

Book 21

But when they came to the ford of the swift-flowing River,
eddyding Xanthos, whom immortal Zeus engendered,
Achilles now split the rout. Some he pursued across the plain
towards the city, where the Achaians were fleeing in panic
the day before, when faced with illustrious Hektōr's fury— 5
they'd broken, fled in disorder, and Hērē had spread
a dense mist in front to confuse them—but half the Trojans
were herded into the River, deep-flowing and silver-eddied.
In they splashed in with great outcry: the deep streambed
resounded,
both riverbanks echoed the tumult as they went swimming 10
this way and that, still shouting, spun round by the eddies.
As when, with an onrushing fire, clouds of locusts will take wing
in flight towards a river, and the never-wearying blaze
in its sudden onset will scorch them, and they cringe in the water,
so at Achilles' onset the stream of deep-eddyding Xanthos 15
was loud with a mingled confusion of men and horses.

Achilles, scion of Zeus, now left his spear on the bank,
leaning against a tamarisk, and charged in like a demon,
armed only with his sword, horrific deeds in mind.
He turned and struck at random, and ghastly cries went up 20
from those caught by his sword: the water ran red with blood,
and as, fleeing a huge-mawed dolphin, the other fishes
scurry to fill the bolt-holes of some sheltering harbor,
terrified, since the dolphin devours all it catches—
so these Trojans, caught in the current of the terrible River, 25
cowered under its banks. When his hands grew weary with killing,
Achilles pulled twelve youths up alive from the water,
to be blood-price for the death of Menoitios's son Patroklos.
He led them ashore, all dazed, like so many fawns,
and bound their hands behind them with the well-cut belts 30
that they wore to cinch in their soft tunics, and then turned them
over to his companions to take back to the hollow ships.
This done, he sprang back again, his mind hard set on slaughter.

There it was he encountered a son of Dardanian Priam
 fleeing from the River: Lykaōn, whom once before he'd caught 35
 and snatched, struggling, out of his father's orchard
 during a night raid: he was busy cutting young branches
 from a fig tree with the sharp bronze, to make rails for a chariot,
 when on him—an unlooked-for disaster—came noble Achilles,
 who took him by ship to well-built Lēmnos and sold him 40
 off as a slave: Jason's son had paid the price demanded,
 but a guest-friend then ransomed him, for a very large sum—
 Ēētiōn of Imbros, who sent him to noble Arisbē,
 from where, slipping off in secret, he reached his ancestral home.
 For eleven days he took pleasure among his friends 45
 on arrival from Lēmnos; but on the twelfth some god threw him
 back into the hands of Achilles, who this second time
 would dispatch him to Hādēs' realm, loath though he was to go.
 When noble swift-footed Achilles noticed this man,
 unarmed, minus helmet or shield, no spear in his hand— 50
 he'd thrown them all away, being tired and sweaty
 as he clambered out of the river, knees weak from exhaustion—
 in amazement he then addressed his own proud spirit:
 "Ah, me, what's this strange thing I see with my own eyes?
 Surely those great-hearted Trojans whom I've slaughtered 55
 will rise once more from the murk of the underworld,
 seeing that this fellow is back, after dodging his day of doom,
 though sold into sacred Lēmnos; nor has the deep
 of the grey sea held him back, that stops many against their will.
 Well, now indeed he'll also get a taste of my spear, 60
 so that I'll be able to see, and be sure in my mind,
 whether he'll come back likewise from that too, or rather
 be stopped by the life-giving earth, that holds down even the strong."

 So he reflected, waiting: Lykaōn now approached him,
 dazed, eager to clasp his knees, and desperate at heart 65
 to escape an unpleasant end and the black death-spirit.
 Then noble Achilles lifted and poised his long spear,
 ready to kill: but Lykaōn ducked under it, embraced
 Achilles' knees. The spear passed over his back and stuck
 in the ground, still longing to glut itself with men's flesh. 70
 Then Lykaōn besought Achilles—one hand clasping his knees,
 while the other kept a firm grip on his sharpened spear,

not letting go—and addressed him with winged words:
 “By your knees, Achilles, I beg you, respect me, take pity on me!
 Zeus’s nursling, I’m your suppliant, I deserve your respect, 75
 since you were the first with whom I tasted Dēmētēr’s grain¹
 on the day you captured me in our well-planned orchard,
 and shipped me far away from father and friends,
 to sacred Lēmnos, for the price of a hundred oxen!
 To free me by ransom cost three times as much, and this 80
 morning’s the twelfth since I returned to Ilion,
 after much hardship—and now my fatal destiny’s put me
 back in your hands: I must be hateful to Zeus the Father
 since he’s given me to you again! Too short the life my mother
 bore me to—Laothoē, old Altēs’ daughter—Altēs, 85
 who rules as lord over the war-loving Lelegēs,
 from steep Pēdasos, his city on the Satnioeis river.
 His daughter Priam married—among many other women—
 and of her we two sons were born: now you’ll slaughter us both—
 one you’ve already done for among the front-line fighters, 90
 Polydōros the godlike, laid low by your sharp spear;
 and now a bad end awaits me too, for I don’t imagine
 I’ll escape your hands: some god it was brought me to you.
 And another thing I’ll tell you, and you bear it in mind:
 I’m not born from the same womb as Hektōr, so don’t kill me: 95
 He it was that slew your comrade, so kindly and so strong.”

