

Book 17

It did not escape Atreus's son, the warlike Menelaös,
that Patroklos had been brought down in the struggle with the Trojans:
through the front ranks he went, armored in gleaming bronze,
and stood there, straddling his corpse, as over her first-born
calf its mother stands lowing, plaintively, having never
given birth before: so over Patroklos fair-haired Menelaös
stood, holding before him his spear and well-balanced shield,
ready to kill any fighter that came out and confronted him. 5

Nor was Pánthoös's son, of the good ash spear, indifferent
to the fall of peerless Patroklos; he came and stood
near warlike Menelaös, and thus addressed him: 10
"Atreus's son Menelaös, Zeus's nursling, leader of armies,
yield ground now, leave the corpse, forego these bloodstained spoils!
No man prior to me of the Trojans or their famed allies
put a spear in Patroklos during the grind of battle, 15
so you now allow me to win true glory among the Trojans,
or else I'll let fly and hit you, rob you of honey-sweet life."
Deeply stirred, fair-haired Menelaös answered him thus:
"Zeus, Father, such over-proud boasting is most unseemly!
Of neither lion nor leopard is the rage so great, 20
nor of the deadly wild boar—in whose breast the greatest
fury exults in its strength—as is the arrogant spirit
of Pánthoös's sons, they of the good ash spear! Not even
Hyperēnōr, the mighty one, the tamer of horses,
had any joy of his youth, when he mocked and confronted me, 25
called me the feeblest warrior among the Danaäns:
not on his own feet, I tell you, did he make his way back home
to gladden his dear wife and his devoted parents!
Just so will I unstring your strength, if you persist
in standing against me: back off, I tell you, into the crowd, 30
don't try confrontation, get out before you suffer
some hurt: what's done even a fool can recognize."

So he spoke, but did not persuade him: Euphorbos replied:
"Now indeed, Menelaös, Zeus's nursling, you'll pay the price

for the brother of mine you killed: you rant boastfully over him, 35
 his wife you left a widow in her new bridal chamber,
 unspeakable grief and sorrow you brought on his parents!
 Surely for them in their misery I could be an easing of grief
 if I bring them your head and your armor, lay these
 in the hands of Pánthoös and of noble Phrontis! 40
 No longer shall this struggle between us go untested
 or unfought, whether it end in victory or in flight.”

That said, Euphorbos struck Menelaös's well-balanced shield,
 but the bronze failed to break through, its point was turned
 by the strong shield; then Atreus's son Menelaös 45
 in his turn attacked with the bronze, praying to Zeus the Father,
 and as Euphorbos drew back, speared him hard at the base
 of his throat, leaning into the thrust, relying on his strong fist;
 and clean through his delicate neck the spear point passed.
 He fell with a thud, and his armor rattled upon him. 50
 Blood soaked his hair that was such as the Graces have—
 those locks wasp-waisted with spirals of gold and silver.¹
 As a man cultivates an olive tree's flourishing slip
 in a lonely spot, where spring water wells up in abundance—
 a fine, healthy sapling, and breezes from every quarter 55
 make it shiver, and soon it bursts out in white blossom,
 but then a sudden gale comes, with abundance of storm winds,
 tears it up root and all and lays it out flat on the ground:
 in such wise Pánthoös's son, the ashen-speared Euphorbos,
 was slain by Atreus's son Menelaös, stripped of his armor. 60
 As some mountain-bred lion, confident in its strength,
 from a grazing herd snatches a cow, the best one there—
 when he's caught her, he first breaks her neck with his powerful teeth,
 then gulps down her blood, along with all her innards,
 tearing her flesh, while all round him hunting dogs and herdsmen 65
 make much noise, but from a distance, not being minded
 to confront him, for pale fear has them in its grip:
 just so the heart in the breast of no Trojan dared

1. “Golden spirals apparently for binding the hair are common in sub-Mycenean and Geometric graves,” Edwards 1991 notes (67). The verb ἐσφῆκωντο (*esphékōnto*), here only in Homer, means to be pinched in like a wasp's waist. It has also been suggested that color—golden/yellow bands on black hair—may have contributed to the wasp image.

to come out and confront illustrious Menelaös.
 Easily, then, would the famed arms of Euphorbos 70
 have been borne off by Atreus's son, had not Phoibos Apollo
 —in a man's likeness, as Mentēs, the Kikōnians' leader—
 begrudging this, stirred against him Hektōr, peer of swift Arēs,
 whom he addressed as follows, in winged words: "Hektōr,
 while you're vainly chasing a quarry you'll never catch, 75
 the horses of Aiakos's warrior grandson—hard
 are they for any mortal to master or to drive,
 save only Achilles, who had an immortal mother—
 meanwhile Menelaös, the warlike son of Atreus,
 straddling Patroklos's corpse, has slain the best of the Trojans, 80
 Pánthoös's son Euphorbos, cut short his fighting spirit."

