

## Book 24

Then the assembly broke up. The troops now scattered, each man  
off to his own swift ship, their minds on the evening meal  
and the joy of a full night's sleep. But Achilles wept and wept,  
thinking of his dear comrade, so that sleep the all-subduing  
got no hold on him: he kept tossing this way and that, 5  
missing Patroklos—his manhood, his splendid strength,  
all he'd been through with him, all the hardships he'd suffered,  
facing men in battle and the waves of the cruel sea.  
Recalling these things he shed large tears, lying now  
stretched out on his side, but, restless, sometimes again 10  
on his back, or prone. Then again he'd rise to his feet  
and wander, distraught, by the seashore: the rising dawn  
never brought light to sea and to beaches but he was there.  
Then he would yoke his swift horses to the chariot,  
and tie on Hektōr behind it, to be dragged; and when 15  
he'd trailed him three times about Menoitios's dead son's mound  
he'd go back and rest in his hut, leaving Hektōr's body  
stretched out prone in the dust. But Apollo, pitying Hektōr,  
preserved his flesh, though mortal, from all unseemly decay  
even in death, wrapped the golden aegis round his whole body 20  
to save the dragged corpse from disfigurement by Achilles.

So Achilles in his fury aimed to mutilate noble Hektōr;  
but the sight of him stirred compassion among the blessed gods,  
and they urged Argos's sharp-sighted slayer, Hermēs, to steal the corpse.  
This plan pleased the rest of them, but neither Hērē 25  
nor Poseidōn liked it, nor the grey-eyed virgin goddess,<sup>1</sup>

1. This is the sole reference in the *Iliad* to the famous, or notorious, Judgment of Paris (Aléxandros) in the beauty contest between Hērē, Athēnē, and Aphroditē. By giving the prize to Aphroditē, Paris earned her reward to him: she made Helen irresistible to his advances, and by so doing precipitated the events that led to the Trojan War. The genuineness of the passage was long debated, but it is now (and rightly, I think) accepted. Even so, problems remain: if this was the *casus belli*, why delay its mention so long, and then make it so brief? Embarrassment at such petty motivation? But similar examples of personal divine spite are frequent in Homer: I suspect the reason may simply have been that the incident was so well known that any ancient audience would take it for granted. See Richardson 278–80 for a good survey of the debate.

who still nursed the hatred they'd conceived for sacred Ilion,  
 and Priam, and Priam's people, through Aléxandros's blind delusion:  
 for when these goddesses came to his courtyard he despised them,  
 but had praise for the one who furthered his fatal lust. 30  
 So now, on the twelfth morning after Hektōr's death,  
 Phoibos Apollo spoke his mind among the immortals:  
 "A hard-hearted lot, you gods, and destructive! Did Hektōr never  
 burn for you thighs of oxen, then, or of unblemished goats?  
 Yet you couldn't be bothered to save him, dead though he is, 35  
 for his wife to look on, his mother and his child,  
 his father Priam, the Trojans—who would all promptly  
 burn his corpse in the fire, give him proper funeral rites.  
 No, gods: it's the ruthless Achilles you're bent on supporting,  
 though his mind's out of proper order and the will in his breast 40  
 inflexible—his nature's turned savage, like a lion  
 that in thrall to its huge might and its daring spirit  
 makes for the flocks of men to capture itself a feast:  
 so Achilles has lost all pity, and has no respect in him—  
 a great source to a man of both harm and benefit. 45  
 Any man may well have lost someone even dearer than he has—  
 a full brother, say, or even a son; yet when  
 he's wept and lamented the loss, he lets him go,  
 for it's an enduring heart the Fates have given to mortals.  
 But this man, after robbing noble Hektōr of his life, 50  
 ties him behind his chariot and then drags him about  
 his dear comrade's mound: nothing fine or decent there.  
 Great though he is, he should watch out for our anger:  
 through this fury of his he's outraging the silent earth."<sup>2</sup>  
 Then angrily white-armed Hērē addressed him, saying: 55  
 "What you say might even be true, lord of the silver bow,  
 if indeed you all grant equal honor to Achilles and Hektōr.  
 Hektōr is mortal, was suckled at a woman's breast; but Achilles  
 is the offspring of a goddess, one whom I myself  
 nurtured and reared, and gave to a mortal as his wife— 60

2. Both Leaf (2: 440) and Richardson (282) assume that the reference is solely to the mutilation of Hektōr's body, now dumb or senseless clay—as both point out, a traditional metaphor; but surely (and still more strikingly) what we have here is the sense of the earth itself (which cannot complain) being outraged by what is taking place, very directly, on its surface?

to Pēleus, a man who was dear to the hearts of the immortals;  
and all of you gods were guests at their wedding—yes, you too<sup>3</sup>  
sat at that feast, lyre in hand, ever faithless, friend of the wicked!”

Then Zeus the cloud-gatherer responded to her, saying:  
“Hērē, no need to rage so vehemently at the gods! 65  
The honor of these two will not be the same; yet Hektōr  
was more dear to the gods than all other mortals in Ilion!  
To me at least, for he never failed me with gifts I enjoyed—  
Not once did my altar lack its fair share of the feasting,  
the libations, the burnt fat, our accepted privileges! 70  
We’ll forget about stealing bold Hektōr—no way to do it  
with Achilles not finding out: his mother is constantly  
around him both day and night. In fact I wish  
that one of you gods would tell Thetis I want her here,  
to give a wise message to her, to make Achilles 75  
accept ransom from Priam, and give Hektōr’s body back.”

So he spoke: storm-footed Iris hastened to take his message.  
Midway between Samothrakē and rocky Imbros  
she plunged into the dark sea with a loud splash of water,  
and plummeted down to the depths like a lead weight 80  
attached to the horn of a field ox on a fisherman’s line  
that brings death in its descent to the ravenous fishes.  
Thetis she found in her hollow cave, and round her other  
sea goddesses gathered, while she in the midst of them  
wept for the fate of her peerless son, who was destined 85  
to perish in rich-soiled Troy, far off from his own country.  
Standing beside her, swift-footed Iris now said:  
“Move yourself, Thetis: Zeus, the eternal planner, wants you.”  
Then the goddess, Thetis the silver-footed, answered her:  
“What does that great god want with me? I’m embarrassed, 90  
going among the immortals, with this endless grief at heart.  
Still, I’ll go. Whatever he says, it won’t be pointless.”

