abarbarea bore Bucolion . . .
 Bucolion, son himself to the lofty King Laomedon,
 first of the line, though his mother bore the prince
 in secrecy and shadow. Tending his flocks one day
 Bucolion took the nymph in a strong surge of love
 and beneath his force she bore him twin sons.
 But now the son of Mecisteus hacked the force
 from beneath them both and loosed their gleaming limbs
 and tore the armor off the dead men's shoulders.

30

Polypoetes braced for battle killed Astyalus—
 Winging his bronze spear Odysseus slew Pidytes
 bred in Percote, and Teucer did the same
 for the royal Aretaon—

Aberus went down too,
 under the flashing lance of Nestor's son Antilochus,
 and Elatus under the lord of men Agamemnon's strength—
 Elatus lived by the banks of rippling Satniois,
 in Pedasus perched on cliffs—

40

The hero Leitus
 ran Phylacus down to ground at a dead run
 and Eurypylos killed Melanthius outright—

But Menelaus
 lord of the war cry had caught Adrestus alive.
 Rearing, bolting in terror down the plain
 his horses snared themselves in tamarisk branches,

splintered his curved chariot just at the pole's tip
 and breaking free they made a dash for the city walls
 where battle-teams by the drove stampeded back in panic.
 But their master hurled from the chariot, tumbling over the wheel 50
 and pitching facedown in the dust, and above him now
 rose Menelaus, his spear's long shadow looming.
 Adrestus hugged his knees and begged him, pleading,
 "Take me alive, Atrides, take a ransom worth my life!
 Treasures are piled up in my rich father's house,
 bronze and gold and plenty of well-wrought iron—
 father would give you anything, gladly, priceless ransom
 if only he learns I'm still alive in Argive ships!"

His pleas were moving the heart in Menelaus,
 just at the point of handing him to an aide 60
 to take him back to the fast Achaean ships . . .
 when up rushed Agamemnon, blocking his way
 and shouting out, "So soft, dear brother, why?
 Why such concern for enemies? I suppose you got
 such tender loving care at home from the Trojans.
 Ah would to god not one of them could escape
 his sudden plunging death beneath our hands!
 No baby boy still in his mother's belly,
 not even he escape—all Ilium blotted out,
 no tears for their lives, no markers for their graves!" 70

And the iron warrior brought his brother round—
 rough justice, fitting too.
 Menelaus shoved Adrestus back with a fist,
 powerful Agamemnon stabbed him in the flank
 and back on his side the fighter went, faceup.
 The son of Atreus dug a heel in his heaving chest
 and wrenched the ash spear out.

And here came Nestor
 with orders ringing down the field: "My comrades—
 fighting Danaans, aides of Ares—no plunder now!
 Don't lag behind, don't fling yourself at spoils 80
 just to haul the biggest portion back to your ship.

Now's the time for killing! Later, at leisure,
strip the corpses up and down the plain!"

So he ordered, spurring each man's nerve—
and the next moment crowds of Trojans once again
would have clambered back inside their city walls,
terror-struck by the Argives primed for battle.
But Helenus son of Priam, best of the seers
who scan the flight of birds, came striding up
to Aeneas and Hector, calling out, "My captains! 90
You bear the brunt of Troy's and Lycia's fighting—
you are our bravest men, whatever the enterprise,
pitched battle itself or planning our campaigns,
so stand your ground right here!
Go through the ranks and rally all the troops.
Hold back our retreating mobs outside the gates
before they throw themselves in their women's arms in fear,
a great joy to our enemies closing for the kill.
And once you've roused our lines to the last man,
we'll hold out here and fight the Argives down, 100
hard-hit as we are—necessity drives us on.

But you,

Hector, you go back to the city, tell our mother
to gather all the older noble women together
in gray-eyed Athena's shrine on the city's crest,
unlock the doors of the goddess' sacred chamber—
and take a robe, the largest, loveliest robe
that she can find throughout the royal halls,
a gift that far and away she prizes most herself,
and spread it out across the sleek-haired goddess' knees.
Then promise to sacrifice twelve heifers in her shrine, 110
yearlings never broken, if only she'll pity Troy,
the Trojan wives and all our helpless children,
if only she'll hold Diomedes back from the holy city—
that wild spearman, that invincible headlong terror!
He is the strongest Argive now, I tell you.⁷
Never once did we fear Achilles so,
captain of armies, born of a goddess too,

or so they say. But here's a maniac run amok—
no one can match his fury man-to-man!"

So he urged

and Hector obeyed his brother start to finish. 120

Down he leapt from his chariot fully armed, hit the ground
and brandishing two sharp spears went striding down his lines,
ranging flank to flank, driving his fighters into battle,
rousing grisly war—and round the Trojans whirled,
bracing to meet the Argives face-to-face.

And the Argives gave way, they quit the slaughter—
they thought some god swept down from the starry skies
to back the Trojans now, they wheeled and rallied so.

Hector shouted out to his men in a piercing voice,
"Gallant-hearted Trojans and far-famed allies! 130

Now be men, my friends, call up your battle-fury!
Till I can return to Troy and tell them all,
the old counselors, all our wives, to pray to the gods
and vow to offer them many splendid victims."

As Hector turned for home his helmet flashed
and the long dark hide of his bossed shield, the rim
running the metal edge, drummed his neck and ankles.

And now

Glaucus son of Hippolochus and Tydeus' son Diomedes
met in the no man's land between both armies:
burning for battle, closing, squaring off 140

and the lord of the war cry Diomedes opened up,
"Who are you, my fine friend?—another born to die?
I've never noticed you on the lines where we win glory,
not till now. But here you come, charging out
in front of all the rest with such bravado—
daring to face the flying shadow of my spear.

Pity the ones whose sons stand up to me in war!
But if you are an immortal come from the blue,
I'm not the man to fight the gods of heaven.
Not even Dryas' indestructible son Lycurgus, 150
not even he lived long . . .

that fellow who tried to fight the deathless gods.

He rushed at the maenads once, nurses of wild Dionysus,
 scattered them breakneck down the holy mountain Nysa.
 A rout of them strewed their sacred staves on the ground,
 raked with a cattle prod by Lycurgus, murderous fool!
 And Dionysus was terrified, he dove beneath the surf
 where the sea-nymph Thetis pressed him to her breast—
 Dionysus numb with fear: shivers racked his body,
 thanks to the raucous onslaught of that man. 160
 But the gods who live at ease lashed out against him—
 worse, the son of Cronus struck Lycurgus blind.
 Nor did the man live long, not with the hate
 of all the gods against him.

No, my friend,
 I have no desire to fight the blithe immortals.
 But if you're a man who eats the crops of the earth,
 a mortal born for death—here, come closer,
 the sooner you will meet your day to die!"

The noble son of Hippolochus answered staunchly,
 "High-hearted son of Tydeus, why ask about my birth? 170
 Like the generations of leaves, the lives of mortal men.
 Now the wind scatters the old leaves across the earth,
 now the living timber bursts with the new buds
 and spring comes round again. And so with men:
 as one generation comes to life, another dies away.
 But about my birth, if you'd like to learn it well,
 first to last—though many people know it—
 here's my story . . .

There is a city, Corinth,
 deep in a bend of Argos, good stallion-country
 where Sisyphus used to live, the wiliest man alive. 180
 Sisyphus, Aeolus' son, who had a son called Glaucus,
 and in his day Glaucus sired brave Bellerophon,
 a man without a fault. The gods gave him beauty
 and the fine, gallant traits that go with men.
 But Proetus plotted against him. Far stronger,
 the king in his anger drove him out of Argos,
 the kingdom Zeus had brought beneath his scepter.

Proetus' wife, you see, was mad for Bellerophon,
 the lovely Antea lusted to couple with him,
 all in secret. Futile—she could never seduce
 the man's strong will, his seasoned, firm resolve. 190
 So straight to the king she went, blurting out her lies:
 'I wish you'd die, Proetus, if you don't kill Bellerophon!
 Bellerophon's bent on dragging me down with him in lust
 though I fight him all the way!'

All of it false

but the king seethed when he heard a tale like that.
 He balked at killing the man—he'd some respect at least—
 but he quickly sent him off to Lycia, gave him tokens,
 murderous signs, scratched in a folded tablet,
 and many of them too, enough to kill a man. 200
 He told him to show them to Antea's father:
 that would mean his death.

So off he went to Lycia,

safe in the escort of the gods, and once he reached
 the broad highlands cut by the rushing Xanthus,
 the king of Lycia gave him a royal welcome.
 Nine days he feasted him, nine oxen slaughtered.
 When the tenth Dawn shone with her rose-red fingers,
 he began to question him, asked to see his credentials,
 whatever he brought him from his in-law, Proetus.
 But then, once he received that fatal message 210
 sent from his own daughter's husband, first
 he ordered Bellerophon to kill the Chimaera—
 grim monster sprung of the gods, nothing human,
 all lion in front, all snake behind, all goat between,
 terrible, blasting lethal fire at every breath!
 But he laid her low, obeying signs from the gods.
 Next he fought the Solymi, tribesmen bent on glory,
 roughest battle of men he ever entered, so he claimed.
 Then for a third test he brought the Amazons down,
 a match for men in war. But as he turned back, 220
 his host spun out the tightest trap of all:
 picking the best men from Lycia far and wide
 he set an ambush—that never came home again!

Fearless Bellerophon killed them all.

Then, yes,
 when the king could see the man's power at last,
 a true son of the gods, he pressed him hard to stay,
 he offered his own daughter's hand in marriage,
 he gave him half his royal honors as the king.
 And the Lycians carved him out a grand estate,
 the choicest land in the realm, rich in vineyards
 and good tilled fields for him to lord it over. 230
 And his wife bore good Bellerophon three children:
 Isander, Hippolochus and Laodamia. Laodamia
 lay in the arms of Zeus who rules the world
 and she bore the god a son, our great commander,
 Sarpedon helmed in bronze.

But the day soon came
 when even Bellerophon was hated by all the gods.
 Across the Alean plain he wandered, all alone,
 eating his heart out, a fugitive on the run
 from the beaten tracks of men. His son Isander? 240
 Killed by the War-god, never sated—a boy fighting
 the Solymi always out for glory. Laodamia? Artemis,
 flashing her golden reins, cut her down in anger.
 But Hippolochus fathered me, I'm proud to say.
 He sent me off to Troy . . .
 and I hear his urgings ringing in my ears:
 'Always be the best, my boy, the bravest,
 and hold your head up high above the others.
 Never disgrace the generation of your fathers.
 They were the bravest champions born in Corinth,
 in Lycia far and wide.' 250

There you have my lineage.
 That is the blood I claim, my royal birth."

When he heard that, Diomedes' spirits lifted.
 Raising his spear, the lord of the war cry drove it home,
 planting it deep down in the earth that feeds us all
 and with winning words he called out to Glaucus,
 the young captain, "Splendid—you are my friend,

my guest from the days of our grandfathers long ago!
 Noble Oeneus hosted your brave Bellerophon once,
 he held him there in his halls, twenty whole days, 260
 and they gave each other handsome gifts of friendship.
 My kinsman offered a gleaming sword-belt, rich red,
 Bellerophon gave a cup, two-handled, solid gold—
 I left it at home when I set out for Troy.

My father, Tydeus, I really don't remember.
 I was just a baby when father left me then,
 that time an Achaean army went to die at Thebes.

So now I am your host and friend in the heart of Argos,
 you are mine in Lycia when I visit in your country.
 Come, let us keep clear of each other's spears, 270
 even there in the thick of battle. Look,
 plenty of Trojans there for me to kill,
 your famous allies too, any soldier the god
 will bring in range or I can run to ground.
 And plenty of Argives too—kill them if you can.
 But let's trade armor. The men must know our claim:
 we are sworn friends from our fathers' days till now!"

Both agreed. Both fighters sprang from their chariots,
 clasped each other's hands and traded pacts of friendship.
 But the son of Cronus, Zeus, stole Glaucus' wits away. 280
 He traded his gold armor for bronze with Diomedes,
 the worth of a hundred oxen just for nine.

And now,
 when Hector reached the Scaean Gates and the great oak,
 the wives and daughters of Troy came rushing up around him,
 asking about their sons, brothers, friends and husbands,
 But Hector told them only, "Pray to the gods"—
 all the Trojan women, one after another . . .
 Hard sorrows were hanging over many.

And soon
 he came to Priam's palace, that magnificent structure
 built wide with porches and colonnades of polished stone. 290
 And deep within its walls were fifty sleeping chambers
 masoned in smooth, lustrous ashlar, linked in a line

where the sons of Priam slept beside their wedded wives,
 and facing these, opening out across the inner courtyard,
 lay the twelve sleeping chambers of Priam's daughters,
 masoned and roofed in lustrous ashlar, linked in a line
 where the sons-in-law of Priam slept beside their wives.
 And there at the palace Hector's mother met her son,
 that warm, goodhearted woman, going in with Laodice,
 the loveliest daughter Hecuba ever bred. His mother 300
 clutched his hand and urged him, called his name:
 "My child—why have you left the bitter fighting,
 why have you come home? Look how they wear you out,
 the sons of Achaea—curse them—battling round our walls!
 And that's why your spirit brought you back to Troy,
 to climb the heights and stretch your arms to Zeus.
 But wait, I'll bring you some honeyed, mellow wine.
 First pour out cups to Father Zeus and the other gods,
 then refresh yourself, if you'd like to quench your thirst.
 When a man's exhausted, wine will build his strength— 310
 battle-weary as *you* are, fighting for your people."

But Hector shook his head, his helmet flashing:
 "Don't offer me mellow wine, mother, not now—
 you'd sap my limbs, I'd lose my nerve for war.
 And I'd be ashamed to pour a glistening cup to Zeus
 with unwashed hands. I'm splattered with blood and filth—
 how could I pray to the lord of storm and lightning?
 No, mother, you are the one to pray.
 Go to Athena's shrine, the queen of plunder,
 go with offerings, gather the older noble women 320
 and take a robe, the largest, loveliest robe
 that you can find throughout the royal halls,
 a gift that far and away you prize most yourself,
 and spread it out across the sleek-haired goddess' knees.
 Then promise to sacrifice twelve heifers in her shrine,
 yearlings never broken, if only she'll pity Troy,
 the Trojan wives and all our helpless children,
 if only she'll hold Diomedes back from the holy city—
 that wild spearman, that invincible headlong terror!

Now, mother, go to the queen of plunder's shrine 330
and I'll go hunt for Paris, summon him to fight
if the man will hear what *I* have to say . . .
Let the earth gape and swallow him on the spot!
A great curse Olympian Zeus let live and grow in him,
for Troy and high-hearted Priam and all his sons.
That man—if I could see him bound for the House of Death,
I could say my heart had forgot its wrenching grief!"

But his mother simply turned away to the palace.
She gave her servants orders and out they strode
to gather the older noble women through the city. 340
Hecuba went down to a storeroom filled with scent
and there they were, brocaded, beautiful robes . . .
the work of Sidonian women. Magnificent Paris
brought those women back himself from Sidon,
sailing the open seas on the same long voyage
he swept Helen off, her famous Father's child.
Lifting one from the lot, Hecuba brought it out
for great Athena's gift, the largest, loveliest,
richly worked, and like a star it glistened,
deep beneath the others. Then she made her way 350
with a file of noble women rushing in her train.

Once they reached Athena's shrine on the city crest
the beauty Theano opened the doors to let them in,
Cisseus' daughter, the horseman Antenor's wife
and Athena's priestess chosen by the Trojans. Then—
with a shrill wail they all stretched their arms to Athena
as Theano, her face radiant, lifting the robe on high,
spread it out across the sleek-haired goddess' knees
and prayed to the daughter of mighty Father Zeus:
"Queen Athena—shield of our city—glory of goddesses! 360
Now shatter the spear of Diomedes! That wild man—
hurl him headlong down before the Scaean Gates!
At once we'll sacrifice twelve heifers in your shrine,
yearlings never broken, if only you'll pity Troy,
the Trojan wives and all our helpless children!"

But Athena refused to hear Theano's prayers.
 And while they prayed to the daughter of mighty Zeus
 Hector approached the halls of Paris, sumptuous halls
 he built himself with the finest masons of the day,
 master builders famed in the fertile land of Troy. 370
 They'd raised his sleeping chamber, house and court
 adjoining Priam's and Hector's aloft the city heights.
 Now Hector, dear to Zeus, strode through the gates,
 clutching a thrusting-lance eleven forearms long;
 the bronze tip of the weapon shone before him,
 ringed with a golden hoop to grip the shaft.
 And there in the bedroom Hector came on Paris
 polishing, fondling his splendid battle-gear,
 his shield and breastplate, turning over and over
 his long curved bow. And there was Helen of Argos, 380
 sitting with all the women of the house, directing
 the rich embroidered work they had in hand.

Seeing Paris,

Hector raked his brother with insults, stinging taunts:
 "What on earth are you doing? Oh how wrong it is,
 this anger you keep smoldering in your heart! Look,
 your people dying around the city, the steep walls,
 dying in arms—and all for you, the battle cries
 and the fighting flaring up around the citadel.
 You'd be the first to lash out at another—anywhere—
 you saw hanging back from this, this hateful war. 390

Up with you—

before all Troy is torched to a cinder here and now!"

And Paris, magnificent as a god, replied,
 "Ah Hector, you criticize me fairly, yes,
 nothing unfair, beyond what I deserve. And so
 I will try to tell you something. Please bear with me,
 hear me out. It's not so much from anger or outrage
 at our people that I keep to my rooms so long.
 I only wanted to plunge myself in grief.
 But just now my wife was bringing me round,
 her winning words urging me back to battle. 400

And it strikes me, even me, as the better way.
 Victory shifts, you know, now one man, now another.
 So come, wait while I get this war-gear on,
 or you go on ahead and I will follow—
 I think I can overtake you.”

Hector, helmet flashing,
 answered nothing. And Helen spoke to him now,
 her soft voice welling up: “My dear brother,
 dear to me, bitch that I am, vicious, scheming—
 horror to freeze the heart! Oh how I wish
 that first day my mother brought me into the light
 some black whirlwind had rushed me out to the mountains
 or into the surf where the roaring breakers crash and drag
 and the waves had swept me off before all this had happened!

410

But since the gods ordained it all, these desperate years,
 I wish I had been the wife of a better man, someone
 alive to outrage, the withering scorn of men.
 This one has no steadiness in his spirit,
 not now, he never will . . .

and he’s going to reap the fruits of it, I swear.
 But come in, rest on this seat with me, dear brother.
 You are the one hit hardest by the fighting, Hector,
 you more than all—and all for me, slut that I am,
 and this blind mad Paris. Oh the two of us!
 Zeus planted a killing doom within us both,
 so even for generations still unborn
 we will live in song.”]