So he spoke, and went back, a god to the struggle of mortals.
 Bitter grief now spread round Hektōr's dark spirit: he glanced
 along the ranks, and at once perceived both men, the one
 stripping off the famed armor, the other one lying there, 85
 blood trickling out of the stab wound. Then Hektōr gave
 a sharp cry, strode out through the foremost fighters, armed
 in gleaming bronze, like Hēphaistos's unquenchable flame.
 Nor did Atreus's son miss that sharp cry: deeply perturbed
 he now communed with his own great-hearted spirit: 90
 "Ah, me, if I leave that fine armor behind, and Patroklos too,
 who lies here dead in his quest to restore my honor,
 any Danaän who sees it, I fear, will blame my action!
 But if, single-handed, I take on Hektōr and the Trojans
 out of shame, I fear they'll surround me, being many against one— 95
 bright-helmeted Hektōr's bringing every last Trojan here.
 Yet why should my heart and I be debating any of this?
 When, against heaven's will, a man chooses to fight with a mortal
 whom some god honors, at once great trouble rolls over him.
 So, no Danaän will be indignant on seeing me retreat 100
 before Hektōr, since he's fighting with a god as his backer.
 Yet, if I could only find Aias of the fine war cry, then
 we two might turn back and battle it out, even
 against divine will, in the hope of rescuing the corpse
 for Achilles, Pēleus's son: that would be the best of evils." 105

Meanwhile, as he was pondering thus in his mind and spirit,
 the Trojan ranks advanced, with Hektōr leading them.

Menelaös began to retreat now, abandoning the corpse,
 but constantly looking back, like a bearded lion
 that dogs and men are chasing away from the cattle pen 110
 with spears and shouting—the bold spirit in his breast
 is chilled, and reluctantly he slinks off from the farmstead:
 so fair-haired Menelaös moved away from Patroklos.
 But on reaching his comrades' division he stood there, looking round,
 attempting to find great Aias, Telamön's son, 115
 and quickly located him, at the far left side of the battle,
 encouraging his companions, urging them on to fight,
 because of the awesome fear put in them by Phoibos Apollo.
 He set off at a run, reached him quickly, addressed him thus:
 "Aias my friend, come with me, we must hurry to save 120
 dead Patroklos—at least let's rescue his body for Achilles—
 his naked body: his armor bright-helmeted Hektör holds."

So speaking he roused the spirit of warlike Aias:
 through the front-line fighters he strode, Menelaös with him.
 Now Hektör had stripped Patroklos of his famed battle gear, 125
 and was dragging him off to cut his head from his shoulders
 with the sharp bronze, and leave his body for Trojan dogs;
 but up came Aias, behind his towering shield,
 and Hektör retreated into the body of his comrades,
 boarded his chariot, turned the famed armor over 130
 for the Trojans to take to the city, to bring him great glory.
 But Aias with his broad shield covered Menoitios's son,
 and stood there like a lion protecting its young,
 one that hunters meet as it leads these cubs in the forest,
 and it bears itself proudly, glorying in its strength, 135
 hooding its eyes with the down-drawn skin of its brow:
 just so did Aias bestride the hero Patroklos, while
 on the other side Atreus's son, the warlike Menelaös,
 stood there, nursing great sorrow within his breast.

And now
 Glaukos, son of Hippolochos, the Lycian warriors' leader, 140
 scowling darkly at Hektör, upbraided him with harsh words:
 "Hektör, so handsome, but sadly wanting in battle—
 this fine reputation of yours conceals a girlish coward!
 You'd better start thinking now of some way to save your city
 and citadel on your own, helped only by native Trojans, 145

for at least of the Lycians not one man will turn out to fight
 the Danaäns over this city, since I now see there's no thanks
 for struggling, without respite, forever against the foe!
 How would you rescue a lesser fighter, one of the crowd,
 you callous brute, when you leave Sarpēdōn—your guest, 150
 your comrade—there for the Argives, to be their prey, their booty?
 Often enough he helped you, your city and yourself,
 while he lived—yet now you don't dare keep the dogs off him!
 So now, if my Lycian troops will obey my orders,
 we're going home, and for Troy sheer ruin is like to follow! 155
 If only that dauntless courage was in the Trojans,
 unflinching, that comes to men who, for their country's sake,
 shoulder the strife and the struggle with their foes,
 then soon enough would we drag off Patroklos to Ilion—
 and if this man came, dead, to King Priam's great city, 160
 when we'd dragged him out of the battle, then quickly enough
 would the Argives surrender Sarpēdōn's fine battle gear
 and we'd bring the man himself back into Ilion;
 for such a fighter is he whose squire has been slain, the best
 of these Argives by their ships—he and his veterans! 165
 But you lacked the courage to stand up, face to face,
 against great-hearted Aias, amid enemies' battle cries,
 and fight him head on, since he's a better man than you."

Scowling darkly, bright-helmeted Hektōr replied:
 "Why, Glaukos, being who you are, have you spoken so arrogantly? 170
 My friend, I once regarded you as the most sensible man
 of all those who have their homes in rich-soiled Lycia;
 but now what you say makes me doubt your sense entirely—
 when you claim that I failed to stand against huge Aias!
 I tell you, I don't fear battle or the hoof beats of horses— 175
 but the mind of Zeus of the aegis is always too strong,
 he scares even the valiant, deprives men of victory
 without effort, and as easily stirs them up to fight.
 Come, friend, stand by me, watch my actions, see whether,
 as you proclaim, I'm a coward the whole day through, 180
 or whether many a Danaän, however fierce a fighter,
 I'll stand off from battling over the dead Patroklos."

So saying, he called out to the Trojans, in a carrying voice:
 "Trojans! Lycians! You Dardanian hand-to-hand fighters!