So saying, she, brightest of goddesses, put on her blue-black  
veil, than which no garment she had was darker,  
and set out to go, wind-footed swift Iris ahead of her 95

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3. Apollo played at the wedding feast of the future Achilles’ parents, but went on (as a fragment of Aeschylus, spoken by Thetis, alleges: Richardson 283) to be responsible for their famous son’s death.

leading the way: the sea's waves parted before them.  
 They stepped out onto the beach, then darted up skywards  
 and found Kronos's far-seeing son, with all the other  
 blessed gods who exist forever around him. **Thetis**  
**sat down by Zeus the Father—Athēnē yielded her seat—** 100  
**and Hērē put in her hand a splendid golden cup,**  
 with a friendly greeting. Thetis drank, and returned it.  
 The Father of men and gods now began their discussion:  
 "Thetis, goddess, you've come to Olympus, despite your distress,  
 and the ceaseless grief in your heart: this I know myself. 105  
 Even so, I shall tell you the reason I brought you here.  
 For nine days there's been a quarrel among the immortals  
 about Hektōr's corpse and Achilles, sacker of cities.  
 They're urging Argos's sharp-eyed slayer to steal the body,  
 but this is an honor that I'm reserving for Achilles, 110  
 to preserve your respect and friendship in the days ahead.  
 Go quickly, then, to the camp, and give your son this message:  
 Say that he's angered the gods, that I, above all other  
 immortals, am filled with rage, because in his maddened heart  
 he's kept Hektōr by the curved ships, won't give him up. 115  
 It may be, through fear of me, he'll return Hektōr's body;  
 but I'll send down Iris to great-hearted Priam, who must  
 offer ransom for his dear son, go to the Achaians' ships  
 in person, with gifts for Achilles that will soften his heart."

So he spoke,  
 and Thetis the silver-footed, the goddess, did not ignore him, 120  
 but went on her way, darting down from the peaks of Olympus,  
 and arrived at her son's hut. It was there that she found him,  
 making ceaseless lament, while round him his dear comrades  
 were busy about their tasks, preparing their morning meal:  
 a big shaggy ram had been killed for them, there in the hut. 125  
 So now his lady mother sat down close by Achilles' side,  
 caressed him with her hand, then spoke to him, saying:  
 "My child, how long will you go on eating your heart out  
 with weeping and lamentation, thinking neither of food  
 nor of bed? A good thing it is to lie with a woman, 130  
 to make love: for you've not long to live—even now, already,  
 death and all-mastering destiny are there beside you.  
 But now listen well: I bring word to you from Zeus.

He says that you've angered the gods, that he, above all other immortals, is filled with rage, because in your maddened heart you've kept Hektōr by the curved ships, won't give him up. So come now, let him go, accept ransom for his corpse." 135

In answer to her swift-footed Achilles declared:  
"So be it: he who brings ransom can take the corpse—if indeed the Olympian himself, of his own free will, so orders." 140

Thus they, where the ships were drawn up now, mother and son, conversed together, exchanging many a winged word; and Kronos's son meanwhile dispatched Iris to sacred Ilion:  
"On your way now, swift Iris, leave the seat of Olympos for Ilion, take this message to great-hearted Priam. He must offer ransom for his dear son, go to the Achaians' ships, in person, with gifts for Achilles that will soften his heart—alone: no Trojan warrior should accompany him, just a herald, well on in years, to drive the mules and a smooth-running wagon, to carry back to the city the corpse of the man whom noble Achilles killed. 145  
Let death not be on his mind, nor any such fear, such a guide we'll provide him with, the slayer of Argos, who'll be his leader, convey him safely to Achilles; and when he's brought him into Achilles' hut, Achilles himself will not kill him, and will restrain all others, being neither senseless nor careless nor malicious: with compassion, rather, he'll spare a man who's a suppliant." 150 155

So he spoke: storm-footed Iris sped off with his message. She reached Priam's house, and found there wailing and sorrow: sons sitting around their father in the courtyard, tears marring their garments, the old man in their midst wrapped tight in his cloak, and round him an abundance of dung all smeared on his aged head and neck that he'd scraped up in his hands as he rolled on the ground. 160  
In the house were his daughters and his sons' wives, keening, their thoughts on the warriors, so many and so warlike, lying dead now, those who'd lost their lives to the Argives. Zeus's messenger stood close to Priam now, and addressed him, speaking softly, yet shivering still invaded his limbs: 165  
"Take heart, Priam, scion of Dardanos: no need to be scared— 170

I've not come here to foretell some disaster for you,  
 but rather with good intent. I'm a messenger from Zeus,  
 who, remote though he is, both pities and cares for you greatly.  
 The Olympian commands you to ransom noble Hektōr, 175  
 taking gifts to Achilles that will soften his heart—  
 alone: no other Trojan warrior should accompany you,  
 just a herald, well on in years, to drive the mules  
 and a smooth-running wagon, on which to take back to the city  
 the corpse of the man whom noble Achilles killed. 180  
 Let death not be on your mind, nor any such fear,  
 such a guide we'll provide you with—the slayer of Argos,  
 who'll be your leader, convey you safely to Achilles;  
 and when he's brought you into Achilles' hut,  
 Achilles himself won't kill you, and will restrain all others, 185  
 being neither senseless nor careless nor malicious;  
 with compassion, rather, he'll spare a man who's a suppliant."

So speaking, swift-footed Iris went on her way,  
 and Priam ordered his sons to make ready the smooth-running  
 mule wagon, and strap the wickerwork basket on it. 190  
 He himself went down to his storeroom—fragrant it was  
 with cedar wood, and high-ceilinged—where many treasures lay,  
 and sent for his wife Hekabē, and spoke to her, saying:  
 "Dear wife, an Olympian messenger's reached me from Zeus—  
 I'm to go to the ships, offer ransom for my dear son, 195  
 in person, with gifts for Achilles that will soften his heart.  
 So tell me, what's your reaction to this, how does it strike you—  
 since my own whole passionate instinct is terribly set  
 on going to the ships, to the broad camp of the Achaians."