420

Turning to go,
 his helmet flashing, tall Hector answered,
 “Don’t ask me to sit beside you here, Helen.
 Love me as you do, you can’t persuade me now.
 No time for rest. My heart races to help our Trojans—
 they long for me, sorely, whenever I am gone.
 But rouse this fellow, won’t you?
 And let him hurry himself along as well,
 so he can overtake me before I leave the city.
 For I must go home to see my people first,
 to visit my own dear wife and my baby son.

430

Who knows if I will ever come back to them again—
or the deathless gods will strike me down at last
at the hands of Argive fighters."

A flash of his helmet

and off he strode and quickly reached his sturdy,
well-built house. But white-armed Andromache— 440
Hector could not find her in the halls.
She and the boy and a servant finely gowned
were standing watch on the tower, sobbing, grieving.
When Hector saw no sign of his loyal wife inside
he went to the doorway, stopped and asked the servants,
"Come, please, tell me the truth now, women.
Where's Andromache gone? To my sisters' house?
To my brothers' wives with their long flowing robes?
Or Athena's shrine where the noble Trojan women 450
gather to win the great grim goddess over?"

A busy, willing servant answered quickly,
"Hector, seeing you want to know the truth,
she hasn't gone to your sisters, brothers' wives
or Athena's shrine where the noble Trojan women
gather to win the great grim goddess over.
Up to the huge gate-tower of Troy she's gone
because she heard our men are so hard-pressed,
the Achaean fighters coming on in so much force.
She sped to the wall in panic, like a madwoman— 460
the nurse went with her, carrying your child."

At that, Hector spun and rushed from his house,
back by the same way down the wide, well-paved streets
throughout the city until he reached the Scaean Gates,
the last point he would pass to gain the field of battle.
There his warm, generous wife came running up to meet him,
Andromache the daughter of gallant-hearted Eetion
who had lived below Mount Placos rich with timber,
in Thebe below the peaks, and ruled Cilicia's people.
His daughter had married Hector helmed in bronze. 470
She joined him now, and following in her steps

a servant holding the boy against her breast,
 in the first flush of life, only a baby,
 Hector's son, the darling of his eyes
 and radiant as a star . . .

Hector would always call the boy Scamandrius,
 townsmen called him Astyanax, Lord of the City,
 since Hector was the lone defense of Troy.

The great man of war breaking into a broad smile,
 his gaze fixed on his son, in silence. Andromache,
 pressing close beside him and weeping freely now,
 clung to his hand, urged him, called him: "Reckless one,
 my Hector—your own fiery courage will destroy you!
 Have you no pity for him, our helpless son? Or me,
 and the destiny that weighs me down, your widow,
 now so soon. Yes, soon they will kill you off,
 all the Achaean forces massed for assault, and then,
 bereft of you, better for me to sink beneath the earth.

480

What other warmth, what comfort's left for me,
 once you have met your doom? Nothing but torment!
 I have lost my father. Mother's gone as well.

490

Father . . . the brilliant Achilles laid him low
 when he stormed Cilicia's city filled with people,
 Thebe with her towering gates. He killed Eetion,
 not that he stripped his gear—he'd some respect at least—
 for he burned his corpse in all his blazoned bronze,
 then heaped a grave-mound high above the ashes
 and nymphs of the mountain planted elms around it,
 daughters of Zeus whose shield is storm and thunder.
 And the seven brothers I had within our halls . . .
 all in the same day went down to the House of Death,
 the great godlike runner Achilles butchered them all,
 tending their shambling oxen, shining flocks.

500

And mother,
 who ruled under the timberline of woody Placos once—
 he no sooner haled her here with his other plunder
 than he took a priceless ransom, set her free
 and home she went to her father's royal halls
 where Artemis, showering arrows, shot her down.

You, Hector—you are my father now, my noble mother,
a brother too, and you are my husband, young and warm
and strong!

510

Pity me, please! Take your stand on the rampart here,
before you orphan your son and make your wife a widow.
Draw your armies up where the wild fig tree stands,
there, where the city lies most open to assault,
the walls lower, easily overrun. Three times
they have tried that point, hoping to storm Troy,
their best fighters led by the Great and Little Ajax,
famous Idomeneus, Atreus' sons, valiant Diomedes.
Perhaps a skilled prophet revealed the spot—
or their own fury whips them on to attack."

520

And tall Hector nodded, his helmet flashing:

"All this weighs on my mind too, dear woman.
But I would die of shame to face the men of Troy
and the Trojan women trailing their long robes
if I would shrink from battle now, a coward.
Nor does the spirit urge me on that way.
I've learned it all too well. To stand up bravely,
always to fight in the front ranks of Trojan soldiers,
winning my father great glory, glory for myself.
For in my heart and soul I also know this well:
the day will come when sacred Troy must die,
Priam must die and all his people with him,
Priam who hurls the strong ash spear . . .

530

Even so,

it is less the pain of the Trojans still to come
that weighs me down, not even of Hecuba herself
or King Priam, or the thought that my own brothers
in all their numbers, all their gallant courage,
may tumble in the dust, crushed by enemies—
That is nothing, nothing beside your agony
when some brazen Argive hales you off in tears,
wrenching away your day of light and freedom!
Then far off in the land of Argos you must live,
laboring at a loom, at another woman's beck and call,

540

fetching water at some spring, Messeis or Hyperia,
 resisting it all the way—
 the rough yoke of necessity at your neck.
 And a man may say, who sees you streaming tears,
 'There is the wife of Hector, the bravest fighter
 they could field, those stallion-breaking Trojans,
 long ago when the men fought for Troy.' So he will say
 and the fresh grief will swell your heart once more,
 widowed, robbed of the one man strong enough
 to fight off your day of slavery.

550

No, no,
 let the earth come piling over my dead body
 before I hear your cries, I hear you dragged away!"

In the same breath, shining Hector reached down
 for his son—but the boy recoiled,
 cringing against his nurse's full breast,
 screaming out at the sight of his own father,
 terrified by the flashing bronze, the horsehair crest,
 the great ridge of the helmet nodding, bristling terror—
 so it struck his eyes. And his loving father laughed,
 his mother laughed as well, and glorious Hector,
 quickly lifting the helmet from his head,
 set it down on the ground, fiery in the sunlight,
 and raising his son he kissed him, tossed him in his arms,
 lifting a prayer to Zeus and the other deathless gods:
 "Zeus, all you immortals! Grant this boy, my son,
 may be like me, first in glory among the Trojans,
 strong and brave like me, and rule all Troy in power
 and one day let them say, 'He is a better man than his father!'—
 when he comes home from battle bearing the bloody gear
 of the mortal enemy he has killed in war—
 a joy to his mother's heart."

560

570

So Hector prayed
 and placed his son in the arms of his loving wife.
 Andromache pressed the child to her scented breast,
 smiling through her tears. Her husband noticed,
 and filled with pity now, Hector stroked her gently,

trying to reassure her, repeating her name: "Andromache,
 dear one, why so desperate? Why so much grief for me? 580
 No man will hurl me down to Death, against my fate.
 And fate? No one alive has ever escaped it,
 neither brave man nor coward, I tell you—
 it's born with us the day that we are born.
 So please go home and tend to your own tasks,
 the distaff and the loom, and keep the women
 working hard as well. As for the fighting,
 men will see to that, all who were born in Troy
 but I most of all."

Hector aflash in arms

took up his horsehair-crested helmet once again. 590
 And his loving wife went home, turning, glancing
 back again and again and weeping live warm tears.
 She quickly reached the sturdy house of Hector,
 man-killing Hector,
 and found her women gathered there inside
 and stirred them all to a high pitch of mourning.
 So in his house they raised the dirges for the dead,
 for Hector still alive, his people were so convinced
 that never again would he come home from battle,
 never escape the Argives' rage and bloody hands. 600

Nor did Paris linger long in his vaulted halls.
 Soon as he buckled on his elegant gleaming bronze
 he rushed through Troy, sure in his racing stride.
 As a stallion full-fed at the manger, stalled too long,
 breaking free of his tether gallops down the plain,
 out for his favorite plunge in a river's cool currents,
 thundering in his pride—his head flung back, his mane
 streaming over his shoulders, sure and sleek in his glory,
 knees racing him on to the fields and stallion-haunts he loves—
 so down from Pergamus heights came Paris, son of Priam, 610
 glittering in his armor like the sun astride the skies,
 exultant, laughing aloud, his fast feet sped him on.
 Quickly he overtook his brother, noble Hector
 still lingering, slow to turn from the spot

where he had just confided in his wife . . .
Magnificent Paris spoke first: “Dear brother,
look at me, holding you back in all your speed—
dragging my feet, coming to you so late,
and you told me to be quick!”

A flash of his helmet as Hector shot back, 620
“Impossible man! How could anyone fair and just
underrate your work in battle? You’re a good soldier.
But you hang back of your own accord, refuse to fight.
And that, that’s why the heart inside me aches
when I hear our Trojans heap contempt on you,
the men who bear such struggles all for you.

Come,

now for attack! We’ll set all this to rights,
someday, if Zeus will ever let us raise
the winebowl of freedom high in our halls,
high to the gods of cloud and sky who live forever— 630
once we drive these Argives geared for battle out of Troy!”



Patroclus Fights and Dies

So they fought to the death around that benched beaked ship
 as Patroclus reached Achilles, his great commander,
 and wept warm tears like a dark spring running down
 some desolate rock face, its shaded currents flowing.
 And the brilliant runner Achilles saw him coming,
 filled with pity and spoke out winging words:
 "Why in tears, Patroclus?

Like a girl, a baby running after her mother,
 begging to be picked up, and she tugs her skirts,
 holding her back as she tries to hurry off—all tears,
 fawning up at her, till she takes her in her arms . . .
 That's how you look, Patroclus, streaming live tears.
 But why? Some news for the Myrmidons, news for me?
 Some message from Phthia that you alone have heard?
 They tell me Menoetius, Actor's son, is still alive.

and Peleus, Aeacus' son, lives on among his Myrmidons—
 if both our fathers had died, we'd have some cause for grief.
 Or weeping over the Argives, are you? Seeing them die
 against the hollow ships, repaid for their offenses?
 Out with it now! Don't harbor it deep inside you.
 We must share it all.”

20

With a wrenching groan
 you answered your friend, Patroclus O my rider:
 “Achilles, son of Peleus, greatest of the Achaeans,
 spare me your anger, please—
 such heavy blows have overwhelmed the troops.
 Our former champions, all laid up in the ships,
 all are hit by arrows or run through by spears.
 There's powerful Diomedes brought down by an archer,
 Odysseus wounded, and Agamemnon too, the famous spearman,
 and Eurypylos took an arrow-shot in the thigh . . .
 Healers are working over them, using all their drugs,
 trying to bind the wounds—

30

But *you* are intractable, Achilles!
 Pray god such anger never seizes *me*, such rage you nurse.
 Cursed in your own courage! What good will a man,
 even one in the next generation, get from you
 unless you defend the Argives from disaster?

You heart of iron! He was not your father,
 the horseman Peleus—Thetis was not your mother.
 Never. The salt gray sunless ocean gave you birth
 and the towering blank rocks—your temper's so relentless.
 But still, if down deep some prophecy makes you balk,
 some doom your noble mother revealed to you from Zeus,
 well and good: at least send *me* into battle, quickly.
 Let the whole Myrmidon army follow my command—
 I might bring some light of victory to our Argives!
 And give me your own fine armor to buckle on my back,
 so the Trojans might take *me* for you, Achilles, yes,
 hold off from attack, and Achaea's fighting sons
 get second wind, exhausted as they are . . .

40

Breathing room in war is all too brief.
 We're fresh, unbroken. The enemy's battle-weary—

50

we could roll those broken Trojans back to Troy,
clear of the ships and shelters!"

So he pleaded,

lost in his own great innocence . . .

condemned to beg for his own death and brutal doom.

And moved now to his depths, the famous runner cried,

"No, no, my prince, Patroclus, what are you saying?

Prophecies? None that touch me. None I know of.

No doom my noble mother revealed to me from Zeus,

just this terrible pain that wounds me to the quick—

when one man attempts to plunder a man his equal,

to commandeer a prize, exulting so in his own power.

That's the pain that wounds me, suffering such humiliation.

That girl—the sons of Achaea picked her as my prize,

and I'd sacked a walled city, won her with my spear

but right from my grasp he tears her, mighty Agamemnon,

that son of Atreus! Treating me like some vagabond,

some outcast stripped of all my rights . . .

60

Enough.

Let bygones be bygones now. Done is done.

How on earth can a man rage on forever?

Still, by god, I said I would not relax my anger,

not till the cries and carnage reached my own ships.

So you, you strap my splendid armor on your back,

you lead our battle-hungry Myrmidons into action!—

if now, in fact, the black cloud of the Trojans

blasts down on the ships with full gale force,

our backs to the breaking surf but clinging still

to a cramped strip of land—the Argives, lost.

The whole city of Troy comes trampling down on us,

daring, wild—why? They cannot see the brow of my helmet

flash before their eyes—Oh they'd soon run for their lives

and choke the torrent-beds of the field with all their corpses

if only the mighty Agamemnon met me with respect:

now, as it is, they're fighting round our camp!

No spear rages now in the hand of Diomedes,

keen to save the Argives from disaster . . .

I can't even hear the battle cry of Agamemnon

70

80

break from his hated skull. But it's man-killing Hector
calling his Trojans on, his war cries crashing round me,
savage cries of his Trojans sweeping the whole plain,
victors bringing the Argive armies to their knees.

90

Even so, Patroclus, fight disaster off the ships,
fling yourself at the Trojans full force—
before they gut our hulls with leaping fire
and tear away the beloved day of our return.
But take this command to heart—obey it to the end.
So you can win great honor, great glory for me
in the eyes of all the Argive ranks, and they,
they'll send her back, my lithe and lovely girl,
and top it off with troves of glittering gifts.

100

Once you have whipped the enemy from the fleet
you must come back, Patroclus. Even if Zeus
the thundering lord of Hera lets you seize your glory,
you must not burn for war against these Trojans,
madmen lusting for battle—not without *me*—
you will only make *my* glory that much less . . .
You must not, lost in the flush and fire of triumph,
slaughtering Trojans outright, drive your troops to Troy—
what if one of the gods who never die comes down
from Olympus heights to intervene in battle?

110

The deadly Archer loves his Trojans dearly.
No, you must turn back—
soon as you bring the light of victory to the ships. |
Let the rest of them cut themselves to pieces on the plain!
Oh would to god—Father Zeus, Athena and lord Apollo—
not one of all these Trojans could flee his death, not one,
no Argive either, but we could stride from the slaughter
so we could bring Troy's hallowed crown of towers
toppling down around us—you and I alone!"

And so the comrades roused each other now,
But Ajax could hold his post on the decks no longer.
He was overwhelmed by the latest salvos, driven back
by the will of Zeus and the fearless Trojan spearmen
hurling blows nonstop—a terrific din at his temples,

120

his shining helmet clashing under repeated blows,
 relentless blows beating his forged cheek-irons.
 And the joint of his left shoulder ached with labor,
 forever bracing his huge burnished shield rock-steady,
 but they could not wrench it loose from round his body
 for all their pelting weapons. Again and again
 he fought for breath, gasping, bathed in sweat
 rivering down his body, his limbs soaked and sleek . . .
 where could he find some breathing room in battle?
 Wherever he looked, pains heaped on pains.

130

Sing to me now,
 you Muses, you who hold Olympus' vaulting halls,
 how fire was first pitched on Achaea's ships!

Hector lunged at Ajax toe-to-toe,
 hacked his ash-wood pike with a heavy sword
 and striking the socket just behind the point
 he slashed the head clean off, leaving the shaft,
 the lopped stump dangling in Ajax' fist, useless,
 bronze head bounding away, clanging along the ground.
 And deep in his heart brave Ajax knew and shuddered—
 here was work of the gods, thundering Zeus on high,
 cutting him off from battle, dashing all his plans,
 Zeus, determined to grant the Trojans triumph now.
 So Ajax drew back, out of range, and then—
 they flung their tireless fire at a fast trim ship.
 She was up in flames at once, engulfed in quenchless fire,
 in a flash the blaze went swirling round the stern
 and Achilles slapped his thighs and urged Patroclus,
 "To arms—Patroclus, prince and master horseman!
 I can see the blaze go roaring up the ships.
 They *must* not destroy them. No escape-route then.
 Quick, strap on my gear—I'll rouse the troops."

140

150

That was all,
 and Patroclus armed himself in Achilles' gleaming bronze.
 First he wrapped his legs with the well-made greaves,
 fastened behind the heels with silver ankle-clasps,
 next he strapped the breastplate round his chest,

blazoned with stars—swift Achilles' own— 160
then over his shoulder Patroclus slung the sword,
the fine bronze blade with its silver-studded hilt,
and then the shield-strap and the sturdy, massive shield
and over his powerful head he set the well-forged helmet,
the horsehair crest atop it tossing, bristling terror,
and he took two rugged spears that fit his grip.
And Achilles' only weapon Patroclus did not take
was the great man's spear, weighted, heavy, tough.
No other Achaean fighter could heft that shaft,
only Achilles had the skill to wield it well: 170
Pelian ash it was, a gift to his father Peleus
presented by Chiron once, hewn on Pelion's crest
to be the death of heroes.

Now the war-team.

Patroclus ordered Automedon to yoke them quickly—
a man he honored next to Achilles breaker of men,
always firmest in battle, nerved to wait the call.
So at his command Automedon yoked the horses,
the rapid stallions Roan Beauty and Dapple,
the team that raced the gales, magnificent team
the storm-wind filly Lightfoot foaled for the West Wind, 180
grazing the lush green grass along the Ocean's tides.
And into the traces he ran the purebred Bold Dancer—
Achilles seized him once when he stormed Eetion's city,
a mortal war-horse pacing immortal horses now.

Prince Achilles, ranging his ranks of Myrmidons,
arrayed them along the shelters, all in armor.
Hungry as wolves that rend and bolt raw flesh,
hearts filled with battle-frenzy that never dies—
off on the cliffs, ripping apart some big antlered stag
they gorge on the kill till all their jaws drip red with blood, 190
then down in a pack they lope to a pooling, dark spring,
their lean sharp tongues lapping the water's surface,
belching bloody meat, but the fury, never shaken,
builds inside their chests though their glutton bellies burst—
so wild the Myrmidon captains, Myrmidon field commanders

swarming round Achilles' dauntless friend-in-arms.
 And there in the midst Achilles stood like the god of war,
 urging his charioteers and fighters bracing shields.