Be men, my friends! Remember your fighting spirit,
until I put on the armor of peerless Achilles, the splendid
gear that I stripped from mighty Patroklos when I slew him!” 185

Having spoken thus, bright-helmeted Hektōr withdrew
from war’s deadly turmoil, ran fast, overtook his comrades
who were not far off yet, hastened on swift feet after 190
those bearing towards the city the famed armor of Pēleus’s son.
Then he halted, away from the grievous conflict, changed
his armor: his own he gave, to be taken to sacred Ilion,
to the Trojans, lovers of warfare, and himself put on
the immortal gear of Achilles, Pēleus’s son, that the heavenly 195
gods gave to his father, and he bequeathed, when old,
to his son; but the son did not grow old in his father’s armor.

Now when from far off Zeus the cloud-gatherer saw him
arming himself in the war gear of Pēleus’s godlike son,
he shook his head and said, addressing his own heart: 200
“Ah, wretched man: death has no place in your thoughts,
near though it is to you: you’re putting on the immortal
gear of a prince among men, before whom others, too, tremble.
His comrade you’ve slain, a man as gentle as he was strong,
and improperly stripped the armor from his head and shoulders. 205
Still, for now I’ll allow you great power, in compensation
for the fact that no way are you coming back from battle,
nor will Andromachē get from you the famed arms of Pēleus’s son.”

So the son of Kronos spoke, and, nodding his dark brows,
made the armor fit Hektōr’s body, and there entered him then 210
fearsome Enyalian Arēs, and his limbs were filled with inner
courage and strength. Then he went in among the far-famed
allies, shouting his war cry, and displayed himself to them all,
agleam in the battle gear of Pēleus’s great-hearted son,
urging on every man he approached with his winged words— 215
Mesthlēs and Glaukos, Medōn, Thersilochos,
Hippothoös, Deisēnōr, and Asteropaios,
Phorkys and Chromios, the bird-augur Ennomos—
these he approached, to these his winged words were addressed:
“Hear me, you countless tribes of allies that dwell around us! 220
It was not in search of mere numbers, or because I lacked them,
that I brought each one of you here from your cities, but rather

for you to rescue the Trojans' wives and children,
of your own will, for me, from these war-loving Achaians.
It's with this aim that I'm straining my people's resources 225
for gifts and food to keep strong the spirit in you all!
So let each man make straight for the foe, whether to perish
or come safely through: that's the sweet embrace of warfare.
And whoever drags Patroklos, dead though he is for sure,
back among the horse-breaker Trojans, and Aias yields to him, 230
half my booty I'll share with him, keep only half
myself: for his glory will be as great as mine."

So he spoke: they charged, full force, straight at the Danaäns,
spears raised, the hearts within them brimming with hope
that they'd drag the corpse away from Aias, Telamōn's son— 235
the fools, for over that body he robbed many of their life.
Yet now Aias spoke to Menelaös of the fine war cry, saying:
"My friend Menelaös, Zeus's nursling, no longer do I hope
that the two of us will ever come home safe from this war—
it's not so much the corpse of Patroklos that concerns me, 240
which all too soon will glut the dogs and vultures of Troy:
it's my own head I'm afraid for, lest ill befall it,
and yours as well, for a cloud of war—I mean Hektōr—
now enshrouds everything: it's sheer destruction confronts us.
Still, call to the Danaäns' leaders: someone may hear us." 245

So he spoke: Menelaös of the fine war cry did not
ignore him, called out to the Danaäns in a carrying voice:
"Friends, leaders and rulers of the Argives, you
who with Atreus's sons, Agamemnōn and Menelaös,
drink at the public cost, who, each of you, issue orders 250
to your people, who from Zeus have honor and glory!
Hard it is for me to distinguish each individual leader,
so vast the strife of war that's flared up—so let each man
advance unnamed, but with fury in his heart
that Patroklos should end as a plaything for the dogs of Troy." 255

So he spoke: Oïleus's son, swift Aias, heard him clearly.
He was the first who came to him, at a run, through the fighting,
and after him Idomeneus, and Idomeneus's comrade
Mêrionēs, the equal of Enyalios, killer of men.

As for the rest—who, from memory, could reel off all the names
of those who followed, who woke the Achaians' battle spirit? 260

The Trojans charged in a massed body, Hektōr leading.
As at the outflow of some rain-fed river, giant
waves come roaring against the current, and all around
the coast's headlands re-echo as the salt sea breaks in foam, 265
with such huge clamor the Trojans came on. But still
the Achaians stood steadfast around Menoitios's son,
united in purpose, fenced with bronze shields: upon them
Kronos's son shed thick mist, hid their gleaming helmets,
since, even before, he'd not hated the son of Menoitios, 270
the squire of Aiakos's grandson, while he still lived; so now,
hating the thought of his becoming the prey of his Trojan
enemies' dogs, Zeus stirred up his comrades to defend him.

At first, the Trojans thrust back the sharp-eyed Achaians,
who retreated, leaving the corpse. Not a single one of them 275
did these spirited Trojans spear, though they longed to, but
started dragging the body away. Yet for a short while only
were the Achaians to hold off, being quickly rallied
by Aias, a man who for handsome looks and war craft
surpassed all Danaäns, after Pēleus's peerless son. 280
Through the front-line fighters he stormed, in prowess resembling
a wild boar, that in hill country easily scatters dogs
and vigorous youths as it charges, swerving, through the glens:
just so lordly Telamōn's son, illustrious Aias,
easily, once in among them, scattered the Trojan ranks 285
that had closed in over Patroklos, determined above all
to drag him back to their city, and so win glory.