So he spoke: but his wife cried out aloud, and responded: 200  
 "Oh my lord, what's become of that good sense for which  
 you were famous once, both abroad and with those you rule?  
 How can you want to go to the Achaians' ships, alone,  
 into the sight of the man who's slaughtered so many  
 of your noble sons? You must have a heart of iron. 205  
 For once you are in his power, once he sets eyes on you,  
 that treacherous raw flesh eater will show you no pity,  
 nor any respect! Let us rather lament far from him,  
 sitting here in our own home. All-mastering Destiny

surely spun a thread at his birth, when I myself bore him,  
that far from his parents he'd glut quick scavenging dogs  
after meeting a stronger man—whose whole liver I wish  
I could get in my jaws and devour! A fair requital, that,  
for my son, who was not playing the coward when he killed  
him,

but in defense of Troy's men and deep-bosomed women,  
standing firm, with no thought of panic, or of fleeing the foe."

In answer to her the old man, Priam the godlike, said:  
"Don't try to stop me when I want to go; do not yourself  
prove a bird of ill omen here in our home: you won't persuade me.  
If anyone else on earth had been urging me thus—  
whether seers divining from sacrifices, or priests—  
we'd call it a lie and have nothing to do with it!  
But now, since I heard the goddess and saw her face myself,  
I'm going—her word won't be wasted. And if it's my fate  
to end up dead beside the bronze-clad Achaians' ships,  
I'm ready. Achilles is welcome to slaughter me there and then  
once I've held my son in my arms, and had my fill of mourning."

With that he opened up the fine lids of the clothes chests,  
and from them took out a dozen most elegant robes,  
a dozen plain cloaks, the same number of rugs and blankets,  
and of white linen mantles, as well as tunics to match them;  
and of gold he weighed out and took ten talents in all,  
with four cauldrons, and two brightly gleaming tripods,  
and an exquisite cup, that was given him by some Thracians  
when he went there on a mission, a great treasure: not even this  
did the old man keep in his home, so strong was his passion  
to ransom his dear son. Then he drove all the Trojans away  
from his colonnade, upbraiding them with abusive insults:  
'Get out, you worthless no-goods! Do you not have your own  
mourning to do at home, that you've come here to double mine?  
Or is the grief nothing to you that Zeus the son of Kronos  
has laid on me: the loss of my best son? You too will learn—  
you'll be that much easier for the Achaians to slaughter  
now that he's dead! As for me, before I'm forced  
to see the downfall and sacking of this city  
with my own eyes, may I go down into Hādēs' realm."

That said, he went after the men with his staff, and they  
 ran off from the old man's assault. Then he yelled at his own sons,  
 abusing them—Helenos, noble Agathōn, Paris,  
 Pammōn and Antiphōn, Politēs of the great war cry, 250  
 Deiphobos and Hippothoös and illustrious Dios:  
 To these nine the old man now shouted his harsh orders:  
 “Get moving, you wretched children, you downcasts—how I wish  
 all of you, rather than Hektōr, had been killed at the swift ships!  
 Alas, I'm wholly ill-fated—I sired sons who were the best 255  
 in the broad land of Troy, yet of them not one, I tell you,  
 is left—neither godlike Mēstōr, nor Trōilos, charioteer,  
 nor Hektōr, a god among men, who never did seem  
 a mortal man's son, but the offspring of a god!  
 These Arēs destroyed: what's left are all the no-goods— 260  
 the liars, the dancers only expert at matching the beat,  
 the lifters of lambs and kids from those in your own country!<sup>4</sup>  
 So at least make me ready a wagon, and do it quickly,  
 and load all this stuff aboard it, so we can be on our way.”  
  
 So he spoke, and they, alarmed by their father's reproof, 265  
 went and brought out for him the smooth-running mule wagon—  
 a fine one, newly made—strapped the wickerwork basket to it,  
 and down from its peg took the yoke for the mules, of boxwood,  
 with a boss on it, well equipped with guide rings for the reins.  
 Then they fetched the nine-cubit yoke strap, and the yoke itself, 270  
 which they settled down firmly upon the well-polished pole  
 at its front end, set the ring on the peg, then fastened  
 the strap three times each side of the boss, made it tight  
 in a series of turns, and twisted it under the hook. They brought  
 from the storeroom and stacked up aboard the polished wagon 275  
 the boundless ransom to offer for the head of Hektōr;  
 they yoked the strong-hoofed mules, broken to work in harness,  
 that the Mysians had given to Priam, a splendid gift; while for him  
 they harnessed up the horses that the old man kept on  
 for his own use, and cared for, there in his polished stalls. 280

4. As Thucydides observed (1.5.1) and Richardson duly notes (300–301), “robbing livestock outside one's community was no disgrace in heroic society.” Modern Greece and the Scottish Highlands offer good parallels.



So these two<sup>5</sup> in the high palace, while their teams were harnessed,  
 the herald and Priam, had much to meditate on;  
 and Hekabē now approached them, heavy-laden at heart,  
 carrying in her right hand wine sweet to the mind  
 in a golden cup, for libation before they departed. 285  
 Standing in front of the horses, she spoke to Priam, saying:  
 “Here, pour a libation to Zeus, the Father, and pray that you  
 get back home safe from these hateful men, since your heart  
 impels you  
 to go to the ships, even though I’m set against it.  
 Then pray to Kronos’s son, lord of the dark clouds, 290  
 who from Ida looks down on all the country of Troy.  
 Ask him for a bird of omen—the swift messenger that’s  
 the dearest of birds to him, and its power is the greatest—  
 on your right hand, so that, after seeing it for yourself,  
 and trusting it, you can go to the swift-horsed Danaäns’ ships. 295  
 But if far-seeing Zeus does not grant you his messenger,  
 then I at least would not encourage you to go out  
 to the ships of the Argives, however much you may want to.”  
  
 In answer to her, godlike Priam then declared:  
 “My wife, in this I shall not disregard your wishes: 300  
 it’s good to raise hands to Zeus: he always might show pity.”  
  
 So saying, the old man asked a servant, the housekeeper,  
 to pour pure water over his hands; the servant stood  
 beside him, with in her hands both ewer and wine jug.  
 When he’d washed his hands he took the cup from his wife, 305  
 and stood in the forecourt and prayed, poured out the wine  
 eyes upturned to heaven, and spoke aloud, in these words:  
 “Zeus, Father, ruling from Ida, most glorious, greatest,  
 grant that Achilles receive me with both friendship and pity—  
 and send me a bird of omen—the swift messenger that’s 310  
 the dearest of birds to you, and its power is the greatest—  
 on my right hand, so that, after seeing it for myself,  
 and trusting it, I can go to the swift-horsed Danaäns’ ships.”