There were fifty fast black ships that bore his troops
 when Achilles dear to Zeus sailed east for Troy. 200

Fifty fighters aboard each, manning the oarlocks,
 five captains he named, entrusted with command,
 but he himself in his martial power ruled them all . . .

The first battalion was led by Menesthius bright in bronze,
 son of Spercheus River swelled by the rains of Zeus
 and born by the lovely Polydora, Peleus' daughter,
 when a girl and the god of a tireless river bedded down.
 But they called him the son of Borus, Perieres' son
 who showered the girl with countless bridal gifts,
 his wedded bride in the sight of all the world. 210

The next battalion was led by fighting Eudorus,
 born out of wedlock too. Phylas' daughter,
 Polymela the gorgeous dancer bore the man
 when irresistible Hermes, Hermes the giant-killer
 lusted for her once—she ravished the god's bright eyes,
 swaying among the dancers singing goddess Artemis
 with arrow of gold and cry that halloos the hunt.
 And straightway up to her chamber Hermes climbed,
 the Healer, in secret, lay in her arms in love
 and the woman bore the god a radiant son, Eudorus— 220
 lightning on his feet and a crack man of war.

But soon as the Lady of Labor's birthing pangs
 brought him to light and he saw the blaze of day,
 Actor's majestic son the powerful lord Echeclus
 led her home to his house with troves of bridal gifts
 while old King Phylas reared the boy with kindness,
 tending, embracing the young Eudorus like a son.

The third battalion was led by brave Pisander,
 Maemalus' son, who outfought them all with spears,
 all the Myrmidons after Achilles' friend Patroclus. 230

The fourth was led by the old horseman Phoenix,
 Alcimedon led the fifth, Laerces' gallant son.

But soon as Achilles mustered all battalions,
 positioned in battle-order led by captains,
 he imposed this stern command on all his troops:
 "Myrmidons! Not one of you dare forget those threats
 you hurled from the fast trim ships against the Trojans
 all the while I raged, and I was the one you blamed,
 down to the last fighter: 'Brutal son of Peleus—
 your mother nursed you on gall! Merciless, iron man—
 confining your own men to the ships against their will!
 So home we go in those ships and cut the seas again,
 since now such deadly anger strikes our captain.'

240

Denouncing *me*—

my comrades, clustered together, always grumbling.
 Well, here's a tremendous work of battle, look,
 blazing before your eyes
 and just the sort you longed for all those days.
 So each man tense with courage—fight the Trojans down!"

That was the cry that fired each soldier's heart.
 Hearing the king's command the ranks pulled closer,
 tight as a mason packs a good stone wall,
 blocks on granite blocks for a storied house
 that fights the ripping winds—crammed so close
 the crested helmets, the war-shields bulging, jutting,
 buckler-to-buckler, helm-to-helm, man-to-man massed tight
 and the horsehair crests on glittering helmet horns brushed
 as they tossed their heads, the battalions bulked so dense.
 And out before them all, two men took battle-stations,
 Patroclus and Automedon, seized with a single fury
 to fight in the comrades' vanguard, far in front.

250

260

But Achilles strode back to his shelter now
 and opened the lid of the princely inlaid sea chest
 that glistening-footed Thetis stowed in his ship to carry,
 filled to the brim with war-shirts, windproof cloaks
 and heavy fleecy rugs. And there it rested . . .
 his handsome, well-wrought cup. No other man
 would drink the shining wine from its glowing depths.

nor would Achilles pour the wine to any other god,
 none but Father Zeus. Lifting it from the chest
 he purified it with sulphur crystals first 270
 then rinsed it out with water running clear,
 washed his hands and filled it bright with wine.
 And then, taking a stand before his lodge, he prayed,
 pouring the wine to earth and scanning the high skies
 and the god who loves the lightning never missed a word:
 "King Zeus—Pelasgian Zeus, lord of Dodona's holy shrine,
 dwelling far away, brooding over Dodona's bitter winters!
 Your prophets dwelling round you, Zeus, the Selli
 sleeping along the ground with unwashed feet . . .
 If you honored me last time and heard my prayer 280
 and rained destruction down on all Achaea's ranks,
 now, once more, I beg you, bring my prayer to pass!
 I myself hold out on shore with the beached ships here
 but I send my comrade forth to war with troops of Myrmidons—
 Launch glory along with him, high lord of thunder, Zeus!
 Fill his heart with courage—so even Hector learns
 if Patroclus has the skill to fight his wars alone,
 my friend-in-arms, or his hands can rage unvanquished
 only when *I* go wading in and face the grind of battle.
 But once he repels the roaring onslaught from the ships 290
 let him come back to me and our fast fleet—unharméd—
 with all my armor round him, all our comrades
 fighting round my friend!"

So Achilles prayed
 and Zeus in all his wisdom heard those prayers.
 One prayer the Father granted, the other he denied:
 Patroclus would drive the onslaught off the ships—
 that much Zeus granted, true,
 but denied him safe and sound return from battle.
 Once Achilles had poured the wine and prayed to Zeus,
 he returned to his shelter, stowed the cup in the chest 300
 then took his stand outside, his spirit yearning still
 to watch Achaeans and Trojans struggle to the death.

Myrmidons,
 battalions ranged in armor with greathearted Patroclus,

moving out now, the fury bursting inside them,
suddenly charged the Trojans—
they swarmed forth like wasps from a roadside nest
when boys have made it their sport to set them seething,
day after day tormenting them round their wayside hive—
idiot boys! they make a menace for every man in sight.
Any innocent traveler passing them on that road
can stir them accidentally—up in arms in a flash,
all in a swarm come pouring, each one raging down
to fight for home and children—

310

Such frenzy seized their hearts,
Myrmidons pouring out of the ships, ceaseless shouts rising
and over them all Patroclus' war cries rousing comrades:
"Myrmidons! Brothers-in-arms of Peleus' son Achilles!
Fight like men, my friends, call up your battle-fury!
Now we must win high honor for Peleus' royal son,
far the greatest fighter among the Argive fleet,
and we who fight beside him the bravest troops—
so even mighty Atrides can see how mad he was
to disgrace Achilles, the best of the Achaeans!"

320

He closed with a shout and fired each fighter's heart
and down in a mass they launched against the Trojans,
ships around them echoing back their shattering cries.

The Trojans, soon as they saw Menoetius' gallant son,
himself and his loyal driver flare in brazen gear—
all their courage quaked, their columns buckled,
thinking swift Achilles had tossed to the winds
his hard rage that held him back by the ships
and chosen friendship toward the Argives now.
Each Trojan soldier glancing left and right—
how could he run from sudden, plunging death?

330

Patroclus was first to hurl his glinting spear,
right at the center mass—the fighters milling
round the stern of Protesilaus' blazing ship—
and hit Pyraechmes, firebrand who led the Paeonians,

the master riders from Amydon, from Axius' broad currents.
 Patroclus slashed his right shoulder and down he went,
 his back slamming the dust with a jolting groan 340
 as companions panicked round him—brave Paeonians—
 Patroclus whipped the terror in all their hearts
 when he killed the chief who topped them all in battle.
 He rode them off the ships, he quenched the leaping fire,
 leaving Protesilaus' hulk half-burnt but upright still
 and the Trojans scattered back with high, shrill cries.
 The Argives poured against them, back by the hollow hulls,
 the din of battle incessant—

an Argive breakthrough—

bright as the moment Zeus the lord of lightning moves
 from a craggy mountain ridge a storm cloud massing dense 350
 and all the lookout peaks stand out and the jutting cliffs
 and the steep ravines and down from the high heavens bursts
 the boundless bright air . . . So now the Argives
 drove the ravening fire clear of the warships,
 winning a little breathing room, not much,
 no real halt to the buck-and-rush of battle.
 For despite the surge of the Argives primed for war
 the Trojans were still not wheeling round in headlong rout
 away from the black hulls. Forced back from them, true,
 they braced for battle still and made a stand.

Deadlock:

360

there man killed man in the pell-mell clash of battle,
 captains going at captains. Brave Patroclus first—
 just as Areilycus swerved in sudden flight
 he gored him in the hip with a slashing spear
 and the bronze lancehead hammered through his flesh,
 the shaft splintering bone as he pitched face-first,
 pounding the ground—

And veteran Menelaus wounded Thoas,
 raking his chest where the shield-rim left it bare,
 and loosed his limbs—

And Amphiclus went for Meges

but Meges saw him coming and got in first by far,
 spearing him up the thigh where it joins the body,

370

the spot where a man's muscle bunches thickest:
 the tough sinews shredded around the weapon's point
 as the dark swirled down his eyes—

Nestor's sons on attack!

Antilochus struck Atymnius hard with a whetted spear,
 the bronze ripping into his flank and clean through—
 he crashed at his feet—

But Maris charged Antilochus,
 sweeping in with his lance, enraged for his brother,
 planted himself before his corpse but Thrasymedes,
 quick as a god, beat him to it—he stabbed
 before Maris stabbed—no miss! right in the shoulder,
 the Argive's spearpoint cracked through the bony socket,
 shearing away the tendons, wrenched the whole arm out
 and down he thundered, darkness blanked his eyes.
 So these two brothers, laid low by the two brothers,
 dropped to the world of night: Sarpedon's stalwart cohorts,
 spearmen sons of Amisodarus—he who bred the Chimaera,
 the grim monster that sent so many men to death.

380

There—quick Oilean Ajax rushed Cleobulus,
 took him alive, stumbling blind in the rout
 but took his life at once, snapped his strength
 with a sword that hewed his neckbone—up to the hilt
 so the whole blade ran hot with blood, and red death
 came flooding down his eyes, and the strong force of fate.
 And now in a breakneck charge Peneleos closed with Lycon—
 they'd missed each other with spears, two wasted casts,
 so now both clashed with swords. Lycon, flailing,
 chopped the horn of Peneleos' horsehair-crested helmet
 but round the socket the sword-blade smashed to bits—
 just as Peneleos hacked his neck below the ear
 and the blade sank clean through, nothing held
 but a flap of skin, the head swung loose to the side
 as Lycon slumped down to the ground . . . There—
 at a dead run Meriones ran down Acamas, Acamas
 mounting behind his team, and gouged his right shoulder—
 he pitched from the car and the mist whirled down his eyes.
 Idomeneus skewered Erymas straight through the mouth,

390

400

the merciless brazen spearpoint raking through,
up under the brain to split his glistening skull—
teeth shattered out, both eyes brimmed to the lids
with a gush of blood and both nostrils spurting,
mouth gaping, blowing convulsive sprays of blood
and death's dark cloud closed down around his corpse.

410

So in a rush each Argive captain killed his man.
As ravenous wolves come swooping down on lambs or kids
to snatch them away from right amidst their flock—all lost
when a careless shepherd leaves them straggling down the hills
and quickly spotting a chance the wolf pack picks them off,
no heart for the fight—so the Achaeans mauled the Trojans.
Shrieking flight the one thing on the Trojans' minds,
they forgot their fighting-fury . . .

420

Great Ajax now—forever aiming at Hector,
trying to strike his helmet flashing bronze
but Hector was far too seasoned, combat-tested,
broad shoulders hunching under his bull's-hide shield,
his eyes peeled for a whistling shaft or thudding spear.
Hector knew full well the tide of battle had turned
but still stood firm, defending die-hard comrades.

Wild as a storm cloud moving off Olympus into heaven
out of a clear blue sky when Zeus brings cyclones on—
so wild the rout, the cries that came from the ships
as back through the trench they ran, formations wrecked.
And Hector? Hector's speeding horses swept him away,
armor and all, leaving his men to face their fate,
Trojans trapped but struggling on in the deep trench.
Hundreds of plunging war-teams dragging chariots down,
snapping the yoke-poles, ditched their masters' cars
and Patroclus charged them, heart afire for the kill,
shouting his Argives forward—"Slaughter Trojans!"
Cries of terror breaking as Trojans choked all roads,
their lines ripped to pieces, up from under the hoofs
a dust storm swirling into the clouds as rearing horses

430

440

broke into stride again and galloped back to Troy,
 leaving ships and shelters in their wake. Patroclus—
 wherever he saw the biggest masses dashing before him,
 there he steered, plowing ahead with savage cries
 and fighters tumbled out of their chariots headfirst,
 crushed under their axles, war-cars crashing over, yes,
 but straight across the trench went his own careering team
 at a superhuman bound. Magnificent racing stallions,
 gifts of the gods to Peleus, shining immortal gifts,
 straining breakneck on as Patroclus' high courage
 urged him against Prince Hector, keen for the kill
 but Hector's veering horses swept him clear.

450

And all in an onrush dark as autumn days
 when the whole earth flattens black beneath a gale,
 when Zeus flings down his pelting, punishing rains—
 up in arms, furious, storming against those men
 who brawl in the courts and render crooked judgments,
 men who throw all rights to the winds with no regard
 for the vengeful eyes of the gods—so all their rivers
 crest into flood spate, ravines overflowing cut the hilltops
 off into lonely islands, the roaring flood tide rolling down
 to the storm-torn sea, headlong down from the foothills
 washes away the good plowed work of men—

460

Rampaging so,

the gasping Trojan war-teams hurtled on.

Patroclus—

soon as the fighter cut their front battalions off
 he swerved back to pin them against the warships,
 never letting the Trojans stream back up to Troy
 as they struggled madly on—but there mid-field
 between the ships, the river and beetling wall
 Patroclus kept on sweeping in, hacking them down,
 making them pay the price for Argives slaughtered.
 There, Pronous first to fall—a glint of the spear
 and Patroclus tore his chest left bare by the shield-rim,
 loosed his knees and the man went crashing down.
 And next he went for Thestor the son of Enops
 cowering, crouched in his fine polished chariot,

470

crazed with fear, and the reins flew from his grip—
Patroclus rising beside him stabbed his right jawbone, 480
ramming the spearhead square between his teeth so hard
he hooked him by that spearhead over the chariot-rail,
hoisted, dragged the Trojan out as an angler perched
on a jutting rock ledge drags some fish from the sea,
some noble catch, with line and glittering bronze hook.
So with the spear Patroclus gaffed him off his car,
his mouth gaping round the glittering point
and flipped him down facefirst,
dead as he fell, his life breath blown away.
And next he caught Erylaus closing, lunging in— 490
he flung a rock and it struck between his eyes
and the man's whole skull split in his heavy helmet,
down the Trojan slammed on the ground, head-down
and courage-shattering Death engulfed his corpse.
Then in a blur of kills, Amphoterus, Erymas, Epaltes,
Tlepolemus son of Damastor, and Echius and Pyris,
Ipheus and Euippus and Polymelus the son of Argeas—
he crowded corpse on corpse on the earth that rears us all.

But now Sarpedon, watching his comrades drop and die,
war-shirts billowing free as Patroclus killed them, 500
dressed his godlike Lycians down with a harsh shout:
"Lycians, where's your pride? Where are you running?
Now be fast to attack! I'll take him on myself,
see who he is who routs us, wreaking havoc against us—
cutting the legs from under squads of good brave men."

With that he leapt from his chariot fully armed
and hit the ground and Patroclus straight across,
as soon as he saw him, leapt from his car too.
As a pair of crook-clawed, hook-beaked vultures
swoop to fight, screaming above some jagged rock— 510
so with their battle cries they rushed each other there.
And Zeus the son of Cronus with Cronus' twisting ways,
filling with pity now to see the two great fighters,

said to Hera, his sister and his wife, ¹“My cruel fate . . .
 my Sarpedon, the man I love the most, my own son—
 doomed to die at the hands of Menoetius’ son Patroclus.
 My heart is torn in two as I try to weigh all this.
 Shall I pluck him up, now, while he’s still alive
 and set him down in the rich green land of Lycia,
 far from the war at Troy and all its tears?
 Or beat him down at Patroclus’ hands at last?”

520

But Queen Hera, her eyes wide, protested strongly:
 “Dread majesty, son of Cronus—what are you saying?
 A man, a mere mortal, his doom sealed long ago?
 You’d set him free from all the pains of death?
 Do as you please, Zeus . . .
 but none of the deathless gods will ever praise you.
 And I tell you this—take it to heart, I urge you—
 if you send Sarpedon home, living still, beware!
 Then surely some other god will want to sweep
 his own son clear of the heavy fighting too.
 Look down. Many who battle round King Priam’s
 mighty walls are sons of the deathless gods—
 you will inspire lethal anger in them all.

530

No,
 dear as he is to you, and your heart grieves for him,
 leave Sarpedon there to die in the brutal onslaught,
 beaten down at the hands of Menoetius’ son Patroclus.
 But once his soul and the life force have left him,
 send Death to carry him home, send soothing Sleep,
 all the way till they reach the broad land of Lycia.
 There his brothers and countrymen will bury the prince
 with full royal rites, with mounded tomb and pillar.
 These are the solemn honors owed the dead.”

540

So she pressed
 and Zeus the father of men and gods complied at once.
 But he showered tears of blood that drenched the earth,
 showers in praise of him, his own dear son,
 the man Patroclus was just about to kill
 on Troy’s fertile soil, far from his fatherland.

Now as the two came closing on each other
 Patroclus suddenly picked off Thrasymelus 550
 the famous driver, the aide who flanked Sarpedon—
 he speared him down the guts and loosed his limbs.
 But Sarpedon hurled next with a flashing lance
 and missed his man but he hit the horse Bold Dancer,
 stabbing his right shoulder and down the stallion went,
 screaming his life out, shrieking down in the dust
 as his life breath winged away. And the paired horses
 reared apart—a raspy creak of the yoke, the reins flying,
 fouled as the trace horse thrashed the dust in death-throes.
 But the fine spearman Automedon found a cure for that— 560
 drawing his long sharp sword from his sturdy thigh
 he leapt with a stroke to cut the trace horse free—
 it worked. The team righted, pulled at the reins
 and again both fighters closed with savage frenzy,
 dueling now to the death.

Again Sarpedon missed—
 over Patroclus' left shoulder his spearhead streaked,
 it never touched his body. Patroclus hurled next,
 the bronze launched from his hand—no miss, a mortal hit.
 He struck him right where the midriff packs the pounding heart
 and down Sarpedon fell as an oak or white poplar falls 570
 or towering pine that shipwrights up on a mountain
 hew down with whetted axes for sturdy ship timber—
 so he stretched in front of his team and chariot,
 sprawled and roaring, clawing the bloody dust.
 As the bull a marauding lion cuts from the herd,
 tawny and greathearted among the shambling cattle,
 dies bellowing under the lion's killing jaws—
 so now Sarpedon, captain of Lycia's shieldsmen,
 died at Patroclus' hands and died raging still,
 crying out his beloved comrade's name: "Glaucus— 580
 oh dear friend, dear fighter, soldier's soldier!
 Now is the time to prove yourself a spearman,
 a daring man of war—now, if you are brave,
 make grueling battle your one consuming passion.