Hippochoös now, Pelasgian Lēthos's illustrious son,
was dragging the corpse by one foot through the grind of battle
with his baldric lashed fast around the ankle's tendons, 290
delighting the Trojans and Hektōr; but swiftly disaster
struck him, that no one, though desperate to, could ward off:
out from the crowd darted Telamōn's son, closed in,
and hit him, right through his bronze cheek-pieced helmet,
which, horsehair crest and all, split round the spear point, 295
struck by a heavy spear from a powerful hand: the brains,

all blood-bespattered, shot out from the wound along
the spear's socket, his strength was loosened, his hands let fall
great-hearted Patroklos's foot. It fell to the ground
and lay there. He fell prone, close by it, on the corpse, 300
far from rich-soiled Lárissa, and never repaid his parents
the cost of his upbringing: brief indeed was his life,
cut off short by the spear of mighty-spirited Aias.

Hektôr let fly in turn at Aias with his gleaming spear,
but Aias, watching him closely, avoided the bronze-tipped 305
shaft, a near miss; it hit Schedios, great-hearted Iphitos's son,
best by far of the Phokians, who in famous Panopeus
had his dwelling, and reigned as king over many subjects.

Hektôr hit him under the collar-bone, in the mid-part: the bronze
spear point drove right through, emerged at the shoulder's base. 310
He fell with a thud, and his armor rattled upon him.

Next Aias hit Phorkys—the warlike son of Phainōps,
who was standing over Hippothoös—in the mid-belly,
broke the plate of his corselet, so that his guts spilled out
through the bronze: in the dust he fell, hand clawing the earth. 315

Then the front-line fighters and illustrious Hektôr gave ground,
and the Argives, cheering loudly, dragged off the corpses—Phorkys,
Hippothoös—and started stripping the gear from their shoulders.

Now would the warlike Achaians have once more driven the Trojans,
undone by their lack of spirit, back up to Ilion, 320
and the Argives would have won glory—even beyond the measure
approved by Zeus—through their forceful strength; but Apollo
himself roused up Aineias, assuming a herald's likeness—
that of Periphas, Ēpytos's son: in Aineias's aged father's
house he'd grown old as a herald, was on friendly terms with him. 325
In his likeness now Zeus's son Apollo addressed Aineias:

“Aineias, how, against a god's will, could you all
safeguard steep Ilion? I've seen other men who relied
on their forceful strength, on their bravery, on their common
people, even when their numbers were very few; 330
but now it's for us Zeus wants victory, not for the Danaäns—
yet nevertheless you're scared witless, refuse to fight!”

So he spoke: Aineias, face to face with him, recognized
Apollo, the deadly archer, and shouted to Hektôr, saying:

“Hektōr, and you other leaders of the Trojans and allies! 335
 This is a shameful business, that by the warlike Achaians
 we’re being driven back up to Ilion, undone by our lack of spirit!
 But one of the gods just approached me, who says that Zeus,
 the all-highest counselor, is our backer in this battle!
 So let’s go straight for the Danaäns, not leave them undisturbed 340
 to carry the corpse of Patroklos back to their ships!”

So he spoke,
 then charged far beyond the front-line fighters, and stood there.
 The Trojans rallied to him, confronting the Achaians,
 and Aineias with his spear now wounded Leiōkritos,
 Arisbas’s son, Lykomēdēs’ worthy comrade; 345
 and Lykomēdēs, fierce warrior, in sorrow for his death
 advanced to close quarters, let fly with his gleaming spear,
 hit Hippiasos’s son Apisaōn, a shepherd of men,
 in his liver, below the midriff, and at once unstrung his knees—
 Apisaōn, who’d come out there from rich-soiled Paiōnia, 350
 and after Asteropaios was Paiōnia’s finest fighter.
 Asteropaios, fierce warrior, in sorrow for his death
 likewise charged forward, eager to challenge the Danaäns,
 but no longer could, for their shields now fenced them in
 as they encircled Patroklos, spears couched before them, 355
 while Aias ranged round them all, with endless directions—
 that none of them should give ground, fall back from the corpse,
 or come pushing forward in front of the other Achaians to fight,
 but keep close order round the body, battle hand-to-hand.
 Such were huge Aias’s orders: the earth grew sodden 360
 with dark red blood, and jostling men dropped dead
 in mingled heaps, Trojans and their proud allies,
 and Danaäns too: though these did not avoid bloodshed,
 far fewer of them were falling: they took constant care
 in the crush of battle to save one another from death. 365

So they battled on like fire, and you could not tell
 if the sun and the moon were still in their place, intact,
 for a dark mist now enshrouded all the bravest who stood
 and fought in the struggle around Menoitios’s dead son,
 while the rest of the Trojans and well-greaved Achaians engaged, 370
 unimpeded, in the clear air, with the sun’s keen rays
 spread over them, and not one single cloud to be seen

above plain or mountain. These fought with occasional breaks,
 avoiding each other's grief-laden missiles, and standing
 well apart, whereas those in the center were under duress 375
 from the conflict as well as the darkness, all the bravest worn down
 by the pitiless bronze. But two men who'd not yet learned—
 Antilochos, Thrasymēdēs, famous fighters both—
 of peerless Patroklos's death, and thought he was still
 alive, and battling the Trojans there in the foremost ranks, 380
 were now—though alert for their comrades' death or rout—
 fighting off at a distance, as Nestōr had told them to do
 while urging them into battle, away from the black ships.