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5. This is the first we are told of a herald actually being found (at short notice, at night) and brought to the palace. It is only later (325), and equally casually, that we learn that his name is *Idaios* (cf. 3.248, 7.276, and elsewhere).

So he spoke in prayer, and Zeus the Counselor heard him.  
 He at once dispatched an eagle, of winged life the surest omen, 315  
 dark hunter, sometimes known to men as the black falcon.  
 Wide as the door is built to fit some wealthy man's  
 high-ceilinged treasure chamber, a door well-equipped with bars,  
 so wide the spread of its wings on either side. It appeared  
 on their right, swooping over the city, and seeing it they 320  
 rejoiced, and the hearts in the breasts of all were cheered.

Briskly now the old man stepped into his chariot,  
 and drove out through the forecourt and the echoing colonnade.  
 In front of him went the mules, that drew the four-wheeled wagon  
 driven by skillful Idaios, and following after them 325  
 the horses, that the old man smartly whipped on  
 at speed through the city, his kinsfolk all following behind  
 with great weeping and sorrow, as for one going to his death.  
 When they'd come down out of the city, and reached the plain,  
 these last turned and went back into Ilion—Priam's sons, 330  
 and his daughters' husbands. Far-seeing Zeus did not fail  
 to notice the two as they entered the plain, and, seeing Priam,  
 felt pity, and spoke at once to Hermēs, his own dear son:  
 "Hermēs, it gives you much pleasure to act as a man's  
 companion; you're glad to listen to those whom you enjoy! 335  
 So, off with you now, escort Priam to the Achaians'  
 hollow ships—but make sure he's not seen or recognized  
 by the other Danaāns before you get to Pēleus's son."

So he spoke: the guide, Argos's slayer, did not ignore him,  
 but at once strapped under his feet the beautiful sandals, 340  
 golden, immortal, that carried him over water  
 or boundless land, as swift as the wind's blast,  
 and took the wand with which he bewitches the eyes  
 of those he chooses, while others he rouses from their sleep.  
 With this in his hand the mighty slayer of Argos 345  
 took to the air, quickly reaching the Hellespont, and Troy,  
 where he set off to walk in the likeness of a young prince  
 with the first down on his chin, youth's most charming age.

When the two had driven past the great burial mound of Ilos,  
 they halted their mules and horses to let them drink 350  
 at the river: by this time darkness had fallen over the land.

Looking around, the herald caught sight of someone nearby—  
Hermēs—and turning to Priam said: “Think quickly,  
scion of Dardanos—we need a smart decision!  
I see a man—I’m afraid we may soon be cut to pieces! 355  
Let’s run for it in the chariot, or else perhaps  
clasp his knees and entreat him—he might take pity on us.”

So he spoke: the old man was terrified, his mind  
in turmoil, on his bowed limbs the hairs rose up,  
and he stood in a daze: but the Helper himself approached, 360  
took the old man’s hand in his, and questioned him, saying:  
“Where are you off to, father, driving horses and mules  
through the fragrant night, when other mortals are sleeping?  
Aren’t you scared of the Achaians, your implacable enemies,  
whose breath is fury, who are very near around you? 365  
Should one of them see you coming, through the swift dark  
night,  
conveying all that treasure, what answer would you have then?  
You’re not young yourself, and your attendant here’s old too:  
how stand off any man who decides to attack you? Myself,  
I shan’t harm you in any way, in fact I’d defend you 370  
against anyone else: you’re so like my own dear father.”

Then the old man, Priam the godlike, made him this answer:  
“These things, dear child, are indeed correct as you state them—  
but one of the gods must still have had a protective hand  
over me, to have put a traveller like you in my path, 375  
so happily met, so handsome, of so fine a demeanor,  
and sensible too: your parents are truly blessed!”

Then the guide, the slayer of Argos, gave him this reply:  
“All this indeed, old sir, you have fittingly spoken.  
But tell me now, please, and make a true declaration: 380  
all these splendid treasures—are you shipping them out  
to foreign people abroad, to be kept in safety for you?  
Or is it that you’re all abandoning sacred Ilion  
out of fear now, since your finest warrior’s perished—  
your son? *He* never shrank from battling the Achaians.” 385

Then the old man, Priam the godlike, made this answer to him:  
“Who are you, most noble sir, and who, pray, are your parents,  
that you speak so well of the fate of my unlucky son?”

Then the guide, the slayer of Argos, made him this reply:  
 “You’re testing me, old sir, when you ask about noble Hektōr. 390  
 Him I have often seen, in battle, where men win honor,  
 with my own eyes, and when, after driving them to the ships,  
 he would slay Argives, cut them down with the sharp bronze.  
 We would stand there and marvel, because Achilles  
 would not let us fight, being embittered at Atreus’s son. 395  
 His henchman am I: the same well-built ship brought us here.  
 From the Myrmidons I am sprung; my father is Polyktōr,  
 a wealthy man—and an old one, just as you are.  
 Six other sons he has, and I myself am the seventh.  
 We cast lots, and I was chosen to serve out here; 400  
 and now I’ve come to the plain from the ships, for at first dawn  
 the sharp-eyed Achaians are going to attack around the city.  
 Sitting idle has made them impatient: the Achaians’ princes  
 can no longer restrain them, so eager they are for battle.”  
  
 Then the old man, Priam the godlike, made him this answer: 405  
 “If you indeed are a henchman of Pēleus’s son Achilles,  
 then please recount to me the whole truth of the matter:  
 does my son remain by the ships, or has Achilles already  
 hacked him to pieces, and thrown them out for his dogs?”  
  
 Then the guide, the slayer of Argos, made him this reply: 410  
 “Old sir, not yet have dogs or birds of prey devoured him;  
 the man is still lying there beside Achilles’ ship,  
 among the huts, just as he was; though this is the twelfth day  
 he’s been there, his flesh has not rotted, nor have maggots  
 devoured it—the kind that feed on mortals killed in battle. 415  
 Achilles indeed now drags him around his dear comrade’s tomb,  
 ruthlessly, daily, as soon as the light of dawn appears—  
 yet does not disfigure him: go look, and you’d be amazed  
 how dew-fresh he lies there, washed quite clean of blood  
 and nowhere befouled. All the wounds that he was given 420  
 have closed—and many there were who thrust the bronze into him!  
 This is how the blessed gods take good care of your son,  
 corpse though he is, since he was dear to their hearts.”  
  