First find Lycia's captains, range the ranks,
 spur them to fight and shield Sarpedon's body.
 Then you, Glaucus, you fight for me with bronze!
 You'll hang your head in shame—every day of your life—
 if the Argives strip my armor here at the anchored ships
 where I have gone down fighting. Hold on, full force—
 spur all our men to battle!"

590

Death cut him short.

The end closed in around him, swirling down his eyes,
 choking off his breath. Patroclus planted a heel
 against his chest, wrenched the spear from his wound
 and the midriff came out with it—so he dragged out both
 the man's life breath and the weapon's point together.
 Close by, the Myrmidons clung to the panting stallions
 straining to bolt away, free of their masters' chariot.

But grief came over Glaucus, hearing his comrade's call.

His heart was racing—what could he do to help him?
 Wounded himself, he gripped his right arm hard,
 aching where Teucer's arrow had hit him squarely,
 assaulting the Argive wall, when Teucer saved his men.
 Glaucus cried a prayer to the distant deadly Archer:
 "Hear me, Lord Apollo! Wherever you are now—
 in Lycia's rich green country or here in Troy,
 wherever on earth, you can hear a man in pain,
 you have that power, and pain comes on me now.
 Look at this ugly wound—

600

my whole arm rings with the stabbing pangs,
 the blood won't clot, my shoulder's a dead weight.
 I can't take up my spear, can't hold it steady—
 no wading into enemy ranks to fight it out . . .
 and our bravest man is dead, Sarpedon, Zeus's son—
 did Zeus stand by him? Not even his own son!
 I beg you, Apollo, heal this throbbing wound,
 hush the pain now, lend me power in battle—
 so I can rally our Lycians, drive them into war
 and fight to save my comrade's corpse myself."

610

So Glaucus prayed and Apollo heard his prayer. 620
He stopped the pains at once, stanching the dark blood
in his throbbing wound and filled his heart with courage.
And Glaucus sensed it all and the man glowed with joy
that the mighty god had heard his prayer so quickly.
First he hurried to spur his Lycian captains on,
ranging his own ranks, to fight around Sarpedon,
then he ran for the Trojan lines with long strides.
He found Polydamas, Panthous' son, and Prince Agenor
and reaching Aeneas and Hector helmed in bronze,
shoulder-to-shoulder let his challenge fly: 630
"Hector, you've wiped your allies from your mind!
And all for you, Hector, far from their loved ones,
far from native land they bleed their lives away.
But you won't lift a hand to fight beside them.
There lies Sarpedon, lord of Lycia's shieldsmen,
who defended his realm with just decrees and power—
Ares has cut him down with Patroclus' brazen spear.
Quick, my friends, stand by him! Cringe with shame
at the thought they'll strip his gear and maim his corpse—
these Myrmidons, seething for all the Argive troops we killed, 640
we speared to death against their fast trim ships!"

Hard grief came sweeping over the Trojans' heads—
unbearable, irrepressible. He was their city's bastion,
always, even though he came from foreign parts,
and a mass of allies marched at his command
but he excelled them all in battle, always.
So now they went at the Argives, out for blood,
and furious for Sarpedon Hector swung them round.
But the Argives surged to Patroclus' savage spirit—
he spurred the Aeantes first, both ablaze for battle: 650
"Ajax, Ajax! Come—now thrill to fight as before,
brave among the brave, but now be braver still!
Their captain's down, the first to storm our wall,
the great Sarpedon. If only we could seize his body,
mutilate him, shame him, tear his gear from his back
and any comrade of his who tries to shield his corpse—

bring that enemy down with ruthless bronze!"

Urging so

but his men already burned to drive the Trojans off.

And both armies now, pulling their lines tighter,

Trojans and Lycians, Myrmidons and Achaeans

660

closed around the corpse to lunge in battle—

terrible war cries, stark clashing of armored men.

And across the onslaught Zeus swept murderous night

to make the pitched battle over his own dear son

a brutal, blinding struggle.

Here at the first assault

the Trojans shouldered back the fiery-eyed Achaeans—

a Myrmidon had been hit, and not their least man,

dauntless Agacles' son, renowned Epigeus . . .

He ruled Budion's fortress town in the old days

but then, having killed some highborn cousin, fled

670

to Peleus and glistening Thetis, begged for his own life

and they sent him off with Achilles, breaker of men,

cast to stallion-country to fight and die in Troy.

He had just grasped the corpse

when shining Hector smashed his head with a rock

and his whole skull split in his massive helmet—

down he slammed on Sarpedon's body, facefirst

and courage-shattering Death engulfed his corpse.

Grief for his dead companion seized Patroclus now,

he tore through frontline fighters swift as a hawk

680

diving to scatter crows and fear-struck starlings—

straight at the Lycians, Patroclus O my rider,

straight at the pressing Trojan ranks you swooped,

enraged at your comrade's death! and struck Sthenelaus,

Ithaemenes' favorite son—a big rock to the neck

snapped the tendons strung to the skull's base.

So the front gave ground and flashing Hector too,

though only as far as a long slim spear can fly

when a man tests his hurling strength in the games

or in war when enemy fighters close to crush his life—

690

so far the Trojans gave as the Argives drove them back.

But Glaucus was first, lord of Lycia's shieldsmen now,

the first to turn and he killed the gallant Bathycles,
 Chalcon's prize son who had made his home in Hellas,
 excelling the Myrmidons all in wealth and fortune.
 Now, just as the man was about to catch Glaucus
 Glaucus suddenly spun and struck, he stabbed his chest,
 ripped him down with a crash. A heavy blow to the Argives,
 one of the brave ones down. A great joy to the Trojans,
 massing packs of them swarming round the corpse 700
 but Achaean forces never slacked their drive,
 their juggernaut fury bore them breakneck on.
 And there—Meriones killed a Trojan captain,
 Laogonus, daring son of Onetor, priest of Zeus,
 Idaean Zeus, and his land revered him like a god—
 Meriones gouged him under the jaw and ear, his spirit
 flew from his limbs and the hateful darkness gripped him.
 Just then Aeneas hurled his brazen spear at Meriones,
 hoping to hit the man as he charged behind his shield.
 But he eyed Aeneas straight on, he dodged the bronze, 710
 ducking down with a quick lunge, and behind his back
 the heavy spearshaft plunged and stuck in the earth,
 the butt end quivering into the air till suddenly
 rugged Ares snuffed its fury out, dead still.
 The weapon shaking, planted fast in the ground,
 his whole arm's power poured in a wasted shot,
 Aeneas flared in anger, shouting out, "Meriones—
 great dancer as you are, my spear would have stopped
 your dancing days for good if only I had hit you!"

The hardy spearman Meriones shot back, "Aeneas— 720
 great man of war as you are, you'll find it hard
 to quench the fire of every man who fights you.
 You too are made of mortal stuff, I'd say. And I,
 if I'd lanced your guts with bronze—strong as you are
 and cocksure of your hands—you'd give me glory now,
 you'd give your life to the famous horseman Death!"

But Patroclus nerved for battle dressed him down:
 "Meriones, brave as you are, why bluster on this way?

Trust me, my friend, you'll never force the Trojans
 back from this corpse with a few stinging taunts— 730
 Earth will bury many a man before that. Come—
 the proof of battle is action, proof of words, debate.
 No time for speeches now, it's time to fight."

Breaking off, he led the way as Meriones followed,
 staunch as a god. And loud as the roar goes up
 when men cut timber deep in the mountain glades
 and the pounding din of axes echoes miles away—
 so the pound and thud of blows came rising up
 from the broad earth, from the trampled paths of war
 and the bronze shields and tough plied hides struck hard 740
 as the swords and two-edged spearheads stabbed against them.
 Not even a hawk-eyed scout could still make out Sarpedon,
 the man's magnificent body covered over head to toe,
 buried under a mass of weapons, blood and dust.
 But they still kept swarming round and round the corpse
 like flies in a sheepfold buzzing over the brimming pails
 in the first spring days when the buckets flood with milk.
 So veteran troops kept swarming round that corpse,
 never pausing—nor did mighty Zeus for a moment
 turn his shining eyes from the clash of battle. 750
 He kept them fixed on the struggling mass forever,
 the Father's spirit churning, thrashing out the ways,
 the numberless ways to cause Patroclus' slaughter . . .
 To kill him too in this present bloody rampage
 over Sarpedon's splendid body? Hector in glory
 cutting Patroclus down with hacking bronze
 then tearing the handsome war-gear off his back?
 Or let him take still more, piling up his kills?
 As Zeus turned things over, that way seemed the best:
 the valiant friend-in-arms of Peleus' son Achilles 760
 would drive the Trojans and Hector helmed in bronze
 back to Troy once more, killing them by platoons—
 and Zeus began with Hector, he made the man a coward.
 Hector leaping back in his chariot, swerving to fly,
 shouted out fresh orders—"Retreat, Trojans, now!"

He knew that Zeus had tipped the scales against him.
 A rout—not even the die-hard Lycians stood their ground,
 they all scattered in panic, down to the last man
 when they saw their royal king speared in the heart,
 Sarpedon sprawled there in the muster of the dead,
 for men by the squad had dropped across his corpse
 once Zeus stretched tight the lethal line of battle.
 So then the Achaeans ripped the armor off his back,
 Sarpedon's gleaming bronze that Menoetius' son
 the brave Patroclus flung in the arms of cohorts
 poised to speed those trophies back to the beaked ships.
 And storming Zeus was stirring up Apollo: "On with it now—
 sweep Sarpedon clear of the weapons, Phoebus my friend,
 and once you wipe the dark blood from his body,
 bear him far from the fighting, off and away,
 and bathe him well in a river's running tides
 and anoint him with deathless oils . . .
 dress his body in deathless, ambrosial robes.
 Then send him on his way with the wind-swift escorts,
 twin brothers Sleep and Death, who with all good speed
 will set him down in the broad green land of Lycia.
 There his brothers and countrymen will bury the prince
 with full royal rites, with mounded tomb and pillar.
 These are the solemn honors owed the dead."

770

780

So he decreed

and Phoebus did not neglect the Father's strong desires.
 Down from Ida's slopes he dove to the bloody field
 and lifting Prince Sarpedon clear of the weapons,
 bore him far from the fighting, off and away,
 and bathed him well in a river's running tides
 and anointed him with deathless oils . . .
 dressed his body in deathless, ambrosial robes
 then sent him on his way with the wind-swift escorts,
 twin brothers Sleep and Death, who with all good speed
 set him down in Lycia's broad green land.

790

But Patroclus,

giving a cry to Automedon whipping on his team,
 Patroclus went for Troy's and Lycia's lines,

800

blind in his fatal frenzy—luckless soldier.
 If only he had obeyed Achilles' strict command
 he might have escaped his doom, the stark night of death.
 But the will of Zeus will always overpower the will of men,
 Zeus who strikes fear in even the bravest man of war
 and tears away his triumph, all in a lightning flash,
 and at other times he will spur a man to battle,
 just as he urged Patroclus' fury now.

Patroclus—

who was the first you slaughtered, who the last
 when the great gods called you down to death? 810
 First Adrestus, then Autonomous, then Echeclus,
 then Perimus, Megas' son, Epistor and Melanippus,
 then in a flurry Elasmus, Mulus and Pylartes—
 he killed them all but the rest were bent on flight.

—
 And then and there the Achaeans might have taken Troy,
 her towering gates toppling under Patroclus' power
 heading the vanguard, storming on with his spear.
 But Apollo took his stand on the massive rampart,
 his mind blazing with death for him but help for Troy. 820
 Three times Patroclus charged the jut of the high wall,
 three times Apollo battered the man and hurled him back,
 the god's immortal hands beating down on the gleaming shield,
 Then at Patroclus' fourth assault like something superhuman,
 the god shrieked down his winging words of terror: "Back—
 Patroclus, Prince, go back! It is not the will of fate
 that the proud Trojans' citadel fall before your spear,
 not even before Achilles—far greater man than you!"

And Patroclus gave ground, backing a good way off,
 clear of the deadly Archer's wrath.

But now Hector, 830

reining his high-strung team at the Scaean Gates,
 debated a moment, waiting . . .
 should he drive back to the rout and soldier on?
 Or call his armies now to rally within the ramparts?

As he turned things over, Apollo stood beside him,
 taking the shape of that lusty rugged fighter
 Asius, an uncle of stallion-breaking Hector,
 a blood brother of Hecuba, son of Dymas
 who lived in Phrygia near Sangarius' rapids.
 Like him, Apollo the son of Zeus incited Hector: 840
 "Hector, why stop fighting? Neglecting your duty!
 If only I outfought *you* as you can outfight *me*,
 I'd soon teach you to shirk your work in war—
 you'd pay the price, I swear. Up with you—fast!
 Lash those pounding stallions straight at Patroclus—
 you might kill him still—Apollo might give you glory!"

And back Apollo strode, a god in the wars of men
 while glorious Hector ordered skilled Cebriones,
 "Flog the team to battle!" Apollo pressed on,
 wading into the ruck, hurling Argives back in chaos 850
 and handing glory to Hector and all the Trojan forces.
 But Hector ignored the Argive masses, killing none,
 he lashed his pounding stallions straight at Patroclus.
 Patroclus, over against him, leapt down from his car
 and hit the ground, his left hand shaking a spear
 and seized with his right a jagged, glittering stone
 his hand could just cover—Patroclus flung it hard,
 leaning into the heave, not backing away from Hector,
 no, and no wasted shot. But he hit his driver—
 a bastard son of famed King Priam, Cebriones 860
 yanking the reins back taut—right between the eyes.
 The sharp stone crushed both brows, the skull caved in
 and both eyes burst from their sockets, dropping down
 in the dust before his feet as the reinsman vaulted,
 plunging off his well-wrought car like a diver—
 Cebriones' life breath left his bones behind
 and you taunted his corpse, Patroclus O my rider:
 "Look what a springy man, a nimble, flashy tumbler!
 Just think what he'd do at sea where the fish swarm—
 why, the man could glut a fleet, diving for oysters!
 Plunging overboard, even in choppy, heaving seas, 870

just as he dives to ground from his war-car now,
Even these Trojans have their tumblers—what a leap!”

And he leapt himself at the fighting driver’s corpse
with the rushing lunge of a lion struck in the chest
as he lays waste pens of cattle—
his own lordly courage about to be his death.
So you sprang at Cebriones, full fury, Patroclus,
as Hector sprang down from his chariot just across
and the two went tussling over the corpse as lions
up on the mountain ridges over a fresh-killed stag— 880
both ravenous, proud and savage—fight it out to the death.
So over the driver here and both claw-mad for battle,
Patroclus son of Menoetius, Hector ablaze for glory
strained to slash each other with ruthless bronze.
Hector seized the corpse’s head, would not let go—
Patroclus clung to a foot and other fighters clashed,
Trojans, Argives, all in a grueling, maiming onset.

As the East and South Winds fight in killer-squalls
deep in a mountain valley thrashing stands of timber, 890
oak and ash and cornel with bark stretched taut and hard
and they whip their long sharp branches against each other,
a deafening roar goes up, the splintered timber crashing—
so Achaeans and Trojans crashed,
hacking into each other, and neither side now
had a thought of flight that would have meant disaster.
Showers of whetted spears stuck fast around Cebriones,
bristling winged arrows whipped from the bowstrings,
huge rocks by the salvo battering shields on shields
as they struggled round the corpse. And there he lay 900
in the whirling dust, overpowered in all his power
and wiped from memory all his horseman’s skills.

So till the sun bestrode the sky at high noon
the weapons hurtled side-to-side and men kept falling.
But once the sun wheeled past the hour for unyoking oxen,
then the Argives mounted a fiercer new attack,

fighting beyond their fates . . .

They dragged the hero Cebriones out from under
 the pelting shafts and Trojans' piercing cries
 and they tore the handsome war-gear off his back 910
 and Patroclus charged the enemy, fired for the kill.
 Three times he charged with the headlong speed of Ares,
 screaming his savage cry, three times he killed nine men.
 Then at the fourth assault Patroclus like something superhuman—
 then, Patroclus, the end of life came blazing up before you,
 yes, the lord Apollo met you there in the heart of battle,
 the god, the terror! Patroclus never saw him coming,
 moving across the deadly rout, shrouded in thick mist
 and on he came against him and looming up behind him now—
 slammed his broad shoulders and back with the god's flat hand 920
 and his eyes spun as Apollo knocked the helmet off his head
 and under his horses' hoofs it tumbled, clattering on
 with its four forged horns and its hollow blank eyes
 and its plumes were all smeared in the bloody dust.
 Forbidden before this to defile its crest in dust,
 it guarded the head and handsome brow of a god,
 a man like a god, Achilles. But now the Father
 gave it over to Hector to guard his head in war
 since Hector's death was closing on him quickly.
 Patroclus though—the spear in his grip was shattered, 930
 the whole of its rugged bronze-shod shadow-casting length
 and his shield with straps and tassels dropped from his shoulders,
 flung down on the ground—and lord Apollo the son of Zeus
 wrenched his breastplate off. Disaster seized him—
 his fine legs buckling—

he stood there, senseless—

And now,

right at his back, close-up, a Dardan fighter speared him
 squarely between the shoulder blades with a sharp lance.
 Panthous' son Euphorbus, the best of his own age
 at spears and a horseman's skill and speed of foot,
 and even in this, his first attack in chariots— 940
 just learning the arts of war—
 he'd brought down twenty drivers off their cars.

He was the first to launch a spear against you,
 Patroclus O my rider, but did not bring you down.
 Yanking out his ashen shaft from your body,
 back he dashed and lost himself in the crowds—
 the man would not stand up to Patroclus here
 in mortal combat, stripped, defenseless as he was.
 Patroclus stunned by the spear and the god's crushing blow
 was weaving back to his own thronging comrades,
 trying to escape death . . .