All day long the great struggle of their grievous conflict
 raged on, and endlessly with the sweat of action 385
 every man's knees and calves, and the feet below them,
 and his arms and eyes, were bespattered, as they fought
 over the noble squire of Aiakos's swift-footed grandson.
 As when a man consigns the hide of a hefty bull
 to his people for stretching—one already made supple with fat— 390
 and they take it and all stand round in a circle and stretch it,
 so that at once the moisture goes out, while the fat sinks in,
 with many hands pulling, and the whole hide's surface is stretched—
 so this way and that both sides were tugging the corpse
 in a narrow space, and they all were hopeful at heart 395
 that they'd get it away: the Trojans to Ilion, the Achaians
 to the hollow ships; and around it a contest arose, so fierce
 that neither Arēs, driver of armies, nor yet Athēnē
 could have made light of it, however great their rage.

Such was the grim labor of men and horses that Zeus 400
 stretched taut that day over Patroklos. Nor did noble
 Achilles yet have any knowledge of Patroklos's death,
 for far distant from the swift ships the conflict raged,
 beneath the Trojans' ramparts. So he never expected
 that Patroklos would die, thought that once he'd reached
 Troy's gates 405
 he'd come back alive; for it did not enter his mind
 that Patroklos would try to sack Troy, with or without him,
 having often heard that from his mother, in private talk,
 when she brought him news of mighty Zeus's intentions;
 while now indeed his mother did not tell him the great disaster, 410

that his comrade, of all men the dearest to him, had been slain.

The combatants round the corpse, sharp spears in hand,
pressed on without pause, kept up their killing of one another,
and of the bronze-corseleted Achaians thus would one declare:

“Friends, we’d achieve no glory by going back at this point
to the hollow ships: here and now let the black earth gape
for us all—far better indeed that would be for us,
if we must surrender this man to the Trojan horse breakers,
to drag back to their city and so win glory.” 415

Thus likewise
would one of the great-hearted Trojans declare: “My friends,
even though it may prove our destiny to be slaughtered
beside this man, one and all, let no one give up the battle!” 420

This was how they spoke, arousing each man’s passion.
So they fought on, and an iron clatter went up
through the still upper air till it reached the brazen heavens. 425

But the horses of Aiakos’s grandson, now far from the conflict,
were weeping, since first they learned that their charioteer
had been laid low in the dust by Hektōr, killer of men.
Automedōn, valiant son of Diōrēs, again and again

lashed them with blows from his swift whip, many times
tried shifting them with kind words, many times with curses;
yet neither back to the ships by the broad Hellespont 430

were they willing to go, nor yet to join the Achaians in battle,
but as firm as stands the marker that’s set up over
the burial mound of some dead man or woman, so they 435

stood immovable, still hitched to the exquisite chariot,
heads bowed down to the ground, while the warm tears
flowed from their eyelids earthward as they shed them,
mourning their charioteer, and dust soiled the rich manes
that streamed down from the yoke-pad, both sides of the yoke. 440

Their mourning was viewed, with compassion, by Kronos’s son,
who shook his head while communing with his own heart:

“Wretched pair, why, oh, why, did we give you to King Pēleus,
a mortal, when you yourselves are immortal and ageless?
Was it to bring you sorrows among these wretched humans? 445
For surely there’s nothing more pitiable than man
among all the creature that breathe and creep on this earth!

But never behind you, upon that subtly worked chariot,
 will Priam's son Hektōr mount: I shall not let him!
 Is it not enough that he has the armor, brags over it? 450
 Into your knees and spirit I'll channel strength,
 to bring Automedōn also back safe from the fighting
 to the hollow ships, since I'll still bestow glory on the Trojans,
 to go on killing until they reach the well-benched ships,
 and the sun goes down, and sacred darkness comes on." 455

So saying, he breathed great power into the horses: they both
 shook off the dust from their manes to the ground, and lightly
 took their swift chariot in among Trojans and Achaians,
 while behind them Automedōn, though grieving for his comrade,
 fought on, swooped with his team like a vulture after geese: 460
 easily would he retreat from the Trojans' noisy conflict,
 easily make his charge, force a passage through the crowd.
 Yet not one man did he bring down during his urgent pursuit,
 since no way was he able, alone in that headlong chariot,
 both to attack with a spear and rein in his speeding horses. 465
 In the end a comrade of his observed his behavior—
 Alkimedōn, son of Laerkēs and Haimōn's grandson,
 and getting behind the chariot now spoke to Automedōn:
 "Automedōn, which of the gods has put such profitless counsel
 into your mind? Who's so robbed you of common sense 470
 that you're fighting among the foremost Trojan troops
 alone? Your comrade's dead, and his armor—Achilles' own—
 Hektōr himself now wears on his shoulders, flaunts it!"