 So he spoke: the old man rejoiced, and answered in these words:  
 “My child, it’s a good thing indeed to make proper offerings 425  
 to the immortals: my son—if he ever truly existed—

never forgot in his halls the gods who possess Olympus,  
 so now they've remembered him, even in his destined death.  
 But come, accept from me this beautiful drinking cup,  
 and be my protector, and in company with the gods  
 escort me, until I arrive at the hut of Pēleus's son." 430

Then the guide, the slayer of Argos, made this reply:  
 "You're testing my youth, old sir, but you'll not persuade me,  
 when you ask me to take gifts from you behind Achilles' back!  
 Him I fear and respect too much at heart to ever 435  
 defraud him—I wouldn't want to get into trouble later!  
 But as your guide I'd go with you as far as famous Argos,  
 protecting you carefully, in a swift ship or on foot,  
 nor would any man, scorning your escort, dare to attack you."

So saying, the Helper took charge of chariot and horses, 440  
 quickly got his hands on the whip and the reins, and breathed  
 potent strength into horses and mules alike; and when  
 they reached the ditch and the battlements protecting the ships,  
 where the guards were still busy preparing their evening meal,  
 on all these the guide, the slayer of Argos, shed sleep, 445  
 then opened the gates, drew back the bars, and brought  
 Priam inside, along with the splendid gifts on the wagon.  
 But when they arrived at the hut of Peleus's son—  
 that high cabin built by the Myrmidons for their king,  
 with rough-cut fir-wood beams, and a roof set up over it, 450  
 made of bristling thatch that they'd harvested from the meadows,  
 and around it enclosed a large courtyard for their king  
 with a close-set palisade, the entrance to which was secured  
 by one single fir beam: to close it took three Achaians,  
 and three to haul open this huge cross-bar on the doors 455  
 (except for Achilles, who'd ram it home single-handed)—  
 then Hermēs the Helper opened the entrance for the old man,  
 and fetched in the splendid gifts for Pēleus's swift-footed son,  
 and stepped down to the ground from the chariot, and declared:  
 "Old sir, I who have come to you am an immortal god, 460  
 Hermēs, sent here to escort you by my father.  
 But now I must hasten back, and not come in where Achilles  
 can see me: it would be most improper for an immortal  
 god to be entertained by mortals, face to face! But you  
 must go in there now, embrace the knees of Pēleus's son, 465

and in the name of his father and of his fine-haired mother—  
and of his child<sup>6</sup>—entreat him, attempt to touch his heart.”

Having so spoken, Hermēs then departed to high Olympos,  
while Priam stepped from his chariot to the ground,  
leaving Idaios there, to stay behind and look after 470  
the horses and mules. He himself went straight to the dwelling  
where Achilles, dear to Zeus, was sitting; entered, and found  
the man himself, but his comrades were sitting elsewhere—  
two only, the hero Automedōn, and Alkimos, scion of Arēs,  
were in busy attendance on him. He was through with his meal, 475  
with eating and drinking: the table still stood by him.  
Unnoticed, great Priam came in, approached Achilles,  
embraced his knees, and kissed his hands—those terrible  
murderous hands, that had killed so many of his sons.  
As when blind delusion possesses a man to murder 480  
someone in his own country, and he flees to an alien people,  
to some wealthy man’s house, and wonder grips those who see him—  
so Achilles was amazed at the sight of godlike Priam,  
and the rest were likewise amazed, and looked at one another.  
Then Priam addressed Achilles, entreating him in these words: 485  
“Remember your own father, godlike Achilles,  
whose years equal mine, on old age’s deathly threshold:  
him too, it may well be, those dwelling on his frontiers  
are harassing, with no one to ward off ruin from him.  
But he at least, while he hears that you’re still living, 490  
is happy at heart, and hopes from day to day  
that he’ll see his dear son returning from the land of Troy—  
whereas I am wholly ill-fated: of the best sons I sired,  
in the broad land of Troy, not one, I tell you, is left:  
fifty I had, when the Achaians’ sons first came; 495  
nineteen were born to me from one single womb, the rest  
other women bore in my halls. But most of these, though many,  
had their limbs unstrung by impetuous Arēs. The one  
true son I had left me to guard the city and its people

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6. Achilles’ only son, by Deidameia, was Pyrrhos, also known as Neoptolemos. There is grim irony here, since according to one tradition (*Little Iliad* fr. 18 = West 2003 [A]: 136–37), it was Neoptolemos—one of the warriors in the Wooden Horse—who during the sack of Troy killed Priam, while the latter was seeking sanctuary at the altar of Zeus. For this outrage Neoptolemos was later slain at Delphi (*HE* 2: 569).

you slew untimely as he fought in defense of his country— 500  
 Hektōr! It's for his sake I've come, now, to the Argives' ships,  
 to recover him from you. I bring with me ransom past counting.  
 Revere the gods, Achilles, and to me show pity,  
 remembering your own father: but I'm the more pitiable,  
 for I've borne what no other mortal on earth has yet endured: 505  
 I've brought to my lips the hand of the man who killed my son."