950

Hector waiting, watching

the greathearted Patroclus trying to stagger free,
 seeing him wounded there with the sharp bronze
 came rushing into him right across the lines
 and rammed his spearshaft home,
 stabbing deep in the bowels, and the brazen point
 went jutting straight out through Patroclus' back.
 Down he crashed—horror gripped the Achaean armies.
 As when some lion overpowers a tireless wild boar
 up on a mountain summit, battling in all their fury
 over a little spring of water, both beasts craving
 to slake their thirst, but the lion beats him down
 with sheer brute force as the boar fights for breath—
 so now with a close thrust Hector the son of Priam
 tore the life from the fighting son of Menoetius,
 from Patroclus who had killed so many men in war,
 and gloried over him, wild winging words: "Patroclus—
 surely you must have thought you'd storm my city down,
 you'd wrest from the wives of Troy their day of freedom,
 drag them off in ships to your own dear fatherland—
 you fool! Rearing in their defense my war-team,
 Hector's horses were charging out to battle,
 galloping, full stretch. And I with my spear,
 Hector, shining among my combat-loving comrades,
 I fight away from them the fatal day—but you,
 the vultures will eat your body raw!

960

970

Poor, doomed . . .

not for all his power could Achilles save you now—
 and how he must have filled your ears with orders

as you went marching out and the hero stayed behind:
 'Now don't come back to the hollow ships, you hear?—
 Patroclus, master horseman—
 not till you've slashed the shirt around his chest
 and soaked it red in the blood of man-killing Hector!
 So he must have commanded—you maniac, you obeyed."

980

Struggling for breath, you answered, Patroclus O my rider,

"Hector! Now is your time to glory to the skies . . .

now the victory is yours.

A gift of the son of Cronus, Zeus—Apollo too—
 they brought me down with all their deathless ease,
they are the ones who tore the armor off my back.

990

Even if twenty Hectors had charged against me—
 they'd all have died here, laid low by my spear.

No, deadly fate in league with Apollo killed me.

From the ranks of men, Euphorbus. You came third,
 and all you could do was finish off my life . . .

One more thing—take it to heart, I urge you—
 you too, you won't live long yourself, I swear.

Already I see them looming up beside you—death
 and the strong force of fate, to bring you down
 at the hands of Aeacus' great royal son . . .

Achilles!"

1000

Death cut him short. The end closed in around him.

Flying free of his limbs

his soul went winging down to the House of Death,

wailing his fate, leaving his manhood far behind,

his young and supple strength. But glorious Hector

taunted Patroclus' body, dead as he was, "Why, Patroclus—

why prophesy my doom, my sudden death? Who knows?—

Achilles the son of sleek-haired Thetis may outrace me—

struck by *my* spear first—and gasp away his life!"

With that he planted a heel against Patroclus' chest,

1010

wrenched his brazen spear from the wound, kicked him over,

flat on his back, free and clear of the weapon.

At once he went for Automedon with that spear—
quick as a god, the aide of swift Achilles—
keen to cut him down but his veering horses
swept him well away—magnificent racing stallions,
gifts of the gods to Peleus, shining immortal gifts.



The Death of Hector

So all through Troy the men who had fled like panicked fawns were wiping off their sweat, drinking away their thirst, leaning along the city's massive ramparts now while Achaean troops, sloping shields to shoulders, closed against the walls. But there stood Hector, shackled fast by his deadly fate, holding his ground, exposed in front of Troy and the Scaean Gates. And now Apollo turned to taunt Achilles:

“Why are you chasing *me*? Why waste your speed?— son of Peleus, you a mortal and I a deathless god. You still don't know that I am immortal, do you?— straining to catch me in your fury! Have you forgotten? There's a war to fight with the Trojans you stampeded. look, they're packed inside their city walls, but you, you've slipped away out here. You can't kill *me*—

10

I can never die—it's not my fate!"

Enraged at that,
 Achilles shouted in mid-stride, "You've blocked my way,
 you distant, deadly Archer, deadliest god of all—
 you made me swerve away from the rampart there.
 Else what a mighty Trojan army had gnawed the dust
 before they could ever straggle through their gates!
 Now you've robbed me of great glory, saved their lives
 with all your deathless ease. Nothing for you to fear,
 no punishment to come. Oh I'd pay you back
 if I only had the power at my command!"

No more words—he dashed toward the city,
 heart racing for some great exploit, rushing on
 like a champion stallion drawing a chariot full tilt,
 sweeping across the plain in easy, tearing strides—
 so Achilles hurtled on, driving legs and knees.

And old King Priam was first to see him coming,
 surging over the plain, blazing like the star
 that rears at harvest, flaming up in its brilliance,—
 far outshining the countless stars in the night sky,
 that star they call Orion's Dog—brightest of all
 but a fatal sign emblazoned on the heavens,
 it brings such killing fever down on wretched men.
 So the bronze flared on his chest as on he raced—
 and the old man moaned, flinging both hands high,
 beating his head and groaning deep he called,
 begging his dear son who stood before the gates,
 unshakable, furious to fight Achilles to the death.
 The old man cried, pitifully, hands reaching out to him,
 "Oh Hector! Don't just stand there, don't, dear child,
 waiting that man's attack—alone, cut off from friends!
 You'll meet your doom at once, beaten down by Achilles,
 so much stronger than you—that hard, headlong man.
 Oh if only the gods loved him as much as I do . . .
 dogs and vultures would eat his fallen corpse at once!—
 with what a load of misery lifted from my spirit.

That man who robbed me of many sons, brave boys,
 cutting them down or selling them off as slaves,
 shipped to islands half the world away . . .
 Even now there are two, Lycaon and Polydorus—
 I cannot find them among the soldiers crowding Troy,
 those sons Laothoë bore me, Laothoë queen of women.
 But if they are still alive in the enemy's camp,
 then we'll ransom them back with bronze and gold.
 We have hoards inside the walls, the rich dowry
 old and famous Altes presented with his daughter. 60
 But if they're dead already, gone to the House of Death,
 what grief to their mother's heart and mine—we gave them life.
 For the rest of Troy, though, just a moment's grief
 unless you too are battered down by Achilles.
 Back, come back! Inside the walls, my boy!
 Rescue the men of Troy and the Trojan women—
 don't hand the great glory to Peleus' son,
 bereft of your own sweet life yourself.

Pity me too!—

still in my senses, true, but a harrowed, broken man
 marked out by doom—past the threshold of old age . . . 70
 and Father Zeus will waste me with a hideous fate,
 and after I've lived to look on so much horror!
 My sons laid low, my daughters dragged away
 and the treasure-chambers looted, helpless babies
 hurled to the earth in the red barbarity of war . . .
 my sons' wives hauled off by the Argives' bloody hands!
 And I, I last of all—the dogs before my doors
 will eat me raw, once some enemy brings me down
 with his sharp bronze sword or spits me with a spear,
 wrenching the life out of my body, yes, the very dogs 80
 I bred in my own halls to share my table, guard my gates—
 mad, rabid at heart they'll lap their master's blood
 and loll before my doors.

Ah for a young man
 all looks fine and noble if he goes down in war,
 hacked to pieces under a slashing bronze blade—
 he lies there dead . . . but whatever death lays bare,

all wounds are marks of glory. When an old man's killed
and the dogs go at the gray head and the gray beard
and mutilate the genitals—that is the cruelest sight
in all our wretched lives!"

So the old man groaned 90

and seizing his gray hair tore it out by the roots
but he could not shake the fixed resolve of Hector.
And his mother wailed now, standing beside Priam,
weeping freely, loosing her robes with one hand
and holding out her bare breast with the other,
her words pouring forth in a flight of grief and tears:
"Hector, my child! Look—have some respect for *this!*
Pity your mother too, if I ever gave you the breast
to soothe your troubles, remember it now, dear boy—
beat back that savage man from safe inside the walls! 100
Don't go forth, a champion pitted against him—
merciless, brutal man. If he kills you now,
how can I ever mourn you on your deathbed?—
dear branch in bloom, dear child I brought to birth!—
Neither I nor your wife, that warm, generous woman . . .
Now far beyond our reach, now by the Argive ships
the rushing dogs will tear you, bolt your flesh!"

So they wept, the two of them crying out
to their dear son, both pleading time and again
but they could not shake the fixed resolve of Hector. 110
No, he waited Achilles, coming on, gigantic in power.
As a snake in the hills, guarding his hole, awaits a man—
bloated with poison, deadly hatred seething inside him,
glances flashing fire as he coils round his lair . . .
so Hector, nursing his quenchless fury, gave no ground,
leaning his burnished shield against a jutting wall,
but harried still, he probed his own brave heart:
"No way out. If I slip inside the gates and walls,
Polydamas will be first to heap disgrace on me—
he was the one who urged me to lead our Trojans 120
back to Ilium just last night, the disastrous night
Achilles rose in arms like a god. But did I give way?

Not at all. And how much better it would have been!
 Now my army's ruined, thanks to my own reckless pride,
 I would die of shame to face the men of Troy
 and the Trojan women trailing their long robes . . .

Someone less of a man than I will say, 'Our Hector—
 staking all on his own strength, he destroyed his army!'

So they will mutter. So now, better by far for me
 to stand up to Achilles, kill him, come home alive
 or die at his hands in glory out before the walls.

130

But wait—what if I put down my studded shield
 and heavy helmet, prop my spear on the rampart
 and go forth, just as I am, to meet Achilles,
 noble Prince Achilles . . .

why, I could promise to give back Helen, yes,
 and all her treasures with her, all those riches
 Paris once hauled home to Troy in the hollow ships—
 and they were the cause of all our endless fighting—

Yes, yes, return it all to the sons of Atreus now
 to haul away, and then, at the same time, divide
 the rest with all the Argives, all the city holds,
 and then I'd take an oath for the Trojan royal council

140

that we will hide nothing! Share and share alike the hoards
 our handsome citadel stores within its depths and—
 Why debate, my friend? Why thrash things out?

I must not go and implore him. He'll show no mercy,

no respect for me, my rights—he'll cut me down
 straight off—stripped of defenses like a woman
 once I have loosed the armor off my body.

150

No way to parley with that man—not now—
 not from behind some oak or rock to whisper,
 like a boy and a young girl, lovers' secrets

a boy and girl might whisper to each other . . .

Better to clash in battle, now, at once—
 see which fighter Zeus awards the glory!"

So he wavered,

waiting there, but Achilles was closing on him now
 like the god of war, the fighter's helmet flashing,
 over his right shoulder shaking the Pelian ash spear,

that terror, and the bronze around his body flared
like a raging fire or the rising, blazing sun. 160
Hector looked up, saw him, started to tremble,
nerve gone, he could hold his ground no longer,
he left the gates behind and away he fled in fear—
and Achilles went for him, fast, sure of his speed
as the wild mountain hawk, the quickest thing on wings,
launching smoothly, swooping down on a cringing dove
and the dove flits out from under, the hawk screaming
over the quarry, plunging over and over, his fury
driving him down to beak and tear his kill— 170
so Achilles flew at him, breakneck on in fury
with Hector fleeing along the walls of Troy,
fast as his legs would go. On and on they raced,
passing the lookout point, passing the wild fig tree
tossed by the wind, always out from under the ramparts
down the wagon trail they careered until they reached
the clear running springs where whirling Scamander
rises up from its double wellsprings bubbling strong—
and one runs hot and the steam goes up around it,
drifting thick as if fire burned at its core 180
but the other even in summer gushes cold
as hail or freezing snow or water chilled to ice . . .
And here, close to the springs, lie washing-pools
scooped out in the hollow rocks and broad and smooth
where the wives of Troy and all their lovely daughters
would wash their glistening robes in the old days,
the days of peace before the sons of Achaea came . . .
Past these they raced, one escaping, one in pursuit
and the one who fled was great but the one pursuing
greater, even greater—their pace mounting in speed 190
since both men strove, not for a sacrificial beast
or oxhide trophy, prizes runners fight for, no,
they raced for the life of Hector breaker of horses.
Like powerful stallions sweeping round the post for trophies,
galloping full stretch with some fine prize at stake,
a tripod, say, or woman offered up at funeral games
for some brave hero fallen—so the two of them

whirled three times around the city of Priam,
 sprinting at top speed while all the gods gazed down,
 and the father of men and gods broke forth among them now: 200

“Unbearable—a man I love, hunted round his own city walls
 and right before my eyes. My heart grieves for Hector.
 Hector who burned so many oxen in my honor, rich cuts,
 now on the rugged crests of Ida, now on Ilium’s heights.
 But now, look, brilliant Achilles courses him round
 the city of Priam in all his savage, lethal speed.
 Come, you immortals, think this through. Decide.
 Either we pluck the man from death and save his life
 or strike him down at last, here at Achilles’ hands—
 for all his fighting heart.”

But immortal Athena, 210
 her gray eyes wide, protested strongly: “Father!
 Lord of the lightning, king of the black cloud,
 what are you saying? A man, a mere mortal,
 his doom sealed long ago? You’d set him free
 from all the pains of death?”

Do as you please—
 but none of the deathless gods will ever praise you.”

And Zeus who marshals the thunderheads replied,
 “Courage, Athena, third-born of the gods, dear child.
 Nothing I said was meant in earnest, trust me,
 I mean you all the good will in the world. Go. 220
 Do as your own impulse bids you. Hold back no more.”

So he launched Athena already poised for action—
 down the goddess swept from Olympus’ craggy peaks.

And swift Achilles kept on coursing Hector, nonstop
 as a hound in the mountains starts a fawn from its lair,
 hunting him down the gorges, down the narrow glens
 and the fawn goes to ground, hiding deep in brush
 but the hound comes racing fast, nosing him out
 until he lands his kill. So Hector could never throw
 Achilles off his trail, the swift racer Achilles— 230

time and again he'd make a dash for the Dardan Gates,
 trying to rush beneath the rock-built ramparts, hoping
 men on the heights might save him, somehow, raining spears
 but time and again Achilles would intercept him quickly,
 heading him off, forcing him out across the plain
 and always sprinting along the city side himself—
 endless as in a dream . . .

when a man can't catch another fleeing on ahead
 and he can never escape nor his rival overtake him—
 so the one could never run the other down in his speed
 nor the other spring away. And how could Hector have fled
 the fates of death so long? How unless one last time,
 one final time Apollo had swept in close beside him,
 driving strength in his legs and knees to race the wind?
 And brilliant Achilles shook his head at the armies,
 never letting them hurl their sharp spears at Hector—
 someone might snatch the glory, Achilles come in second.

But once they reached the springs for the fourth time,
 then Father Zeus held out his sacred golden scales:
 in them he placed two fates of death that lays men low—
 one for Achilles, one for Hector breaker of horses—
 and gripping the beam mid-haft the Father raised it high
 and down went Hector's day of doom, dragging him down
 to the strong House of Death—and god Apollo left him.

Athena rushed to Achilles, her bright eyes gleaming,
 standing shoulder-to-shoulder, winging orders now:
 "At last our hopes run high, my brilliant Achilles—
 Father Zeus must love you—
 we'll sweep great glory back to Achaea's fleet,
 we'll kill this Hector, mad as he is for battle!
 No way for him to escape us now, no longer—
 not even if Phoebus the distant deadly Archer
 goes through torments, pleading for Hector's life,
 groveling over and over before our storming Father Zeus.
 But you, you hold your ground and catch your breath
 while I run Hector down and persuade the man
 to fight you face-to-face."

So Athena commanded

and he obeyed, rejoicing at heart—Achilles stopped,
 leaning against his ashen spearshaft barbed in bronze.
 And Athena left him there, caught up with Hector at once. 270
 and taking the build and vibrant voice of Deiphobus
 stood shoulder-to-shoulder with him, winging orders:
 “Dear brother, how brutally swift Achilles hunts you—
 coursing you round the city of Priam in all his lethal speed!
 Come, let us stand our ground together—beat him back.”

“Deiphobus!”—Hector, his helmet flashing, called out to her—
 “dearest of all my brothers, all these warring years,
 of all the sons that Priam and Hecuba produced!
 Now I’m determined to praise you all the more,
 you who dared—seeing me in these straits— 280
 to venture out from the walls, all for *my* sake,
 while the others stay inside and cling to safety.”

The goddess answered quickly, her eyes blazing,
 “True, dear brother—how your father and mother both
 implored me, time and again, clutching my knees,
 and the comrades round me begging me to stay!
 Such was the fear that broke them, man for man,
 but the heart within me broke with grief for you.
 Now headlong on and fight! No letup, no lance spared!
 So now, now we’ll *see* if Achilles kills us both 290
 and hauls our bloody armor back to the beaked ships
 or he goes down in pain beneath your spear.”

Athena luring him on with all her immortal cunning—
 and now, at last, as the two came closing for the kill
 it was tall Hector, helmet flashing, who led off:
 “No more running from you in fear, Achilles!
 Not as before. Three times I fled around
 the great city of Priam—I lacked courage then
 to stand your onslaught. Now my spirit stirs me
 to meet you face-to-face. Now kill or be killed! 300
 Come, we’ll swear to the gods, the highest witnesses—
 the gods will oversee our binding pacts. I swear

I will never mutilate you—merciless as you are—
 if Zeus allows me to last it out and tear your life away.
 But once I've stripped your glorious armor, Achilles,
 I will give your body back to your loyal comrades.
 Swear you'll do the same."

A swift dark glance
 and the headstrong runner answered, "Hector, stop!
 You unforgivable, you . . . don't talk to me of pacts.
 There are no binding oaths between men and lions—
 wolves and lambs can enjoy no meeting of the minds—
 they are all bent on hating each other to the death.
 So with you and me. No love between us. No truce
 till one or the other falls and gluts with blood
 Ares who hacks at men behind his rawhide shield.
 Come, call up whatever courage you can muster.
 Life or death—now prove yourself a spearman,
 a daring man of war! No more escape for you—
 Athena will kill you with my spear in just a moment.
 Now you'll pay at a stroke for all my comrades' grief,
 all you killed in the fury of your spear!"

310

320

With that,
 shaft poised, he hurled and his spear's long shadow flew
 but seeing it coming glorious Hector ducked away,
 crouching down, watching the bronze tip fly past
 and stab the earth—but Athena snatched it up
 and passed it back to Achilles
 and Hector the gallant captain never saw her.
 He sounded out a challenge to Peleus' princely son:
 "You missed, look—the great godlike Achilles!
 So you knew nothing at all from Zeus about my death—
 and yet how sure you were! All bluff, cunning with words,
 that's all you are—trying to make me fear you,
 lose my nerve, forget my fighting strength.
 Well, you'll never plant your lance in my back
 as I flee *you* in fear—plunge it through my chest
 as I come charging in, if a god gives you the chance!
 But now it's for you to dodge *my* brazen spear—

330

I wish you'd bury it in your body to the hilt,
 How much lighter the war would be for Trojans then
 if you, their greatest scourge, were dead and gone!"