To him Automedōn, son of Diōrēs, responded:
 "Alkimedōn, what other Achaian save you is able 475
 to curb and control the might of these immortal steeds—
 except for Patroklos, the gods' own equal in counsel,
 while he still lived? But now death and his fate have claimed him.
 So you take from me the whip and shining reins,
 and I'll dismount from the chariot, join the fighting." 480
 So he spoke. Alkimedōn boarded the rescue-swift chariot,
 quickly gathering in his hands both the reins and the whip,
 while Automedōn jumped down. Illustrious Hektōr saw them,
 and at once said to Aineias, who was standing near by:
 "Aineias, counselor of the bronze-corseleted Trojans, 485
 I've just seen the team of Aiakos's swift-footed grandson

showing up in the battle line with incompetent charioteers!
These two horses I'd hope to capture, if you in your heart
are agreeable, since if the two of us went at them
they wouldn't dare to stand firm, to face us in battle." 490

So he spoke, and Anchīsēs' fine son did not disregard him:
the pair strode forward, shoulders hooded with oxhide—
dried, stiff, with thick bronze hammered upon it—
and with them went both Chromios and the godlike Arētos,
hearts brimming with hopeful expectation that they'd now 495
kill the two men and drive off their strong-necked horses—
fools that they were, for they wouldn't come back without bloodshed
from Automedōn, who now was praying to Zeus, the Father,
his dark heart within him filled with courage and strength.
Quickly he spoke to Alkimedōn, his trusty comrade: 500
"Alkimedōn, don't keep the horses any distance from me—
let their breath fall close on my back, for I don't suppose
Hektōr, the son of Priam, will be stayed from his raging might
till he either mounts behind Achilles' fine-maned horses
after killing us both, and routing the rank and file 505
of the Argives—or else himself is slain in the front line."

So saying, he called out to both Aiasēs and Menelaös:
"Aiasēs, leaders of Argives, and you, Menelaös!
Entrust the body to those who are the best men we have,
to stand around it and fend off these crowding assailants— 510
But we're alive! Come help us, keep the ruthless day from us,
for here, bearing hard down on us in grievous battle
are Aineias and Hektōr, the Trojans' best fighting men!
Still, the outcome of all this lies on the knees of the gods—
I too will let fly my spear: for the rest, let Zeus decide!" 515

So saying, he poised and threw his far-shadowing spear,
and hit the well-balanced shield of Arētos, that failed
to stop its passage: clean through the bronze it drove,
and pierced through the baldric into the nether belly.
As when a strong young man, wielding a sharpened axe, 520
lands a blow behind the horns of a country ox, cuts clean
through the tendon, and the ox starts forward, falls,
so Arētos jerked forward, then fell on his back: the spear,
razor-sharp, quivered deep in his innards, unstrung his limbs.

Now Hektōr with his bright spear let fly at Automedōn, 525
 but Automedōn was watching, and avoided the bronze spear
 by ducking down forward, so that its long shaft
 stuck in the ground behind him, its butt-end quivering,
 and there mighty Arēs took its power away from it.
 They'd have faced off with their swords then, fought hand to hand, 530
 had the two Aiases not parted them—both hot for battle—
 coming out through the ranks in response to their comrade's call,
 so that from fear of them both Hektōr and Aineias,
 together with godlike Chromios, retreated once more,
 leaving Arētos behind, mortally wounded, still 535
 lying there. Automedōn now, the peer of speedy Arēs,
 stripped off Arētos's armor and boasted over him, saying:
 "Indeed, if only a little, I've eased my heart of its grief
 for Menoitios's son, though it was a lesser man that I killed."
 So saying, he picked up the bloodstained trappings, put them 540
 in the chariot, climbed aboard it himself, his feet and hands
 above them all bloody, like a lion that's devoured a bull.
 Once more over Patroklos the grinding battle was stretched,
 tear-laden and agonizing: Athēnē stirred the conflict,
 coming down from the sky, dispatched by far-seeing Zeus 545
 to urge on the Danaāns, for by now his mind had been changed.
 As Zeus from heaven stretches a rainbow's shimmering arc
 as a portent for mortals—it may be either of war,
 or of some chill winter storm, that stops men from working
 outdoors on the land, and distresses their flocks—just so 550
 Athēnē, enshrouding herself in a dark cloud, now ranged through
 the Achaian forces, began spurring each man on.
 First, with encouraging words she addressed the son
 of Atreus, brave Menelaös, since he was near at hand,
 assuming the form of Phoinix, and his unwearying voice: 555
 "For you indeed, Menelaös, there will be sure disgrace
 and shame, if lordly Achilles' trusty comrade
 is torn apart by quick dogs beneath the walls of Troy!
 So hold your position firmly, encourage all your men."
 Menelaös of the fine war cry made her this answer: 560
 "Phoinix, old daddy, aged sir, if only Athēnē
 would give me strength, fend off the oncoming missiles,

then I'd be ready to stand by Patroklos, protect him,
 for his death touched my heart to the quick. But Hektôr's
 strength is like fire's, he never rests from slaughtering 565
 with the bronze, since it's to him Zeus now grants glory."

