



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,

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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.”

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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 Eurypylus took an arrow-shot in the thigh . . .
Healers are working over them, using all their drugs,
trying to bind the wounds—

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

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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 . . .

Enough.

Let by-gones be by-gones 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

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.
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.
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?
The deadly Archer loves his Trojans dearly.
No, you must turn back—
soon as you bring the light of victory to the ship
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,

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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 130
 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.

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, 140
 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 150
 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."

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

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—Pelagian 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 310
 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—

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— 320
 so even mighty Atrides can see how mad he was
 to disgrace Achilles, the best of the Achaeans!"

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 330
 and chosen friendship toward the Argives now.
 Each Trojan soldier glancing left and right—
 how could he run from sudden, plunging death?

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 Axios' 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 370
 but Meges saw him coming and got in first by far,
 spearing him up the thigh where it joins the body,

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 380
 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.
 There—quick Oilean Ajax rushed Cleobulus,
 took him alive, stumbling blind in the rout 390
 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 400
 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,

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.

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 . . .

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

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.
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—

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,

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crazed with fear, and the reins flew from his grip—
 Patroclus rising beside him stabbed his right jawbone,
 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,

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dead as he fell, his life breath blown away.
 And next he caught Erylaus closing, lunging in—
 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.

490

But now Sarpedon, watching his comrades drop and die,
 war-shirts billowing free as Patroclus killed them,
 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."

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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—
 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,

510

said to Hera, his sister and his wife, "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?"

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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— 590
 spur all our men to battle!"

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? 600
 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—
 my whole arm rings with the stabbing pangs, 610
 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,
 lull 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."

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,
 east 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?
 First Adrestus, then Autonous, then Echeclus,
 then Perimus, Megas' son, Epistor and Melanippus,
 then in a flurry Elasmus, Mulius and Pylartes—
 he killed them all but the rest were bent on flight.

810

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.
 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!"

820

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

But now Hector,

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?

830

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:
 "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!"

840

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
 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
 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,

850

860

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—
 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.

880

As the East and South Winds fight in killer-squalls
 deep in a mountain valley thrashing stands of timber,
 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
 in the whirling dust, overpowered in all his power
 and wiped from memory all his horseman's skills.

890

900

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, 950
trying to escape death . . .

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 960
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— 970
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!

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.

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

H O M E R

The

Iliad

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PENGUIN BOOKS