340

Shaft poised, he hurled and his spear's long shadow flew
 and it struck Achilles' shield—a dead-center hit—
 but off and away it glanced and Hector seethed,
 his hurtling spear, his whole arm's power poured
 in a wasted shot. He stood there, cast down . . .
 he had no spear in reserve. So Hector shouted out
 to Deiphobus bearing his white shield—with a ringing shout
 he called for a heavy lance—

but the man was nowhere near him,
 vanished—

yes and Hector knew the truth in his heart
 and the fighter cried aloud, "My time has come!
 At last the gods have called me down to death.
 I thought he was at my side, the hero Deiphobus—
 he's safe inside the walls, Athena's tricked me blind.
 And now death, grim death is looming up beside me,
 no longer far away. No way to escape it now. This,
 this was their pleasure after all, sealed long ago—
 Zeus and the son of Zeus, the distant deadly Archer—
 though often before now they rushed to my defense.
 So now I meet my doom. Well let me die—
 but not without struggle, not without glory, no,
 in some great clash of arms that even men to come
 will hear of down the years!"

350

360

And on that resolve
 he drew the whetted sword that hung at his side,
 tempered, massive, and gathering all his force
 he swooped like a soaring eagle
 launching down from the dark clouds to earth
 to snatch some helpless lamb or trembling hare.
 So Hector swooped now, swinging his whetted sword
 and Achilles charged too, bursting with rage, barbaric,
 guarding his chest with the well-wrought blazoned shield,

370

head tossing his gleaming helmet, four horns strong
and the golden plumes shook that the god of fire
drove in bristling thick along its ridge.

Bright as that star amid the stars in the night sky,
star of the evening, brightest star that rides the heavens,
so fire flared from the sharp point of the spear Achilles
brandished high in his right hand, bent on Hector's death,
scanning his splendid body—where to pierce it best?

The rest of his flesh seemed all encased in armor,
burnished, brazen—*Achilles'* armor that Hector stripped
from strong Patroclus when he killed him—true,
but one spot lay exposed,

380

where collarbones lift the neckbone off the shoulders,
the open throat, where the end of life comes quickest—*there*
as Hector charged in fury brilliant Achilles drove his spear
and the point went stabbing clean through the tender neck
but the heavy bronze weapon failed to slash the windpipe—
Hector could still gasp out some words, some last reply . . .
he crashed in the dust—

godlike Achilles gloried over him:

"Hector—surely you thought when you stripped Patroclus' armor
that you, you would be safe! Never a fear of me—
far from the fighting as I was—you fool!
Left behind there, down by the beaked ships
his great avenger waited, a greater man by far—
that man was I, and I smashed your strength! And you—
the dogs and birds will maul you, shame your corpse
while Achaeans bury my dear friend in glory!"

390

Struggling for breath, Hector, his helmet flashing,
said, "I beg you, beg you by your life, your parents—
don't let the dogs devour me by the Argive ships!
Wait, take the princely ransom of bronze and gold,
the gifts my father and noble mother will give you—
but give my body to friends to carry home again,
so Trojan men and Trojan women can do me honor
with fitting rites of fire once I am dead."

400

Staring grimly, the proud runner Achilles answered,
 "Beg no more, you fawning dog—begging me by my parents!
 Would to god my rage, my fury would drive me now
 to hack your flesh away and eat you raw—
 such agonies you have caused me! Ransom? 410
 No man alive could keep the dog-packs off you,
 not if they haul in ten, twenty times that ransom
 and pile it here before me and promise fortunes more—
 no, not even if Dardan Priam should offer to weigh out
 your bulk in gold! Not even then will your noble mother
 lay you on your deathbed, mourn the son she bore . . .
 The dogs and birds will rend you—blood and bone!"

At the point of death, Hector, his helmet flashing,
 said, "I know you well—I see my fate before me.
 Never a chance that I could win you over . . . 420
 Iron inside your chest, that heart of yours.
 But now beware, or my curse will draw god's wrath
 upon your head, that day when Paris and lord Apollo—
 for all your fighting heart—destroy you at the Scaean Gates!"

Death cut him short. The end closed in around him.
 Flying free of his limbs
 his soul went winging down to the House of Death,
 wailing his fate, leaving his manhood far behind,
 his young and supple strength. But brilliant Achilles
 taunted Hector's body, dead as he was, "Die, die! 430
 For my own death, I'll meet it freely—whenever Zeus
 and the other deathless gods would like to bring it on!"

With that he wrenched his bronze spear from the corpse,
 laid it aside and ripped the bloody armor off the back.
 And the other sons of Achaea, running up around him,
 crowded closer, all of them gazing wonder-struck
 at the build and marvelous, lithe beauty of Hector.
 And not a man came forward who did not stab his body,

glancing toward a comrade, laughing: "Ah, look here—
 how much softer he is to handle now, this Hector, 440
 than when he gutted our ships with roaring fire!"

Standing over him, so they'd gloat and stab his body.
 But once he had stripped the corpse the proud runner Achilles
 took his stand in the midst of all the Argive troops
 and urged them on with a flight of winging orders:
 "Friends—lords of the Argives, O my captains!
 Now that the gods have let me kill this man
 who caused us agonies, loss on crushing loss—
 more than the rest of all their men combined— 450
 come, let us ring their walls in armor, test them,
 see what recourse the Trojans still may have in mind.
 Will they abandon the city heights with this man fallen?
 Or brace for a last, dying stand though Hector's gone?
 But wait—what am I saying? Why this deep debate?
 Down by the ships a body lies unwept, unburied—
 Patroclus . . . I will never forget him,
 not as long as I'm still among the living
 and my springing knees will lift and drive me on.
 Though the dead forget their dead in the House of Death,
 I will remember, even there, my dear companion.

Now, 460

come, you sons of Achaea, raise a song of triumph!
 Down to the ships we march and bear this corpse on high—
 we have won ourselves great glory. We have brought
 magnificent Hector down, that man the Trojans
 glorified in their city like a god!"

So he triumphed

and now he was bent on outrage, on shaming noble Hector.
 Piercing the tendons, ankle to heel behind both feet,
 he knotted straps of rawhide through them both,
 lashed them to his chariot, left the head to drag
 and mounting the car, hoisting the famous arms aboard, 470
 he whipped his team to a run and breakneck on they flew,
 holding nothing back. And a thick cloud of dust rose up
 from the man they dragged, his dark hair swirling round

that head so handsome once, all tumbled low in the dust—
 since Zeus had given him over to his enemies now
 to be defiled in the land of his own fathers.

So his whole head was dragged down in the dust.

And now his mother began to tear her hair . . .

she flung her shining veil to the ground and raised
 a high, shattering scream, looking down at her son.

480

Pitifully his loving father groaned and round the king
 his people cried with grief and wailing seized the city—
 for all the world as if all Troy were torched and smoldering
 down from the looming brows of the citadel to her roots.

Priam's people could hardly hold the old man back,
 frantic, mad to go rushing out the Dardan Gates.

He begged them all, groveling in the filth,
 crying out to them, calling each man by name,

"Let go, my friends! Much as you care for me,
 let me hurry out of the city, make my way,

490

all on my own, to Achaea's waiting ships!
 I must implore that terrible, violent man . . .

Perhaps—who knows?—he may respect my age,
 may pity an old man. He has a father too,

as old as I am—Peleus sired him once,
 Peleus reared him to be the scourge of Troy
 but most of all to me—he made my life a hell.

So many sons he slaughtered, just coming into bloom . . .

but grieving for all the rest, one breaks my heart the most
 and stabbing grief for him will take me down to Death—
 my Hector—would to god he had perished in my arms!

500

Then his mother who bore him—oh so doomed,
 she and I could glut ourselves with grief."

So the voice of the king rang out in tears,

the citizens wailed in answer, and noble Hecuba

led the wives of Troy in a throbbing chant of sorrow:

"O my child—my desolation! How can I go on living?

What agonies must I suffer now, now *you* are dead and gone?

You were my pride throughout the city night and day—

a blessing to us all, the men and women of Troy: 510
 throughout the city they saluted you like a god.
 You, you were their greatest glory while you lived—
 now death and fate have seized you, dragged you down!"

Her voice rang out in tears, but the wife of Hector
 had not heard a thing. No messenger brought the truth
 of how her husband made his stand outside the gates.
 She was weaving at her loom, deep in the high halls,
 working flowered braiding into a dark red folding robe.
 And she called her well-kempt women through the house
 to set a large three-legged cauldron over the fire 520
 so Hector could have his steaming hot bath
 when he came home from battle—poor woman,
 she never dreamed how far he was from bathing,
 struck down at Achilles' hands by blazing-eyed Athena.
 But she heard the groans and wails of grief from the rampart now
 and her body shook, her shuttle dropped to the ground,
 she called out to her lovely waiting women, "Quickly—
 two of you follow me—I must see what's happened.
 That cry—that was Hector's honored mother I heard!
 My heart's pounding, leaping up in my throat, 530
 the knees beneath me paralyzed—Oh I know it . . .
 something terrible's coming down on Priam's children.
 Pray god the news will never reach my ears!
 Yes but I dread it so—what if great Achilles
 has cut my Hector off from the city, daring Hector,
 and driven him out across the plain, and all alone?—
 He may have put an end to that fatal headstrong pride
 that always seized my Hector—never hanging back
 with the main force of men, always charging ahead,
 giving ground to no man in his fury!"

So she cried, 540
 dashing out of the royal halls like a madwoman,
 her heart racing hard, her women close behind her.
 But once she reached the tower where soldiers massed
 she stopped on the rampart, looked down and saw it all—
 saw him dragged before the city, stallions galloping,

dragging Hector back to Achaea's beaked warships—
ruthless work. The world went black as night
before her eyes, she fainted, falling backward,
gasping away her life breath . . .

She flung to the winds her glittering headdress,
the cap and the coronet, braided band and veil,
all the regalia golden Aphrodite gave her once,
the day that Hector, helmet aflash in sunlight,
led her home to Troy from her father's house
with countless wedding gifts to win her heart.

550

But crowding round her now her husband's sisters
and brothers' wives supported her in their midst,
and she, terrified, stunned to the point of death,
struggling for breath now and coming back to life,
burst out in grief among the Trojan women: "O Hector—

560

I am destroyed! Both born to the same fate after all!
You, you at Troy in the halls of King Priam—
I at Thebes, under the timberline of Placos,
Ection's house . . . He raised me as a child,
that man of doom, his daughter just as doomed—
would to god he'd never fathered *me*!

Now you go down

to the House of Death, the dark depths of the earth,
and leave me here to waste away in grief, a widow
lost in the royal halls—and the boy only a baby,
the son we bore together, you and I so doomed.
Hector, what help are you to him, now you are dead?—
what help is he to you? Think, even if he escapes
the wrenching horrors of war against the Argives,
pain and labor will plague him all his days to come.
Strangers will mark his lands off, stealing his estates.
The day that orphans a youngster cuts him off from friends.
And he hangs his head low, humiliated in every way . . .

570

his cheeks stained with tears, and pressed by hunger
the boy goes up to his father's old companions,
tugging at one man's cloak, another's tunic,
and some will pity him, true,
and one will give him a little cup to drink,

580

enough to wet his lips, not quench his thirst.

But then some bully with both his parents living
beats him from the banquet, fists and abuses flying:

'You, get out—you've got no father feasting with us here!'

And the boy, sobbing, trails home to his widowed mother . . .

Astyanax!

And years ago, propped on his father's knee,

he would only eat the marrow, the richest cuts of lamb,

and when sleep came on him and he had quit his play,

cradled warm in his nurse's arms he'd drowse off,

snug in a soft bed, his heart brimmed with joy.

Now what suffering, now he's lost his father—

Astyanax!

The Lord of the City, so the Trojans called him,

because it was you, Hector, you and you alone

who shielded the gates and the long walls of Troy.

But now by the beaked ships, far from your parents,

glistening worms will wriggle through your flesh,

once the dogs have had their fill of your naked corpse—

though we have such stores of clothing laid up in the halls,

fine things, a joy to the eye, the work of women's hands.

Now, by god, I'll burn them all, blazing to the skies!

No use to you now, they'll never shroud your body—

but they will be your glory

burned by the Trojan men and women in your honor!"

Her voice rang out in tears and the women wailed in answer.



Achilles and Priam

The games were over now. The gathered armies scattered, each man to his fast ship, and fighters turned their minds to thoughts of food and the sweet warm grip of sleep. But Achilles kept on grieving for his friend, the memory burning on . . . and all-subduing sleep could not take him, not now, he turned and twisted, side to side, he longed for Patroclus' manhood, his gallant heart— What rough campaigns they'd fought to an end together, what hardships they had suffered, cleaving their way through wars of men and pounding waves at sea. The memories flooded over him, live tears flowing, and now he'd lie on his side, now flat on his back, now facedown again. At last he'd leap to his feet, wander in anguish, aimless along the surf, and dawn on dawn

flaming over the sea and shore would find him pacing.
 Then he'd yoke his racing team to the chariot-harness,
 lash the corpse of Hector behind the car for dragging
 and haul him three times round the dead Patroclus' tomb,
 and then he'd rest again in his tents and leave the body 20
 sprawled facedown in the dust. But Apollo pitied Hector—
 dead man though he was—and warded all corruption off
 from Hector's corpse and round him, head to foot,
 the great god wrapped the golden shield of storm
 so his skin would never rip as Achilles dragged him on.

And so he kept on raging, shaming noble Hector,
 but the gods in bliss looked down and pitied Priam's son.
 They kept on urging the sharp-eyed giant-killer Hermes
 to go and steal the body, a plan that pleased them all,
 but not Hera, Poseidon or the girl with blazing eyes, 30
 They clung to their deathless hate of sacred Troy,
 Priam and Priam's people, just as they had at first
 when Paris in all his madness launched the war.
 He offended Athena and Hera—both goddesses.
 When they came to his shepherd's fold he favored Love
 who dangled before his eyes the lust that loosed disaster.
 But now, at the twelfth dawn since Hector's death,
 lord Apollo rose and addressed the immortal powers:
 "Hard-hearted you are, you gods, you live for cruelty!
 Did Hector never burn in your honor thighs of oxen 40
 and flawless, full-grown goats? Now you cannot
 bring yourselves to save him—even his corpse—
 so his wife can see him, his mother and his child,
 his father Priam and Priam's people: how they'd rush
 to burn his body on the pyre and give him royal rites!
 But murderous Achilles—you gods, you *choose* to help Achilles.
 That man without a shred of decency in his heart . . .
 his temper can never bend and change—like some lion
 going his own barbaric way, giving in to his power,
 his brute force and wild pride, as down he swoops 50
 on the flocks of men to seize his savage feast.
 Achilles has lost all pity! No shame in the man,

shame that does great harm or drives men on to good.
 No doubt some mortal has suffered a dearer loss than this,
 a brother born in the same womb, or even a son . . .
 he grieves, he weeps, but then his tears are through.
 The Fates have given mortals hearts that can endure.
 But this Achilles—first he slaughters Hector,
 he rips away the noble prince's life
 then lashes him to his chariot, drags him round
 his beloved comrade's tomb. But why, I ask you?
 What good will it do him? What honor will he gain?
 Let that man beware, or great and glorious as he is,
 we mighty gods will wheel on him in anger—look,
 he outrages the senseless clay in all his fury!"

60

But white-armed Hera flared at him in anger:
 "Yes, there'd be some merit even in what *you* say,
 lord of the silver bow—if all you gods, in fact,
 would set Achilles and Hector high in equal honor.
 But Hector is mortal. He sucked a woman's breast.
 Achilles sprang from a goddess—one I reared myself:
 I brought her up and gave her in marriage to a man,
 to Peleus, dearest to all your hearts, you gods.
 All you gods, you shared in the wedding rites,
 and so did you, Apollo—there you sat at the feast
 and struck your lyre. What company you keep now,
 these wretched Trojans. You—forever faithless!"

70

But Zeus who marshals the storm clouds warned his queen,
 "Now, Hera, don't fly into such a rage at fellow gods.
 These two can never attain the same degree of honor.
 Still, the immortals loved Prince Hector dearly,
 best of all the mortals born in Troy . . .
 so *I* loved him, at least:
 he never stinted with gifts to please my heart.
 Never once did my altar lack its share of victims,
 winecups tipped and the deep smoky savor. These,
 these are the gifts we claim—they are our rights.
 But as for stealing courageous Hector's body,

80

we must abandon the idea—not a chance in the world
 behind Achilles' back. For Thetis is always there,
 his mother always hovering near him night and day.
 Now would one of you gods call Thetis to my presence?—
 so I can declare to her my solemn, sound decree:
 Achilles must receive a ransom from King Priam,
 Achilles must give Hector's body back."

90

So he decreed
 and Iris, racing a gale-wind down with Zeus's message,
 mid-sea between Samos and Imbros' rugged cliffs
 dove in a black swell as groaning breakers roared.
 Down she plunged to the bottom fast as a lead weight
 sheathed in a glinting lure of wild bull's horn,
 bearing hooked death to the ravenous fish.
 And deep in a hollow cave she came on Thetis.
 Gathered round her sat the other immortal sea-nymphs
 while Thetis amidst them mourned her brave son's fate,
 doomed to die, she knew, on the fertile soil of Troy,
 far from his native land. Quick as the wind now
 Iris rushed to the goddess, urging, "Rise, Thetis—
 Zeus with his everlasting counsels calls you now!"
 Shifting on her glistening feet, the goddess answered,
 "Why . . . what does the great god want with me?
 I cringe from mingling with the immortals now—
 Oh the torment—never-ending heartbreak!
 But go I shall. A high decree of the Father
 must not come to nothing—whatever he commands."

100

110

The radiant queen of sea-nymphs seized a veil,
 blue-black, no robe darker in all the Ocean's depths,
 and launched up and away with wind-swift Iris leading—
 the ground swell round them cleaved and opened wide.
 And striding out on shore they soared to the high sky
 and found farseeing Zeus, and around him all the gods
 who live in bliss forever sat in a grand assembly.
 And Thetis took a seat beside the Father,
 a throne Athena yielded. Hera placed in her hand
 a burnished golden cup and said some words of comfort,

120

and taking a few quick sips, Thetis gave it back . . .

The father of men and gods began to address them:

"You have come to Olympus now, immortal Thetis,
for all your grief—what unforgettable sorrow
seizes on your heart. I know it well myself.

Even so, I must tell you why I called you here.

130

For nine whole days the immortals have been feuding
over Hector's corpse and Achilles scourge of cities.

They keep urging the sharp-eyed giant-killer Hermes
to go and steal the body. But that is not my way.