So he spoke, and the goddess, grey-eyed Athênê, rejoiced,
 since it was to her, before all other gods, that he'd prayed;
 and she put power into his knees and shoulders,
 and filled his breast with the aggressiveness of the fly: 570

however often swatted away from a man's skin, still
 it persists in biting him, so sweet it finds human blood.
 Such the daring with which she flooded his dark spirit:
 he went and stood over Patroklos, let fly his gleaming spear.
 Now among the Trojans there was one Podês, Ēëtiôn's son, 575
 both wealthy and a good fighter, and honored by Hektôr,
 above all the people, as his friend and dinner-companion.
 Him fair-haired Menelaôs struck on the baldric as
 he leapt into flight; the bronze made its way clean through.
 He fell with a thud, and Atreus's son Menelaôs 580
 dragged his corpse from the Trojans into his comrades' ranks.

Then Apollo intervened, gave encouragement to Hektôr,
 in the likeness of Phainôps, Asios's son, who of all
 his guest-friends was dearest him, whose house was in Abydos.
 In his likeness the deadly archer Apollo now addressed him: 585
 "Hektôr, what other Achaian will be afraid of you, now
 you've fled before Menelaôs, who—at least in the past—
 seemed a faint-hearted fighter? Yet single-handed
 he's snatched a corpse from the Trojans, and killed your trusty
 comrade, a good front-line fighter—Podês, Ēëtiôn's son." 590

So he spoke, and a black cloud of grief enshrouded Hektôr,
 and he strode through the front-line fighters, clad in gleaming
 bronze.

Now, too, the son of Kronos took his aegis—tasseled,
 glittering bright—enveloped Ida in clouds,
 sent lightning, made a huge thunderclap, shook the aegis, 595
 gave victory to the Trojans, put the Achaians to flight.

First to panic and flee was Boiôtian Pêneleôs,
 who, turning to face the enemy, was hit in the upper shoulder,
 a glancing blow, yet Poulydamas's spear point nicked

the bone (it was he who'd speared him, at close range). 600
 Lēitos too, great-hearted Alektryōn's son, was wounded,
 in the wrist, at close quarters, by Hektōr, put out of the fight:
 he backed off, glancing round, since he no longer hoped,
 spear in good hand, to do battle with the Trojans.
 As Hektōr chased after Lēitos, Idomeneus struck 605
 his corselet, upon the chest by the nipple; but the long
 spear shaft broke off at the socket, so that the Trojans
 raised a loud cheer. Now Hektōr had a shot at Idomeneus,
 Deukaliōn's son, as he stood in his chariot—just missed him,
 but hit the charioteer and comrade of Mērionēs, 610
 Koiranos, who'd accompanied him from well-built Lyktos.
 Idomeneus had at first come on foot from the curved ships,
 and would have yielded a great triumph to the Trojans
 had Koiranos not quickly driven up his swift horses, come
 as a light of deliverance to him, warding off his pitiless day, 615
 but died himself at the hands of Hektōr, killer of men,
 who hit him below the ear, in under the jawline. The spear
 dashed his teeth out by their roots, cut his tongue at the midpoint.
 He fell from the chariot, dropped the reins on the ground.
 Mērionēs bent down, gathered them up in his own hands 620
 from the earth, and addressed Idomeneus:

"Use the whip now
 till you get to the swift ships! You yourself can recognize
 that the upper hand is no longer with the Achaians."

So he spoke, and Idomeneus lashed the fine-maned horses
 back to the hollow ships, for fear had seized his heart. 625

Nor did great-hearted Aias and Menelaös fail to see
 that Zeus was backing the Trojans, turning the tide of battle.
 Of these it was Telamōn's son, great Aias, who spoke first:
 "What's to be done? By this time even the merest idiot
 could figure that Zeus himself, the Father, is for the Trojans: 630
 all their missiles, whoever throws them, coward or hero,
 hit their target—Zeus anyway steers them straight—but for us
 every man's shot falls uselessly to the ground!
 So let's think up a plan, the best way we can contrive
 to drag that corpse out of the fray, and as for ourselves, 635
 manage to get back home, a great joy to our comrades,

who must be distressed by the scene here, who don't believe
 that the rage and invincible hands of Hektōr, killer of men,
 can now be stood off, are sure they'll descend on the black ships!
 If only there were some comrade to take a message posthaste 640
 to Pēleus's son, since I don't think he's yet received
 the sorrowful news that his own dear comrade is slain.
 But such a one I can't see amongst the Achaians,
 since they're all shrouded in mist—their selves and their horses!
 Zeus, Father, rescue the Achaians' sons from this mist, 645
 make the sky clear, let us see with our eyes; if you mean
 to kill us, if that's your pleasure, at least do it in daylight."

So he spoke: the Father pitied him as he wept,
 and forthwith scattered the darkness, drove the mist away:
 the sun shone on them, the battle was all now in clear view. 650
 Then Aias addressed Menelaös of the fine war cry:
 "Take a look, Menelaös, Zeus's nursling, in case you can spot
 Antilochos still alive there, great-hearted Nestōr's son,
 and send him, as fast as may be, to warlike Achilles
 to tell him his dearest comrade by far has been killed." 655

So he spoke: Menelaös of the fine war cry did not
 disregard him, but went on his way like a lion from a steading,
 tired of provoking the dogs and men that won't let him
 get in and seize the fattest steer, who are vigilant
 the whole night through—yet he, so desperate for meat, 660
 keeps coming, but gets nowhere, has to face a shower
 of hunting spears flung by strong hands, and blazing firebrands
 before which, for all his eagerness, he shrinks back,
 and at dawn goes on his way, his spirit crushed—
 so from Patroklos went Menelaös, of the fine war cry, 665
 against his will, for he greatly feared that the Achaians
 in their disastrous flight might leave him a prey for his foes.
 Repeatedly he adjured Mērionēs and both Aiases:
 "You Aiases, Argive leaders, and, Mērionēs, you too—
 each one of you should remember the gentleness of Patroklos— 670
 unhappy soul!—for he knew how to be kind to all men
 while he still lived: but now death and destiny have claimed him."