Thus Priam’s illustrious son addressed him, with words
 of entreaty, but there was no honey in the reply he heard:
 “Fool, don’t talk ransom to me, don’t make speeches!
 Before Patroklos encountered the day of his destiny, 100
 till then I was more inclined to spare the lives
 of Trojans, and many I captured alive and sold;
 but of them now not one shall escape death, whomsoever
 before Troy’s ramparts a god puts into my hands
 of all Trojans—and least of all one of Priam’s sons! 105
 So, friend, you too must die: why then lament thus?
 Patroklos too is dead, a far better man than you are.

1. I.e., Achilles was the first Greek with whom Lykaōn broke bread after being captured. Richardson (60) quotes a scholiast’s explanation of Lykaōn’s hopeful argument: “It would be incongruous to offer food, the source of life, to someone, and then take away his life. And he mentions Demeter to evoke religious scruples.”

Can't you see what I'm like, how handsome and tall I am?
 A fine father sired me, the mother who bore me was a goddess—
 Yet over me too hang death and all-mastering destiny: 110
 A day will come when, at dawn, or noon, or evening,
 my life too will be forfeit to someone in battle,
 by a flighted spear or an arrow shot from the bowstring."

So he spoke, and Lykaōn's knees and heart were unstrung:
 he let go the spear, and sat there, both hands outstretched 115
 in supplication. But Achilles drew his sharp sword, and plunged it
 in by the neck at the collarbone: the two-edged blade
 sank in its full length, and Lykaōn fell prone, lay stretched out
 there on the ground. His dark blood gushed, soaked the earth.
 Achilles now seized one foot, flung him into the river 120
 as flotsam, and, vaunting, spoke winged words over him:
 "Lie there now with the fishes, that'll lick the blood
 from your wound, quite indifferent to you; nor will your
 mother

lay you out on a bier and wail over you: rather will Skamandros
 roll you away in its eddies to the wide gulf of the sea, 125
 and fish darting through the waves will surface amid
 their black ripples to nibble Lykaōn's white lustrous fat!
 So die all, till we reach sacred Ilion's citadel,
 with you in full flight, and I in murderous pursuit!
 Not even the swift-flowing and silver-eddied River 130
 will protect you, long though you've offered him bull after bull,
 and thrown whole-hoofed horses alive still into his eddies:
 you'll all suffer the same evil fate, till every one of you
 has paid for Patroklos's death, and the loss of those Achaians
 whom you slaughtered by the swift ships while I was absent." 135

So he spoke, and the River grew yet more enraged at heart,
 pondering in his mind how to make noble Achilles
 stop his war work, how to fend off calamity from the Trojans.
 Meanwhile the son of Pēleus, with his far-shadowing spear,
 went for Asteropaios, hungry to kill him—the son 140
 of Pēlegōn, who was begotten by wide-flowing Axios
 on Periboia, the eldest of Akessamenos's daughters:
 with her the deep-eddying River mingled in love. Him now
 Achilles charged, as he came up from the water,
 holding two spears, making for him, fierce strength put in his heart 145

by Xanthos, irate on account of the young men slaughtered
by Achilles along the River on his pitiless killing spree.

When they came close, advancing the one against the other,
swift-footed noble Achilles was the first to speak:

“Who are you, from where, that you dare to come out and
face me?

150

Unhappy are those whose sons confront my strength!”

To him then replied Pēlegōn’s illustrious son:

“Great-hearted son of Pēleus, why query my lineage?

I come from rich-soiled Paiōnia, a distant land,

in command of Paiōnian lancers, and this is now

155

the eleventh day since I arrived here in Ilion. As for

my ancestry, I’m descended from wide-flowing Axios—

Axios, who sends forth the sweetest water on earth,

who begot Pēlegōn, famed for his spear; and he,

they say, was my father. So now, renowned Achilles, let’s fight!”