I will grant Achilles glory and so safeguard
your awe and love of me for all the years to come.

Go at once to the camp, give your son this order:

tell him the gods are angry with him now

and I am rising over them all in deathless wrath

that he in heartsick fury still holds Hector's body,

140

there by his beaked ships, and will not give him back—

perhaps in fear of me he'll give him back at once.

Then, at the same time, I am winging Iris down

to greathearted Priam, commanding the king

to ransom his dear son, to go to Achaea's ships,

bearing gifts to Achilles, gifts to melt his rage."

So he decreed

and Thetis with her glistening feet did not resist a moment.

Down the goddess flashed from the peaks of Mount Olympus,

made her way to her son's camp, and there he was,

she found him groaning hard, choked with sobs.

150

Around him trusted comrades swung to the work,

preparing breakfast, steadying in their midst

a large fleecy sheep just slaughtered in the shelter.

But his noble mother, settling down at his side,

stroked Achilles gently, whispering his name: "My child—

how long will you eat your heart out here in tears and torment?

All wiped from your mind, all thought of food and bed?

It's a welcome thing to make love with a woman . . .

You don't have long to live now, well I know:

already I see them looming up beside you—death

160

and the strong force of fate. Listen to me,

quickly! I bring you a message sent by Zeus:
 he says the gods are angry with you now
 and he is rising over them all in deathless wrath
 that you in heartsick fury still hold Hector's body,
 here by your beaked ships, and will not give him back.
 O give him back at once—take ransom for the dead!"

The swift runner replied in haste, "So be it.
 The man who brings the ransom can take away the body,
 if Olympian Zeus himself insists in all earnest."

170

While mother and son agreed among the clustered ships,
 trading between each other many winged words,
 Father Zeus sped Iris down to sacred Troy:
 "Quick on your way now, Iris, shear the wind!
 Leave our Olympian stronghold—
 take a message to greathearted Priam down in Troy:
 he must go to Achaea's ships and ransom his dear son,
 bearing gifts to Achilles, gifts to melt his rage.
 But let him go alone, no other Trojan attend him,
 only a herald with him, a seasoned, older one
 who can drive the mules and smooth-running wagon
 and bring the hero's body back to sacred Troy,
 the man that brilliant Achilles killed in battle.
 Let him have no fear of death, no dread in his heart,
 such a powerful escort we will send him—the giant-killer
 Hermes will guide him all the way to Achilles' presence.
 And once the god has led him within the fighter's shelter,
 Achilles will not kill him—he'll hold back all the rest:
 Achilles is no madman, no reckless fool, not the one
 to defy the gods' commands. Whoever begs his mercy
 he will spare with all the kindness in his heart."

180

190

So he decreed

and Iris ran his message, racing with gale force
 to Priam's halls where cries and mourning met her.
 Sons huddled round their father deep in the courtyard,
 robes drenched with tears, and the old man amidst them,
 buried, beaten down in the cloak that wrapped his body . . .

Smeared on the old man's head and neck the dung lay thick
that he scraped up in his own hands, groveling in the filth.
Throughout the house his daughters and sons' wives wailed,
remembering all the fine brave men who lay dead now, 200
their lives destroyed at the fighting Argives' hands.
And Iris, Zeus's crier, standing alongside Priam,
spoke in a soft voice, but his limbs shook at once—
"Courage, Dardan Priam, take heart! Nothing to fear.
No herald of doom, I come on a friendly mission—
I come with all good will.
I bring you a message sent by Zeus, a world away
but he has you in his heart, he pities you now . . .
Olympian Zeus commands you to ransom royal Hector,
to bear gifts to Achilles, gifts to melt his rage. 210
But you must go alone, no other Trojan attend you,
only a herald with you, a seasoned, older one
who can drive the mules and smooth-running wagon
and bring the hero's body back to sacred Troy,
the man that brilliant Achilles killed in battle.
But have no fear of death, no dread in your heart,
such a powerful escort will conduct you—the giant-killer
Hermes will guide you all the way to Achilles' presence.
And once the god has led you within the fighter's shelter,
Achilles will not kill you—he'll hold back all the rest: 220
Achilles is no madman, no reckless fool, not the one
to defy the gods' commands. Whoever begs his mercy
he will spare with all the kindness in his heart!"

And Iris racing the wind went veering off
and Priam ordered his sons to get a wagon ready,
a good smooth-running one, to hitch the mules
and strap a big wicker cradle across its frame.
Then down he went himself to his treasure-chamber,
high-ceilinged, paneled, fragrant with cedarwood
and a wealth of precious objects filled its chests. 230
He called out to his wife, Hecuba, "Dear woman!
An Olympian messenger came to me from Zeus—
I must go to Achaea's ships and ransom our dear son,

bearing gifts to Achilles, gifts to melt his rage.
 Tell me, what should I do? What do *you* think?
 Myself—a terrible longing drives me, heart and soul,
 down to the ships, into the vast Achaean camp."

But his wife cried out in answer, "No, no—
 where have your senses gone?—that made you famous once,
 both among outland men and those you rule in Troy! 240
 How can you think of going down to the ships, alone,
 and face the glance of the man who killed your sons,
 so many fine brave boys? You have a heart of iron!
 If he gets you in his clutches, sets his eyes on you—
 that savage, treacherous man—he'll show no mercy,
 no respect for your rights!

Come, all we can do now
 is sit in the halls, far from our son, and wail for Hector . . .
 So this, this is the doom that strong Fate spun out,
 our son's life line drawn with his first breath—
 the moment I gave him birth— 250
 to glut the wild dogs, cut off from his parents,
 crushed by the stronger man. Oh would to god
 that I could sink my teeth in his liver, eat him raw!
That would avenge what he has done to Hector—
 no coward the man Achilles killed—my son stood
 and fought for the men of Troy and their deep-breasted wives
 with never a thought of flight or run for cover!"

But the old and noble Priam answered firmly,
 "I will go. My mind's made up. Don't hold me back.
 And don't go flying off on your own across the halls, 260
 a bird of evil omen—you can't dissuade me now.
 If someone else had commanded me, some mortal man,
 some prophet staring into the smoke, some priest,
 I'd call it a lie and turn my back upon it.
 Not now. I heard her voice with my own ears,
 I looked straight at the goddess, face-to-face.
 So I am going—her message must not come to nothing.
 And if it is my fate to die by the beaked ships

of Achaeans armed in bronze, then die I shall.

Let Achilles cut me down straightway—

once I've caught my son in my arms and wept my fill!"

270

He raised back the carved lids of the chests
and lifted out twelve robes, handsome, rich brocades,
twelve cloaks, unlined and light, as many blankets,
as many big white capes and shirts to go with them.
He weighed and carried out ten full bars of gold
and took two burnished tripods, four fine cauldrons
and last a magnificent cup the Thracians gave him once—
he'd gone on an embassy and won that priceless treasure—

280

but not even *that* did the old man spare in his halls,
not now, consumed with desire to ransom back his son.

Crowds of Trojans were mobbing his colonnades—
he gave them a tongue-lashing, sent them packing:

"Get out—you good-for-nothings, public disgraces!

Haven't you got enough to wail about at home
without coming here to add to all my griefs?

You think it nothing, the pain that Zeus has sent me?—

he's destroyed my best son! You'll learn too, in tears—
easier game you'll be for Argive troops to slaughter,

now my Hector's dead. But before I have to see

290

my city annihilated, laid waste before my eyes—
oh let me go down to the House of Death!"

He herded them off with his staff—they fled outside
before the old man's fury. So he lashed out at his sons,
cursing the sight of Helenus, Paris, noble Agathon,
Pammon, Antiphonus, Polites loud with the war cry,
Deiphobus and Hippothous, even lordly Dius—
the old man shouted at all nine, rough commands:

"Get to your work! My vicious sons—my humiliations!

If only you'd all been killed at the fast ships

300

instead of my dear Hector . . .

But I—dear god, my life so cursed by fate!—

I fathered hero sons in the wide realm of Troy

and now, now not a single one is left, I tell you.

Mestor the indestructible, Troilus, passionate horseman
and Hector, a god among men—no son of a mortal man,
he seemed a deathless god's. But Ares killed them all
and all he left me are these, these disgraces—liars,
dancers, heroes only at beating the dancing-rings,
you plunder your own people for lambs and kids!
Why don't you get my wagon ready—now, at once?
Pack all these things aboard! We must be on our way!"

310

Terrified by their father's rough commands
the sons trundled a mule-wagon out at once,
a good smooth-running one,
newly finished, balanced and bolted tight,
and strapped a big wicker cradle across its frame.
They lifted off its hook a boxwood yoke for the mules,
its bulging pommel fitted with rings for guide-reins,
brought out with the yoke its yoke-strap nine arms long
and wedged the yoke down firm on the sanded, tapered pole,
on the front peg, and slipped the yoke-ring onto its pin,
strapped the pommel with three good twists, both sides,
then lashed the assembly round and down the shaft
and under the clamp they made the lashing fast.
Then the priceless ransom for Hector's body:
hauling it up from the vaults they piled it high
on the wagon's well-made cradle, then they yoked the mules—
stamping their sharp hoofs, trained for heavy loads—
that the Mysians once gave Priam, princely gifts.
And last they yoked his team to the king's chariot,
stallions he bred himself in his own polished stalls.

320

330

No sooner were both men harnessed up beneath the roofs,
Priam and herald, minds set on the coming journey,
than Hecuba rushed up to them, gaunt with grief,
holding a gold cup of mellow wine in her right hand
so the men might pour libations before they left.
She stood in front of the horses, crying up at Priam,
"Here, quickly—pour a libation out to Father Zeus!
Pray for a safe return from all our mortal enemies,

340

seeing you're dead set on going down to the ships—
 though you go against my will. But if go you must,
 pray, at least, to the great god of the dark storm cloud,
 up there on Ida, gazing down on the whole expanse of Troy!
 Pray for a bird of omen, Zeus's wind-swift messenger,
 the dearest bird in the world to his prophetic heart,
 the strongest thing on wings—clear on the right
 so you can see that sign with your own eyes
 and trust your life to *it* as you venture down
 to Achaea's ships and the fast chariot-teams. 350
 But if farseeing Zeus does *not* send you that sign—
 his own messenger—then I urge you, beg you,
 don't go down to the ships—
 not for all the passion in your heart!"

The old majestic Priam gave his answer:
 "Dear woman, surely I won't resist your urging now.
 It's well to lift our hands and ask great Zeus for mercy."

And the old king motioned a steward standing by
 to pour some clear pure water over his hands,
 and she came forward, bearing a jug and basin. 360
 He rinsed his hands, took the cup from his wife
 and taking a stand amidst the forecourt, prayed,
 pouring the wine to earth and scanning the high skies,
 Priam prayed in his rich resounding voice: "Father Zeus!
 Ruling over us all from Ida, god of greatness, god of glory!
 Grant that Achilles will receive me with kindness, mercy.
 Send me a bird of omen, your own wind-swift messenger,
 the dearest bird in the world to your prophetic heart,
 the strongest thing on wings—clear on the right
 so I can see that sign with my own eyes 370
 and trust my life to *it* as I venture down
 to Achaea's ships and the fast chariot-teams!"

And Zeus in all his wisdom heard that prayer
 and straightaway the Father launched an eagle—
 truest of Zeus's signs that fly the skies—

the dark marauder that mankind calls the Black-wing,
Broad as the door of a rich man's vaulted treasure-chamber,
well-fitted with sturdy bars, so broad each wing of the bird
spread out on either side as it swept in through the city
flashing clear on the right before the king and queen. 380
All looked up, overjoyed—the people's spirits lifted.

And the old man, rushing to climb aboard his chariot,
drove out through the gates and echoing colonnades.
The mules in the lead hauled out the four-wheeled wagon,
driven on by seasoned Idaeus. The horses came behind
as the old man cracked the lash and urged them fast
throughout the city with all his kinsmen trailing . . .
weeping their hearts out, as if he went to his death.
But once the two passed down through crowded streets
and out into open country, Priam's kin turned back, 390
his sons and in-laws straggling home to Troy.
But Zeus who beholds the world could hardly fail
to see the two men striking out across the plain.
As he watched the old man he filled with pity
and quickly summoned Hermes, his own dear son:
"Hermes—escorting men is your greatest joy,
you above all the gods,
and you listen to the wish of those you favor.
So down you go. Down and conduct King Priam there
through Achaea's beaked ships, so none will see him, 400
none of the Argive fighters recognize him now,
not till he reaches Peleus' royal son."

So he decreed
and Hermes the giant-killing guide obeyed at once.
Under his feet he strapped the supple sandals,
never-dying gold, that wing him over the waves
and boundless earth with the speed of gusting winds.
He seized the wand that enchants the eyes of men
whenever Hermes wants, or wakes them up from sleep.
That wand in his grip he flew, the mighty giant-killer
touching down on Troy and the Hellespont in no time
and from there he went on foot, for all the world 410

like a young prince, sporting his first beard,
just in the prime and fresh warm pride of youth.

And now,

as soon as the two drove past the great tomb of Ilus
they drew rein at the ford to water mules and team.
A sudden darkness had swept across the earth
and Hermes was all but on them when the herald
looked up, saw him, shouted at once to Priam,
"Danger, my king—think fast! I see a man—
I'm afraid we'll both be butchered on the spot—
into the chariot, hurry! Run for our lives
or fling ourselves at his knees and beg for mercy!"

420

The old man was stunned, in a swirl of terror,
the hairs stood bristling all over his gnarled body—
he stood there, staring dumbly. Not waiting for welcome
the running god of luck went straight up to Priam,
clasped the old king's hands and asked him warmly,
"Father—where do you drive these mules and team
through the godsent night while other mortals sleep?
Have you no fear of the Argives breathing hate and fury?
Here are your deadly enemies, camping close at hand.
Now what if one of them saw you, rolling blithely on
through the rushing night with so much tempting treasure—
how would you feel then? You're not so young yourself,
and the man who attends you here is far too old
to drive off an attacker spoiling for a fight.
But I would never hurt you—and what's more,
I'd beat off any man who'd do you harm:
you remind me of my dear father, to the life."

430

And the old and noble Priam said at once,
"Our straits are hard, dear child, as you say.
But a god still holds his hands above me, even me.
Sending such a traveler here to meet me—
what a lucky omen! Look at your build . . .
your handsome face—a wonder. And such good sense—
your parents must be blissful as the gods!"

440

The guide and giant-killer answered quickly,
 “You’re right, old man, all straight to the mark.
 But come, tell me the truth now, point by point:
 this treasure—a king’s ransom—do you send it off
 to distant, outland men, to keep it safe for you?
 Or now do you all abandon sacred Troy,
 all in panic—such was the man who died,
 your finest, bravest man . . . your own son
 who never failed in a fight against the Argives.”

450

But the old majestic Priam countered quickly,
 “Who are *you*, my fine friend?—who are your parents?
 How can you speak so well of my doomed son’s fate?”

And the guide and giant-killer answered staunchly,
 “You’re testing me, old man—asking of noble Hector.
 Ah, how often I watched him battling on the lines
 where men win glory, saw the man with my own eyes!
 And saw him drive Achaeans against the ships that day
 he kept on killing, cutting them down with slashing bronze
 while we stood by and marveled—Achilles reined us in:
 no fighting for us while he raged on at Agamemnon.
 I am Achilles’ aide, you see,
 one and the same good warship brought us here.
 I am a Myrmidon, and my father is Polyctor,
 and a wealthy man he is, about as old as you . . .
 He has six sons—I’m the seventh—we all shook lots
 and it fell to me to join the armies here at Troy.
 I’ve just come up from the ships to scout the plain—
 at dawn the fiery-eyed Achaeans fight around the city.
 They chafe, sitting in camp, so bent on battle now
 the kings of Achaea cannot hold them back.”

460

470

And the old and noble Priam asked at once,
 “If you really are the royal Achilles’ aide,
 please, tell *me* the whole truth, point by point.
 My son—does he still lie by the beached ships,

480

or by now has the great Achilles hacked him limb from limb and served him to his dogs?"

The guide and giant-killer reassured him:
 "So far, old man, no birds or dogs have eaten him. No, there he lies—still there at Achilles' ship, still intact in his shelters.

This is the twelfth day he's lain there, too, but his body has not decayed, not in the least, nor have the worms begun to gnaw his corpse, the swarms that devour men who fall in battle. True, dawn on fiery dawn he drags him round his beloved comrade's tomb, drags him ruthlessly but he cannot mutilate his body. It's marvelous—go see for yourself how he lies there fresh as dew, the blood washed away, and no sign of corruption. All his wounds sealed shut, wherever they struck . . . and many drove their bronze blades through his body. Such pains the blissful gods are lavishing on your son, dead man though he is—the gods love him dearly!"

490

And the old man rejoiced at that, bursting out,
 "O my child, how good it is to give the immortals fit and proper gifts! Now take my son—
 or was he all a dream? Never once in his halls did he forget the gods who hold Olympus, never, so now they remember *him* . . . if only after death. Come, this handsome cup: accept it from me, I beg you! Protect me, escort me now—if the gods will it so—all the way till I reach Achilles' shelter."

500

The guide and giant-killer refused him firmly,
 "You test me again, old man, since I am young,
 but you will not persuade me,
 tempting me with a gift behind Achilles' back. I fear the man, I'd die of shame to rob him—
 just think of the trouble I might suffer later.
 But I'd escort you with all the kindness in my heart,

510

all the way till I reached the shining hills of Argos
bound in a scudding ship or pacing you on foot—
and no marauder on earth, scorning your escort,
would dare attack you then.”

And the god of luck,
leaping onto the chariot right behind the team, 520
quickly grasped the whip and reins in his hands
and breathed fresh spirit into the mules and horses.
As they reached the trench and rampart round the fleet,
the sentries had just begun to set out supper there
but the giant-killer plunged them all in sleep . . .
he spread the gates at once, slid back the bars
and ushered Priam in with his wagon-load of treasure.
Now, at last, they approached royal Achilles' shelter,
the tall, imposing lodge the Myrmidons built their king,
hewing planks of pine, and roofed it high with thatch, 530
gathering thick shaggy reeds from the meadow banks,
and round it built their king a spacious courtyard
fenced with close-set stakes. A single pine beam
held the gates, and it took three men to ram it home,
three to shoot the immense bolt back and spread the doors—
three average men. Achilles alone could ram it home himself.
But the god of luck now spread the gates for the old man,
drove in the glinting gifts for Peleus' swift son,
climbed down from behind the team and said to Priam,
“Old man, look, I am a god come down to you, 540
I am immortal Hermes—
my Father sent me here to be your escort.
But now I will hasten back. I will not venture
into Achilles' presence: it would offend us all
for a mortal man to host an immortal face-to-face.
But you go in yourself and clasp Achilles' knees,
implore him by his father, his mother with lovely hair,
by his own son—so you can stir his heart!”