This said, fair-haired Menelaös went on his way,
 glancing from side to side like an eagle—which, they say,

has the keenest eyesight of all the sky's winged creatures, 675
 and from it, high though it glides, the hare is not hidden
 crouching under a leafy bush, but the eagle swoops
 straight down, and having caught it, quickly robs it of life.
 Thus then, Menelaös, Zeus's nursling, did your glinting eyes
 roam everywhere over the company of your many comrades, 680
 in the hope of discovering Nestör's son still alive there.
 Menelaös soon picked him out—at the far left of the battle,
 encouraging his comrades and urging them on to fight—
 and went over, and said, standing near him: "Come here,
 Antilochos, Zeus's nursling: there's news you need to learn, 685
 distressing news, that I wish had never come about!
 By now I think you must know, from what you've seen,
 that there's some god's who's rolling disaster upon the Danaäns,
 that the Trojans are winning. Slain is the best of the Achaïans—
 Patroklos, leaving the Danaäns with a huge sense of loss: 690
 so you must run, at once, to the Achaïans' ships, bring word
 to Achilles, let him quickly bring the body back to his ship—
 the naked body: his armor bright-helmeted Hektör holds."

 So he spoke: Antilochos heard his words with horror.
 For long he was stricken speechless, while both his eyes 695
 were brimming with tears, and his strong young voice was stilled.
 Even so he did not ignore the command of Menelaös:
 he set off at a run, gave his gear to his peerless companion
 Laodokos, who was turning his whole-hoofed team close by.

 So Antilochos's feet bore him, weeping, away from the battle 700
 to bring these evil tidings to Pēleus's son Achilles.
 Nor, Menelaös, Zeus's nursling, was your spirit minded
 to lend help to those hard-pressed Pylïan comrades
 whom Antilochos, going, had left with a huge sense of loss.
 He sent noble Thrasymēdēs to them, but himself, at a run, 705
 went back to the hero Patroklos, stood once more over him.
 Going first up to the Aiases, he told them at once:
 "That man you mentioned I've sent on to the swift ships,
 to go to swift-footed Achilles, who, even now, I don't think
 will come out, enraged though he is at noble Hektör— 710
 there's no way he would fight without armor against the Trojans.
 So let's think up a plan, the best way we can contrive

to drag that corpse out of the fray, and as for ourselves,
to stay clear of death and its spirits amid the Trojans' clamor."

Then great Aias, Telamōn's son, responded to him: 715
"All you've said, renowned Menelaös, is right and proper.
So you and Mērionēs go quickly, shoulder the corpse,
carry it out of the struggle: we two behind you
will do battle with the Trojans and noble Hektōr,
one in name as in spirit, we who in times gone by 720
have stood firm in sharp battles, each supporting the other."

So he spoke: they gathered the corpse in their arms
and with huge effort heaved it up, while behind them the Trojan
troops all cried out when they saw Achaians lifting the body,
and charged straight at them, like hounds that go for a wounded 725
wild boar, out in front of their young huntsmen: at first
they keep rushing at it, eager to tear it apart,
but when, trusting its strength, it turns at bay amongst them,
they back off, scatter in panic, one this way, one that—
so the Trojans at first kept after them in a body, 730
stabbing at them with swords and two-edged spears;
but each time the two Aiases turned and made a stand
against them, then would their color change, and none
now dared to come forward and do battle for the corpse.

So these two, hurriedly, bore the body out of the fighting 735
back to the hollow ships: against them pressed a conflict
as savage as flames that race to reach a populous city,
set it ablaze in an instant, and houses collapse
in the vast fire that's driven, roaring, by the wind's force—
so against these now the uproar of chariots and spearmen 740
came beating ceaselessly as they struggled on their way;
but like mules that put their strong backs into the effort
and drag from the mountains, down some steep stony track,
a beam or a huge ship timber, their hearts within them
worn down with sweat and exhaustion as they strive onward— 745
so these two, straining, bore off the corpse, while behind them
the Aiases held back the foe, as a ridge holds off a flood,
a wooded ridge, that by chance lies right across a plain,
and checks the dangerous onset of even the strongest rivers,
turns all their streams back to wander over the plain, 750

nor can their mighty torrent ever burst through it—
 so the two Aiases constantly stood off the assaults;
 yet the Trojans kept on coming, two of them above all,
 Aineias, son of Anchīsēs, and illustrious Hektōr.
 As a cloud of starlings or jackdaws will take wing, and cry 755
 the alarm when they catch sight of a hawk approaching—
 the creature that bodes plain murder for all small birds—
 so from Aineias and Hektōr fled the Achaians' young warriors,
 crying the alarm, forgetful of their fighting spirit. Many
 fine pieces of armor were lost now, round and about the ditch, 760
 as the Danaäns fled; but from warfare there was no respite.