So saying, he stirred in Achilles the urge to weep for his father:  
 he took the old man by the hand, gently pushed him away.  
 Both had their memories: Priam of Hektōr, killer of men,  
 as, bitterly weeping, he crouched at Achilles' feet, 510  
 while Achilles wept, now for his own father, now again  
 for Patroklos: their joint mourning resounded throughout the hut.  
 But as soon as noble Achilles had had his fill of weeping,  
 and the urge for it had departed from his heart and limbs,  
 he rose from his chair, took the old man by the hand, 515  
 and raised him up, pitying his grey hair, his grey beard,  
 and then addressed him, speaking with winged words:  
 "Unhappy man, your heart's indeed endured many sorrows!  
 How could you bear to come to the Achaians' ships, alone,  
 to look me straight in the face, the man who slaughtered so many 520  
 of your noble sons? You must have a heart of iron.  
 Come then, sit down on this chair, and let's allow our distress  
 to lie at rest in our hearts, for all our grieving,  
 for there's no profit accrues from numbing lamentation:  
 that's how the gods spun life's thread for unhappy mortals— 525  
 to live amid sorrow, while they themselves are uncaring.  
 There are two great jars, sunk down in the floor of Zeus's abode,<sup>7</sup>  
 full of gifts he hands out, one of ills, the other of blessings;  
 and the man who gets a mixed handout from thundering Zeus  
 will sometimes encounter trouble, and sometimes good luck; 530

7. The jars (πίθοι, *pithoi*) of Zeus are generally treated as a moral allegory, but there is something more practical, more physical and earthy, about the image (Leaf, 2: 467; Onians 395–97, 404, 409; Richardson 330). These are the great clay *pithoi* familiar from Minoan and Mycenaean excavations, which were indeed sunk in the floor of the storeroom. Like words, that are winged, and escape the barrier of one's teeth, evils were in the beginning thought of as physical entities, to be stored, like anything else, in jars. As Leaf says, what we have here is early thinking applied to what we (and indeed already Plato, who for "gifts" substituted κῆρες (*kēros*), "fates", *Rep.* 2.379D) think of as a moral abstraction.

whereas he who gets only ills Zeus renders an outcast,  
 driven by evil hunger to wander across the face  
 of the sacred earth, with respect from neither gods nor mortals.  
 So the gods bestowed on Pēleus the most splendid gifts  
 from his birth onward, for he outstripped all mortal men 535  
 in wealth and prosperity, ruled as lord of the Myrmidons,  
 and though he was mortal they married him to a goddess.  
 Yet even on him the god laid evil: no family  
 of lordly sons was born to him in his halls, but only  
 the one short-lived male child. Nor am I able 540  
 to care for him as he ages, but sit here, far from my country,  
 in Troy, bringing grief to you and to your offspring.  
 Yet you too, old sir, were once, we hear, fortunate.  
 Everywhere southward as far as Lesbos, seat of Makar,  
 or Phrygia inland, with the vast Hellespont—here, they say, 545  
 through your wealth and sons, old sir, you were preeminent.  
 But since the heavenly gods brought this trouble upon you,  
 round your city the fighting, the killings have never stopped.  
 Bear up then, don't nurse unending grief in your heart:  
 you'll gain nothing by mourning your son, you won't 550  
 bring him back to life; before that you'll have other troubles."

Then the old man, Priam the godlike, answered him, saying:  
 "Zeus's nursling, you'll not make me sit, so long as Hektōr lies  
 uncared-for among the huts! So, waste no time,  
 release him—let me see him myself—and accept the ransom, 555  
 the very great ransom, we bring you! Enjoy it, and go back home  
 to your own country, now that you've spared me  
 [to live myself, and to gaze on the light of the sun]."<sup>8</sup>

Eyeing him angrily, swift-footed Achilles exclaimed:  
 "Provoke me no further, old man: I myself am minded 560  
 to give you back Hektōr, since a messenger's reached me from Zeus—  
 the mother who bore me, daughter to the Old Man of the Sea.  
 What's more, I am well aware, Priam—you do not deceive me—  
 that it was some god brought you here to the Achaians' ships:  
 no mortal man would dare, however youthful and strong, 565

8. Line 558 is missing in some MSS, and the scholiasts do not refer to it. It may have been interpolated in the belief that "spared" (ἔασας, *eāsas*) needed an explanatory phrase to complete the predicate (Richardson 335), though it stands on its own elsewhere in the same book (569, 684).



to enter the camp, or could make his way past the guards,  
 or easily thrust back the great bar on our gateway.  
 Stop working on my emotions amid my sorrows, old sir,  
 lest I might not spare even you, while you're here in my hut,  
 suppliant though you are, and break Zeus's ordinances." 570

So he spoke: the old man was frightened, and heeded his words.

Now the son of Pēleus strode out of the hut like a lion:  
 not alone, but two of his henchmen accompanied him,  
 the hero Automedōn and Alkimos, those whom Achilles  
 most honored of all his comrades now Patroklos was dead. 575

Together they unyoked both the mules and the horses,  
 brought in the herald, the old man's public crier,  
 sat him down on a chair, and from the smooth-running wagon  
 took the boundless ransom for Hektōr's head, but left there  
 two robes and a fine-woven tunic, in which Achilles 580  
 would wrap the corpse before yielding it to be carried home.

Then he summoned the handmaids, told them to wash and anoint it—  
 having first moved it away, to stop Priam seeing his son,  
 lest, heartbroken, he failed to restrain his wrath at the sight,  
 and Achilles' own heart should be stirred to fury, so that 585  
 he murdered Priam, thus breaking the ordinances of Zeus.

So when the handmaids had washed it and anointed it with oil,  
 and shrouded it in a fine robe and a tunic besides,  
 Achilles himself raised the body and placed it upon a bier,  
 which he and his comrades lifted onto the polished wagon. 590  
 Then he heaved a sigh, and addressed his dear comrade by name:  
 "Don't be angry with me, Patroklos, if you chance to hear,  
 even in Hādēs' realm, that I've given back noble Hektōr  
 to his dear father: the ransom he offered was not unfitting—  
 and of this I'll allot to you all that's your proper due." 595

That said, noble Achilles went back inside his hut,  
 sat down on the richly worked chair from which he'd arisen,  
 against the opposite wall, and then addressed Priam, saying:  
 "Your son, old sir, has been released to you as you wanted,  
 and is lying on a bier: at daybreak you shall yourself 600  
 see him as you take him, but for now let's turn to supper—  
 for even fair-haired Niobē was minded to eat,  
 though all her twelve children had perished there in her halls,

six daughters and six sons in the prime of their youth!  
 The sons were slain by Apollo with shafts from his silver bow, 605  
 out of anger against Niobē; the daughters by Artemis  
 the huntress—Niobē had praised herself over fair-cheeked Lētō,  
 who, she said, bore two only, whereas she was mother to many.  
 Her brood Lētō's twins then slaughtered, every last one.  
 Nine days they lay in their blood, nor was there anyone 610  
 to bury them: Kronos's son turned their people to stones.  
 But on the tenth day they were buried by the heavenly gods,  
 and Niobē's mind turned to food, since she'd tired of weeping.  
 Now somewhere among the rocks, in those lonely mountains,  
 on Sipylus—where, they say, goddesses have their abodes: 615  
 the nymphs who move nimbly, dancing round Achelōios—  
 there, though stone, she broods on the woes that the gods dealt her.  
 So come, let the two of us likewise, noble old sir, take thought  
 for food: after that you can mourn your dear son, when  
 you've returned him to Ilion: much wept over he will be." 620