160

Menacingly he spoke, and noble Achilles raised

his spear of Pēlian ash; but the hero Asteropaios

let fly both spears at once, being double-handed,

and with one spear he struck his opponent’s shield, but failed

to break through: the gold layer, a god’s gift, held it off;

165

but the other spear struck Achilles’ forearm a grazing blow—

his right one: dark blood gushed, but the spear point passed on,

and stuck in the ground, still hungry to glut itself on flesh.

Then Achilles flung his true-flying ash-wood spear

at Asteropaios, in fierce determination to kill him,

170

but missed the man and struck the high riverbank,

sank the spear half its length, fixing it in the earth.

Pēleus’s son drew the sharp sword from beside his thigh,

and sprang at him, hot to kill. Asteropaios failed

to pull Achilles’ spear from the bank in his massive fist:

175

three times, trying to free it, he made it quiver,

three time he gave up. The fourth time his heart was set on

bending and breaking the ash spear of Aiakos’s grandson:

but, before he could do it, Achilles’ sword at close quarters

took his life, struck into his belly, beside the navel: his guts

180

gushed out on the ground, and darkness shrouded his eyes

as he lay there, gasping still, and Achilles jumped on his chest

and stripped off his armor, and shouted exultantly:
 “Lie there! It’s hard to strive with the sons of mighty Kronos,
 even for someone sired by a River! You claim 185
 a wide-flowing River for ancestor, whereas I
 declare myself of the lineage of mighty Zeus! The man
 who begot me is lord over the numerous Myrmidons—
 Pēleus, Aiakos’s son; it was Zeus who sired Aiakos.
 So, as Zeus is mightier than all seaward-flowing rivers, 190
 Zeus’s line likewise outranks a River’s ancestry!
 You may have a great River beside you—always supposing
 it can protect you: but still there’s no fighting Kronos’s son
 Zeus! With him not even the lord Achelōios contends,
 nor the vast might of deep-flowing Ocean, from whom 195
 all rivers derive, and the whole mass of the sea,
 and every spring and deep well has its beginning;
 no, even he goes in fear of the bolt of mighty Zeus,
 and his awesome thunder, whenever it crashes out of the sky.”

With that he pulled his bronze spear out from the riverbank, 200
 and left Asteropaios there, when he’d taken his dear life,
 sprawled out among the sand shoals, lapped by dark water,
 with the eels and fishes all busy about him,
 nibbling and tearing the fat surrounding his kidneys.
 Achilles moved on to harass the Paiōnians, chariot marshals, 205
 who still lay in scattered confusion alongside the eddying River
 after seeing their best warrior in the grind of battle
 laid low by the might of Achilles and his sword.
 There he took down Thersilochos, Astypylos, and Mydōn,
 Mnēsos and Thrasios, Aínios, Ophelestēs— 210
 and yet more Paiōnians would swift Achilles have slain,
 had the deep-eddying River, enraged, not now addressed him
 in the semblance of a man, voicing speech from a deep eddy:
 “Ah, Achilles, beyond all in strength, beyond all men in evil
 acts, since the gods themselves are forever your protectors! 215
 If the son of Kronos is letting you kill every Trojan, at least
 drive these well away from me, do your vile work on dry land!
 My lovely streams are currently all awash with corpses;
 I can’t get to discharge my waters into the bright sea,
 I’m so choked with the dead, while you ruthlessly keep on killing! 220
 Come, now, let me be: I’m dumbfounded, O High Commander.”

Then swift-footed Achilles answered him in these words:
“All this, Zeus’s nursling Skamandros, shall be done as you request.
But I’ll not cease from the slaughter of these arrogant Trojans
till I’ve cooped them up in their city, and made trial of Hektōr, 225
man against man, and either he slays me, or I him.”

So saying, he charged at the Trojans like a demon,
and then the deep-eddying River said to Apollo: “Look here,
child of Zeus, lord of the silver bow, you’ve not honored
the wishes of Kronos’s son, who strongly required you 230
to stand firm by the side of the Trojans, and help them until
the late-setting sun goes down, and darkens the rich earth.”

So he spoke. Achilles, famed spearman, leapt to midstream
from the high bank. But the River, now rushing onward in
turbulent
spate, stirred all his streams, swept up the countless 235
corpses that cluttered his channel, whom Achilles had killed:
these he, bellowing bull-like, tossed up onto dry land,
while the ones still alive he protected with his sweet streams,
concealing them in his eddies, which were both large and deep.
Fearsomely round Achilles surged his turbulent wave: its crest 240
crashing onto his shield forced him back, he could no longer
stand firm on his feet, so reached out and grasped an elm,
one full-grown and lofty, but it came away roots and all,
tearing up the whole bank, and with its clustering branches
dropped right across the fine streambed, damming the River
himself 245

by falling its whole length within him. Achilles sprang clear
of his whirling waters, ran swift-foot across the plain
in some alarm. But the great god did not give up,
pursued him, surging black-crested, to stop the actions of noble
Achilles, fend off destruction from the Trojans. 250