With that urging

Hermes went his way to the steep heights of Olympus.
But Priam swung down to earth from the battle-car 550
and leaving Idaeus there to rein in mules and team,

the old king went straight up to the lodge
 where Achilles dear to Zeus would always sit.
 Priam found the warrior there inside . . .
 many captains sitting some way off, but two,
 veteran Automedon and the fine fighter Alcimus
 were busy serving him. He had just finished dinner,
 eating, drinking, and the table still stood near.
 The majestic king of Troy slipped past the rest
 and kneeling down beside Achilles, clasped his knees
 and kissed his hands, those terrible, man-killing hands
 that had slaughtered Priam's many sons in battle.
 Awesome—as when the grip of madness seizes one
 who murders a man in his own fatherland and flees
 abroad to foreign shores, to a wealthy, noble host,
 and a sense of marvel runs through all who see him—
 so Achilles marveled, beholding majestic Priam.
 His men marveled too, trading startled glances.
 But Priam prayed his heart out to Achilles:

560

“Remember your own father, great godlike Achilles—
 as old as *I* am, past the threshold of deadly old age!
 No doubt the countrymen round about him plague him now,
 with no one there to defend him, beat away disaster.
 No one—but at least he hears you're still alive
 and his old heart rejoices, hopes rising, day by day,
 to see his beloved son come sailing home from Troy.
 But I—dear god, my life so cursed by fate . . .
 I fathered hero sons in the wide realm of Troy
 and now not a single one is left, I tell you. . . .
 Fifty sons I had when the sons of Achaea came,
 nineteen born to me from a single mother's womb
 and the rest by other women in the palace. Many,
 most of them violent Ares cut the knees from under.
 But one, one was left me, to guard my walls, my people—
 the one you killed the other day, defending his fatherland,
 my Hector! It's all for him I've come to the ships now,
 to win him back from you—I bring a priceless ransom.
 Revere the gods, Achilles! Pity me in my own right,
 remember your own father! I deserve more pity . . .

570

580

I have endured what no one on earth has ever done before—
I put to my lips the hands of the man who killed my son.”

590

Those words stirred within Achilles a deep desire
to grieve for his own father. Taking the old man's hand
he gently moved him back. And overpowered by memory
both men gave way to grief. Priam wept freely
for man-killing Hector, throbbing, crouching
before Achilles' feet as Achilles wept himself,
now for his father, now for Patroclus once again,
and their sobbing rose and fell throughout the house.

Then, when brilliant Achilles had had his fill of tears
and the longing for it had left his mind and body,

600

he rose from his seat, raised the old man by the hand
and filled with pity now for his gray head and gray beard,
he spoke out winging words, flying straight to the heart:

“Poor man, how much you've borne—pain to break the spirit!
What daring brought you down to the ships, all alone,
to face the glance of the man who killed your sons,
so many fine brave boys? You have a heart of iron.

Come, please, sit down on this chair here . . .

Let us put our griefs to rest in our own hearts,
rake them up no more, raw as we are with mourning.
What good's to be won from tears that chill the spirit?

610

So the immortals spun our lives that we, we wretched men
live on to bear such torments—the gods live free of sorrows.

There are two great jars that stand on the floor of Zeus's halls
and hold his gifts, our miseries one, the other blessings.

When Zeus who loves the lightning mixes gifts for a man,
now he meets with misfortune, now good times in turn.

When Zeus dispenses gifts from the jar of sorrows only,
he makes a man an outcast—brutal, ravenous hunger
drives him down the face of the shining earth,
stalking far and wide, cursed by gods and men.

620

So with my father, Peleus. What glittering gifts
the gods rained down from the day that he was born!
He excelled all men in wealth and pride of place,
he lorded the Myrmidons, and mortal that he was,

they gave the man an immortal goddess for a wife.
 Yes, but even on him the Father piled hardships,
 no powerful race of princes born in his royal halls,
 only a single son he fathered, doomed at birth, 630
 cut off in the spring of life—
 and I, I give the man no care as he grows old
 since here I sit in Troy, far from my fatherland,
 a grief to you, a grief to all your children . . .
 And you too, old man, we hear you prospered once:
 as far as Lesbos, Macar's kingdom, bounds to seaward,
 Phrygia east and upland, the Hellespont vast and north—
 that entire realm, they say, you lorded over once,
 you excelled all men, old king, in sons and wealth.
 But then the gods of heaven brought this agony on you— 640
 ceaseless battles round your walls, your armies slaughtered.
 You must bear up now. Enough of endless tears,
 the pain that breaks the spirit.
 Grief for your son will do no good at all.
 You will never bring him back to life—
 sooner you must suffer something worse."

But the old and noble Priam protested strongly:
 "Don't make me sit on a chair, Achilles, Prince,
 not while Hector lies uncared-for in your camp!
 Give him back to me, now, no more delay— 650
 I must see my son with my own eyes.
 Accept the ransom I bring you, a king's ransom!
 Enjoy it, all of it—return to your own native land,
 safe and sound . . . since now you've spared my life."

A dark glance—and the headstrong runner answered,
 "No more, old man, don't tempt my wrath, not now!
 My own mind's made up to give you back your son.
 A messenger brought me word from Zeus—my mother,
 Thetis who bore me, the Old Man of the Sea's daughter.
 And what's more, I can see through you, Priam— 660
 no hiding the fact from me: one of the gods

has led you down to Achaea's fast ships.
 No man alive, not even a rugged young fighter,
 would dare to venture into our camp. Never—
 how could he slip past the sentries unchallenged?
 Or shoot back the bolt of my gates with so much ease?
 So don't anger me now. Don't stir my raging heart still more.
 Or under my own roof I may not spare your life, old man—
 suppliant that you are—may break the laws of Zeus!"

The old man was terrified. He obeyed the order. 670
 But Achilles bounded out of doors like a lion—
 not alone but flanked by his two aides-in-arms,
 veteran Automedon and Alcimus, steady comrades,
 Achilles' favorites next to the dead Patroclus.
 They loosed from harness the horses and the mules,
 they led the herald in, the old king's crier,
 and sat him down on a bench. From the polished wagon
 they lifted the priceless ransom brought for Hector's corpse
 but they left behind two capes and a finely-woven shirt
 to shroud the body well when Priam bore him home. 680
 Then Achilles called the serving-women out:
 "Bathe and anoint the body—
 bear it aside first. Priam must not see his son."
 He feared that, overwhelmed by the sight of Hector,
 wild with grief, Priam might let his anger flare
 and Achilles might fly into fresh rage himself,
 cut the old man down and break the laws of Zeus.
 So when the maids had bathed and anointed the body
 sleek with olive oil and wrapped it round and round
 in a braided battle-shirt and handsome battle-cape, 690
 then Achilles lifted Hector up in his own arms
 and laid him down on a bier, and comrades helped him
 raise the bier and body onto the sturdy wagon . . .
 Then with a groan he called his dear friend by name:
 "Feel no anger at me, Patroclus, if you learn—
 even there in the House of Death—I let his father
 have Prince Hector back. He gave me worthy ransom
 and you shall have your share from me, as always,

your fitting, lordly share."

So he vowed

and brilliant Achilles strode back to his shelter,
sat down on the well-carved chair that he had left,
at the far wall of the room, leaned toward Priam
and firmly spoke the words the king had come to hear:

700

"Your son is now set free, old man, as you requested.

Hector lies in state. With the first light of day
you will see for yourself as you convey him home.

Now, at last, let us turn our thoughts to supper.

Even Niobe with her lustrous hair remembered food,

though she saw a dozen children killed in her own halls,
six daughters and six sons in the pride and prime of youth.

710

True, lord Apollo killed the sons with his silver bow
and Artemis showering arrows killed the daughters.

Both gods were enraged at Niobe. Time and again
she placed herself on a par with their own mother,

Leto in her immortal beauty—how she insulted Leto:

'All you have borne is two, but I have borne so many!'

So, two as they were, they slaughtered all her children.

Nine days they lay in their blood, no one to bury them—

Cronus' son had turned the people into stone . . .

then on the tenth the gods of heaven interred them.

720

And Niobe, gaunt, worn to the bone with weeping,

turned her thoughts to food. And now, somewhere,

lost on the crags, on the lonely mountain slopes,

on Sipylus where, they say, the nymphs who live forever,

dancing along the Achelous River run to beds of rest—

there, struck into stone, Niobe still broods

on the spate of griefs the gods poured out to her.

So come—we too, old king, must think of food.

Later you can mourn your beloved son once more,

when you bear him home to Troy, and you'll weep many tears."

730

Never pausing, the swift runner sprang to his feet
and slaughtered a white sheep as comrades moved in
to skin the carcass quickly, dress the quarters well.

Expertly they cut the meat in pieces, pierced them with spits,
roasted them to a turn and pulled them off the fire.

Automedon brought the bread, set it out on the board
in ample wicker baskets. Achilles served the meat.

They reached out for the good things that lay at hand
and when they had put aside desire for food and drink,

Priam the son of Dardanus gazed at Achilles, marveling
now at the man's beauty, his magnificent build—

face-to-face he seemed a deathless god . . .

and Achilles gazed and marveled at Dardan Priam,
beholding his noble looks, listening to his words.

But once they'd had their fill of gazing at each other,
the old majestic Priam broke the silence first:

✓ "Put me to bed quickly, Achilles, Prince.

Time to rest, to enjoy the sweet relief of sleep.

Not once have my eyes closed shut beneath my lids
from the day my son went down beneath your hands . . .

day and night I groan, brooding over the countless griefs,
groveling in the dung that fills my walled-in court.

But now, at long last, I have tasted food again
and let some glistening wine go down my throat.

Before this hour I had tasted nothing." J

He shook his head
as Achilles briskly told his men and serving-women

to make beds in the porch's shelter, to lay down
some heavy purple throws for the beds themselves

and over them spread blankets and thick woolly robes,
a warm covering laid on top. Torches held in hand,

they went from the hall and fell to work at once
and in no time two good beds were spread and made.

Then Achilles nodded to Priam, leading the king on
with brusque advice: "Sleep outside, old friend,

in case some Achaean captain comes to visit.

They keep on coming now, huddling beside me,
making plans for battle—it's their duty.

But if one saw you here in the rushing dark night
he'd tell Agamemnon straightaway, our good commander.

Then you'd have real delay in ransoming the body.

740

750

760

770

One more point. Tell me, be precise about it—
 how many days do you need to bury Prince Hector?
 I will hold back myself
 and keep the Argive armies back that long."

And the old and noble Priam answered slowly,
 "If you truly want me to give Prince Hector burial,
 full, royal honors, you'd show me a great kindness,
 Achilles, if you would do exactly as I say.
 You know how crammed we are inside our city,
 how far it is to the hills to haul in timber, 780
 and our Trojans are afraid to make the journey.
 Well, nine days we should mourn him in our halls,
 on the tenth we'd bury Hector, hold the public feast,
 on the eleventh build the barrow high above his body—
 on the twelfth we'd fight again . . . if fight we must."

The swift runner Achilles reassured him quickly:
 "All will be done, old Priam, as you command.
 I will hold our attack as long as you require."

With that he clasped the old king by the wrist,
 by the right hand, to free his heart from fear. 790
 Then Priam and herald, minds set on the journey home,
 bedded down for the night within the porch's shelter.
 And deep in his sturdy well-built lodge Achilles slept
 with Briseis in all her beauty sleeping by his side.

Now the great array of gods and chariot-driving men
 slept all night long, overcome by gentle sleep.
 But sleep could never hold the running Escort—
 Hermes kept on turning it over in his mind . . .
 how could he convoy Priam clear of the ships,
 unseen by devoted guards who held the gates? 800
 Hovering at his head the Escort rose and spoke:
 "Not a care in the world, old man? Look at you,
 how you sleep in the midst of men who'd kill you—
 and just because Achilles spared your life. Now, yes,

you've ransomed your dear son—for a king's ransom.
 But wouldn't the sons you left behind be forced
 to pay three times as much for *you* alive?
 What if Atrides Agamemnon learns you're here—
 what if the whole Achaean army learns you're here?"

The old king woke in terror, roused the herald.
 Hermes harnessed the mules and team for both men,
 drove them fast through the camp and no one saw them.

810

Once they reached the ford where the river runs clear,
 the strong, whirling Xanthus sprung of immortal Zeus,
 Hermes went his way to the steep heights of Olympus
 as Dawn flung out her golden robe across the earth,
 and the two men, weeping, groaning, drove the team
 toward Troy and the mules brought on the body.
 No one saw them at first, neither man nor woman,
 none before Cassandra, golden as goddess Aphrodite.
 She had climbed to Pergamus heights and from that point
 she saw her beloved father swaying tall in the chariot,
 flanked by the herald, whose cry could rouse the city.
 And Cassandra saw *him* too . . .
 drawn by the mules and stretched out on his bier.
 She screamed and her scream rang out through all Troy:
 "Come, look down, you men of Troy, you Trojan women!
 Behold Hector now—if you ever once rejoiced
 to see him striding home, home alive from battle!
 He was the greatest joy of Troy and all our people!"

820

830

Her cries plunged Troy into uncontrollable grief
 and not a man or woman was left inside the walls.
 They streamed out at the gates to meet Priam
 bringing in the body of the dead. Hector—
 his loving wife and noble mother were first
 to fling themselves on the wagon rolling on,
 the first to tear their hair, embrace his head
 and a wailing throng of people milled around them.
 And now, all day long till the setting sun went down

they would have wept for Hector there before the gates 840
 if the old man, steering the car, had not commanded,
 "Let me through with the mules! Soon, in a moment,
 you can have your fill of tears—once I've brought him home."

So he called and the crowds fell back on either side,
 making way for the wagon. Once they had borne him
 into the famous halls, they laid his body down
 on his large carved bed and set beside him singers
 to lead off the laments, and their voices rose in grief—
 they lifted the dirge high as the women wailed in answer.
 And white-armed Andromache led their songs of sorrow, 850
 cradling the head of Hector, man-killing Hector
 gently in her arms: "O my husband . . .
 cut off from life so young! You leave me a widow,
 lost in the royal halls—and the boy only a baby,
 the son we bore together, you and I so doomed.
 I cannot think he will ever come to manhood.
 Long before *that* the city will be sacked,
 plundered top to bottom! Because you are dead,
 her great guardian, you who always defended Troy,
 who kept her loyal wives and helpless children safe, 860
 all who will soon be carried off in the hollow ships
 and I with them—

And you, my child, will follow me
 to labor, somewhere, at harsh, degrading work,
 slaving under some heartless master's eye—that,
 or some Achaean marauder will seize you by the arm
 and hurl you headlong down from the ramparts—horrible death—
 enraged at you because Hector once cut down his brother,
 his father or his son, yes, hundreds of armed Achaeans
 gnawed the dust of the world, crushed by Hector's hands!
 Your father, remember, was no man of mercy . . . 870
 not in the horror of battle, and that is why
 the whole city of Troy mourns you now, my Hector—
 you've brought your parents accursed tears and grief
 but to me most of all you've left the horror, the heartbreak!
 For you never died in bed and stretched your arms to me

or said some last word from the heart I can remember,
always, weeping for you through all my nights and days!"

Her voice rang out in tears and the women wailed in answer
and Hecuba led them now in a throbbing chant of sorrow:

"Hector, dearest to me by far of all my sons . . . 880

and dear to the gods while we still shared this life—
and they cared about you still, I see, even after death.

Many the sons I had whom the swift runner Achilles
caught and shipped on the barren salt sea as slaves
to Samos, to Imbros, to Lemnos shrouded deep in mist!

But you, once he slashed away your life with his brazen spear
he dragged you time and again around his comrade's tomb,
Patroclus whom you killed—not that he brought Patroclus
back to life by that. But I have you with me now . . .

fresh as the morning dew you lie in the royal halls 890

like one whom Apollo, lord of the silver bow,
has approached and shot to death with gentle shafts."

Her voice rang out in tears and an endless wail rose up
and Helen, the third in turn, led their songs of sorrow:

"Hector! Dearest to me of all my husband's brothers—
my husband, Paris, magnificent as a god . . .

he was the one who brought me here to Troy—

Oh how I wish I'd died before that day!

But this, now, is the twentieth year for me

since I sailed here and forsook my own native land, 900

yet never once did I hear from *you* a taunt, an insult.

But if someone else in the royal halls would curse me,

one of your brothers or sisters or brothers' wives

trailing their long robes, even your own mother—

not your father, always kind as my own father—

why, you'd restrain them with words, Hector,

you'd win them to my side . . .

you with your gentle temper, all your gentle words.

And so in the same breath I mourn for you and me,

my doom-struck, harrowed heart! Now there is no one left 910

in the wide realm of Troy, no friend to treat me kindly—
all the countrymen cringe from me in loathing!"

Her voice rang out in tears and vast throngs wailed
and old King Priam rose and gave his people orders:
"Now, you men of Troy, haul timber into the city!
Have no fear of an Argive ambush packed with danger—
Achilles vowed, when he sent me home from the black ships,
not to do us harm till the twelfth dawn arrives."

At his command they harnessed oxen and mules to wagons,
they assembled before the city walls with all good speed 920
and for nine days hauled in a boundless store of timber.
But when the tenth Dawn brought light to the mortal world
they carried gallant Hector forth, streaming tears,
and they placed his corpse aloft the pyre's crest,
flung a torch and set it all aflame.

At last,

when young Dawn with her rose-red fingers shone once more,
the people massed around illustrious Hector's pyre . . .
And once they'd gathered, crowding the meeting grounds,
they first put out the fires with glistening wine,
wherever the flames still burned in all their fury. 930
Then they collected the white bones of Hector—
all his brothers, his friends-in-arms, mourning,
and warm tears came streaming down their cheeks.
They placed the bones they found in a golden chest,
shrouding them round and round in soft purple cloths.
They quickly lowered the chest in a deep, hollow grave
and over it piled a cope of huge stones closely set,
then hastily heaped a barrow, posted lookouts all around
for fear the Achaean combat troops would launch their attack
before the time agreed. And once they'd heaped the mound 940
they turned back home to Troy, and gathering once again
they shared a splendid funeral feast in Hector's honor,
held in the house of Priam, king by will of Zeus.

And so the Trojans buried Hector breaker of horses.

H O M E R

The
Iliad

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INTRODUCTION AND
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