With that swift Achilles sprang up, and cut the throat  
 of a white sheep: his comrades skinned it, butchered it neatly,  
 cut up the meat with skill, threaded the bits on skewers,  
 grilled them with care, then drew them all off. That done,  
 Automedon brought bread and put it on the table 625  
 in handsome baskets, while Achilles shared out the meat.  
 So they reached out their hands to the good things ready for them;  
 but when they'd satisfied their desire for food and drink,  
 then Priam, scion of Dardanos, gazed in wonder at Achilles,  
 his stature and beauty, how like the gods he appeared; 630  
 while at Priam, scion of Dardanos, Achilles gazed in wonder,  
 observing his noble features, listening as he spoke.

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9. Achilles suggests a meal even though he has himself recently eaten (475–76): as Graziosi 2011 says (449) “he is now imparting a lesson he has only just learned” (cf. 19.205–14 and 314–55). The use of the myth of Niobē as a recommendation for this is odd, since Niobē was an example of never-ending sorrow, even when petrified (a vaguely human-looking rock formation on Mt. Sipylus dripping with tear-like water gave rise to this aspect of the myth). Other details, not extant elsewhere, seem to have been introduced in the Homeric narrative for symbolic effect: the nine days before burial match both the time Hektōr's body lies in Achilles' hut and the mourning period in Troy (664–65, 784–87; Richardson 340), while the gods' personal care for the burial of Niobē's offspring foreshadows divine concern for Hektōr's obsequies. The Achelōios is a local river: there were several of that name, and Achelōios can be “a generic name for rivers or water in general” (Richardson 342).

But when they'd had their pleasure of looking at one another,  
 then the first to speak was the old man, Priam the godlike:  
 "Let me bed down now, Zeus's nursling, so that at last 635  
 we may take our rest and get our fill of sweet slumber:  
 for never yet have my eyes closed under my eyelids  
 since at your hands my son was bereft of life—I've been  
 lamenting ceaselessly, nursing my countless sorrows,  
 rolling about in the dung in my courtyard's enclosure. 640  
 But now I've tasted food, permitted fire-bright wine  
 to pass down my throat: before that I'd taken nothing."

Thereupon Achilles instructed his comrades and the handmaids  
 to set bedsteads under the colonnade, and lay upon them  
 fine purple wool throws, and over these to spread blankets, 645  
 topped off with fleecy cloaks to serve as coverlets.  
 Out from the hall went the handmaids, each holding a torch,  
 and quickly made up two beds. In a teasing voice  
 swift-footed Achilles then had this to say to Priam:  
 "Best sleep outside, good old sir! Some Achaian counselor 650  
 might come over here—they're always having sessions with me,  
 seeking advice in their planning, a common practice—  
 but if one of them saw you, during the swift black night,  
 he might go and tell Agamemnōn, the people's shepherd,  
 and then there'd be, ah, delay in the release of the body. 655  
 Now, tell me this, and be honest: how many days  
 do you have in mind for the funeral of noble Hektōr,  
 so I hold off that long, and restrain the troops as well?"

Then the old man, Priam the godlike, answered him, saying:  
 "If you truly mean that I can complete noble Hektōr's burial, 660  
 you'd be doing me a great kindness by acting thus—you know  
 how we're shut up inside the city, and firewood has to be fetched  
 a long way from the mountains, and the Trojans are really scared.  
 Nine days we would mourn him in our halls, and then  
 on the tenth we'd inter him, and there'd be public feasting; 665  
 on the eleventh we'd raise the funeral mound over him—  
 and on the twelfth, if we have to, we'll join battle once again."

Then noble swift-footed Achilles answered him, saying:  
 "All these things, aged Priam, shall be as you propose:  
 I shall hold back the attack for the time that you've requested." 670

So saying, he took hold of the aged man's right hand  
 by the wrist, to allay any fear that might be in his heart.  
 Then they lay down to sleep there, in the dwelling's forecourt,  
 the herald and Priam, with a great deal to think about;  
 but Achilles himself slept at the back of the well-built hut,  
 with the fair-checked Briseïs now lying there by his side.<sup>10</sup> 675

All others, both gods, and mortals, chariot marshals,  
 slept the night through, overcome by gentle slumber;  
 but on Hermēs the Helper sleep could get no hold  
 as he pondered on how he was going to escort King Priam 680  
 away from the ships unseen by the watchful gate guards.  
 So he stood close, above his head, and addressed him, saying:  
 "Ah, old sir, you're not bothered by danger, still fast asleep  
 among enemies as you are, since Achilles has spared you!  
 Now you've ransomed your son, and a great deal you gave  
 for him; 685  
 yet to get you back alive would cost your surviving sons  
 three times that amount in ransom, were Atreus's son  
 Agamemnōn or all the Achaïans to learn you were here."

He spoke,

and the old man, badly frightened, made the herald get up,  
 while Hermēs himself yoked the mules and the horses for them, 690  
 and briskly drove them out of the camp. No one noticed them.  
 But when they came to the ford of the swift-flowing river,  
 eddying Xanthos, begotten by immortal Zeus,  
 then Hermēs went on his way to lofty Olympos,  
 as saffron-robed Dawn was spreading across the entire earth, 695  
 and the others, weeping and wailing, drove the horses to the city,  
 while the mules drew the dead body. Once more no man,  
 nor any fine-sashed woman, recognized them now,  
 save only Kassandrē, as lovely as golden Aphroditē,  
 who'd gone up onto the citadel, and recognized her dear father 700  
 as he stood in the chariot, and the herald, the city's crier—  
 and him she saw stretched on a bier in the mule-drawn wagon.  
 Then she shrieked aloud, and went screaming throughout the city:  
 "Go look, men and women of Troy! Go now and see Hektōr,

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10. Achilles, having eaten, now fulfills the second part of his mother Thetis's advice: see above, 128–32.

if ever while he yet lived you were happy to see him coming 705  
home from the battle, great joy to our city and all its people!”

So she spoke: not one man was left behind in the city,  
nor any woman: upon them all came sorrow past bearing.  
It was near the city gates they encountered the dead man’s escort.  
His dear wife and his lady mother were the first to fling themselves 710  
aboard the smooth-running wagon, tearing their hair,  
to cradle Hektōr’s head: the thronged bystanders all wept,  
and from then all day long until sunset, there by the gates,  
they’d have gone on shedding tears and mourning for Hektōr  
had the old man not called out to the crowd from his chariot: 715  
“Make way for the mules to come through! You’ll get your fill  
of lamenting later, as soon as I’ve brought him home.”

So he spoke: they stood to one side, made way for the wagon.  
When Hektōr’s body reached Priam’s famed palace, they moved it  
to an inlaid bedstead, and by his side placed minstrels, 720  
leaders of dirges: these chanted the song of lamentation  
while the women in chorus added their lament to the dirge.  
Of these it was white-armed Andromachē led the mourning,  
cradling in her arms the head of Hektōr the killer:  
“Husband, perished too young, you’re leaving me a widow 725  
here in our home, and the son’s still only an infant  
that we, both ill-fated, made: nor do I believe he will  
ever come to the years of manhood—before then this city  
will be leveled, since you, its guardian, have perished,  
who protected it, kept safe its devoted wives, its children. 730  
Soon enough these’ll be cargo aboard the hollow ships,  
and I among them; and you, my child, will go with me  
to a place where you must labor at unseemly tasks,  
slaving for a rough master, or else some Achaian  
will strong-arm you down from the battlements, a grim death, 735  
angered maybe because it was Hektōr killed his brother—  
or father, or son, since there are so many Achaians  
have bitten the boundless dust at Hektōr’s hands,  
for in grim warfare your father was far from gentle.  
So there’s public mourning for him throughout the city— 740  
and unspeakable grief and sorrow you’ve brought on your parents,  
Hektōr: to me, above all, there’s left this bitter loss,  
for you never, dying, reached out to me from your bed,

you never uttered for me some enduring last word  
that I could have recalled, night and day, as I shed my tears.” 745

So she spoke, weeping: the women added their own lament,  
and among them now Hekabē led the passionate mourning:  
“Hektōr, of all my children far the dearest to my heart,  
while you still were living you were beloved of the gods,  
they cared for you even in your destiny of death: 750  
those other sons of mine swift-footed Achilles, whenever  
he took one, would sell abroad, beyond the unharvested sea,  
to Samos or Imbros or mist-enshrouded Lēmnos;  
but you—though he’d robbed you of life with the keen-edged bronze,  
and often dragged you around the tomb of his comrade, 755  
Patroklos, whom you slew—yet never could bring him back to life—  
you lie now in my halls as though new-slain, dewy-fresh,  
like one whom lately Apollo, he of the silver bow,  
has assailed with his gentle shafts, and put to death.”

So she spoke, weeping, and stirred up unending lamentation. 760  
Then, third in line, to lead the mourning came Helen:  
“Hektōr, most dear to my heart of all my husband’s brothers!  
Yes, indeed, my husband is Aléxandos the godlike,  
who brought me hither to Troy—ah, would that I’d died first!  
This is now the twentieth<sup>11</sup> year that’s passed since I 765  
ran off from home, abandoning my own country;  
yet from you I’ve never had one mean or degrading word,  
and if anyone else reviled me here in these halls,  
one of your brothers or sisters, or a brother’s well-dressed wife,  
or your mother—your father could have been mine, he was 770  
always so gentle—then you’d talk them round and restrain them  
with your personal gentleness and the gentle things you said.  
So I weep, sad at heart, for both you and my ill-starred self,

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11. This is the tenth year of the war, and whatever allowances we make for such things as the time taken to assemble the expedition, the delay of the Greek fleet setting out from Aulis, or Paris’s travels with Helen en route to Troy, the figure Helen gives is simply incompatible with the accepted chronology (e.g., with the return of Odysseus, likewise placed in the twentieth year). It is now generally argued (e.g., by Richardson 358) that “twenty” is a rough Homeric equivalent for any time more than “ten”, thus eliding both Helen’s and Odysseus’s dates to a vague extension beyond the canonical ten years of the war; but how likely is it that any poet or rhapsode would, at this point, choose a figure so certain to provoke dissent? For the same reason, textual corruption is highly unlikely. The problem remains.

for no more in all broad Troy is there anyone left  
who's gentle or loving to me: all regard me with horror." 775

So she spoke, weeping, and the countless throng lamented.  
Then the aged Priam addressed his people, saying:  
"Fetch in firewood now to the city, don't be scared at heart  
lest the Argives set up some smart ambush: for Achilles,  
when sending me back from the black ships, guaranteed 780  
that he'd do us no harm until the twelfth day's dawn from now."

So he spoke, and at that they harnessed both oxen and mules  
to wagons, and quickly assembled outside the city.  
For nine days they carted back timber in abundance;  
But when the tenth dawn came, bringing light to mortals, 785  
Then, shedding tears, they carried out bold Hektōr,  
laid his corpse on top of the pyre, and set it ablaze.

But when Dawn appeared, lately born, with her rosy fingers,  
then a crowd collected around illustrious Hektōr's pyre,  
and when they were all assembled and gathered together, 790  
first they quenched the still-smoldering pyre with fire-bright wine  
in each part that the fire's force reached, and next  
his brothers and comrades gathered up the white bones,  
still mourning, with great tears streaming down their cheeks,  
took them and laid them away in a golden casket,<sup>12</sup> 795  
wrapped in a soft purple cloth, and at once after that,  
put the box in a dug-out grave, and covered it over  
with great close-set stones, and last, very quickly,  
heaped up the burial mound, with lookouts all round it, in case  
the well-greaved Achaians attacked them before the stated time; 800  
and when they'd raised the mound, they all went back,  
then sat down together and shared a glorious feast  
in the palace of Priam, the king who was Zeus's nursling.

Such were the funeral rites for Hektōr, breaker of horses.

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12. There is a remarkable parallel to this golden container (λάρναξ, *larnax*) in the actually surviving gold *larnax* from the Macedonian royal tomb at Vergina, with the bones of the tomb's occupant still in it.