But Pēleus’s son leapt back the whole length of a spear cast
with the swoop of a black eagle, the hunting falcon,
that is the strongest and swiftest of all winged creatures:
such was his speed, and the bronze strips on his torso
rattled fearfully. He dodged aside from under the River 255
and kept running: the River’s huge bore roared on behind him.
As a man who digs a channel from a dark-water spring
to the plants in his garden will guide the water’s flow,

mattock in hand to clear obstructions from the channel,
 and, as the rill flows on, all the pebbles that litter its bed 260
 are swept along with it while it chuckles quickly down
 a slope in the channel, even getting ahead of its guide—
 just so did the River's bore keep overtaking Achilles,
 swift runner though he was: gods are mightier than mortals.
 Every time swift-footed noble Achilles attempted 265
 to stand firm and confront the River, to find out if all
 the immortals who hold the wide heavens were his pursuers,
 the sky-fed River's huge crest would come crashing down
 on his shoulders, he'd jump away from it, much wearied
 in spirit, while the River's rough spate kept sapping the strength 270
 of his knees beneath him, sucked the earth from under his feet.
 Then Pēleus's son cried out, looking up to the wide heavens:
 "Zeus, Father, not one god has undertaken to save me,
 pitiable as I am, from the River—after this, I could
 endure any trouble! Yet none of the Heavenly Ones is as much 275
 to blame as my mother, who beguiled me with lies,
 saying that under the walls of the corseleted Trojans
 I'd perish, slain by the swift shafts of Apollo!
 If only Hektōr had killed me, the best-bred warrior here,
 then noble had been the slayer, noble the man he slew— 280
 whereas now it's my wretched fate to perish miserably,
 trapped in a great river, like some swineherd's boy
 who's swept away by the torrent he tries to cross in winter."²

So he spoke; and very quickly Poseidōn and Athēnē
 came and stood by him, in the likeness of mortal men, 285
 took him by the hand, and spoke reassuringly to him.
 Of them Poseidōn the Earth-Shaker now addressed him, saying:
 "Son of Pēleus, don't be too scared, no need for alarm
 when you have two such helpers as we are, from the gods,
 and with Zeus's approval—Pallas Athēnē and I! 290
 Since it's not your destiny to be overcome by the River
 he'll very soon ease off—as you'll see for yourself.

2. It is generally assumed that Achilles would regret not having been killed by another champion warrior, and this thought is certainly present. But both *ἀγαθός* (*agathos*, "good") and *ἀριστος* (*aristos*, "best"), the epithets used here, while regularly in Homer denoting excellence in a warrior, also regularly denote nobility of birth. The reference to the swineherd's boy is significant: Achilles would most regret not having died, like a gentleman, in single combat with another such.

Now, if you will listen, we have good advice for you:
 Don't let your hands cease from the work of common warfare
 until you've cooped up inside Troy's famous ramparts 295
 the whole routed Trojan army; when you've taken Hektōr's life
 return to the ships. This much glory we grant you."

So saying, they both went back to the immortals,
 but Achilles, greatly encouraged by the gods' behest,
 went on over the plain, now swamped with a flood of water, 300
 and much fine armor and weapons of young slain warriors
 lay floating there with their corpses: his knees rose high
 as he charged, straight against the current. Now the wide-flowing
 river could not stop him, such strength he had from Athēnē.
 Yet Skamandros did not abate his force, but rather swelled 305
 his wrath against Pēleus's son, brought his waters up to a crest,
 raising himself aloft, and shouted to Simoeis:

"Dear brother, to face this man's strength will need both of us
 if we're to stop him from sacking King Priam's great city
 any time now! The Trojans won't withstand him in battle, 310
 so help me at once, go flood your streams with the flow
 from your springs, put all your torrents in spate,
 raise a huge wave, stir up a thunderous racket
 of driftwood and pebbles! We must halt this wild warrior,
 who now has the upper hand, wants to match the gods in action! 315
 For I tell you, neither his violence nor his good looks will save him,
 nor his fine armor, which in some flooded pool of mine
 will lie, all coated with mud; while the man himself
 I'll wrap in sand, pour over him an abundance of shingle.
 That way the Achaians will have no idea where to gather 320
 his bones, under such a mass of silt I shall entomb him!
 Here will his grave be prepared, and he'll have no need
 of a burial mound, when Achaians perform his funeral rites."

With that he rushed at Achilles, turbulent, surging high,
 seething with foam and blood and slaughtered corpses. 325
 The dark and heaving wave of the sky-fed River
 towered above him, began to take down the son of Pēleus;
 then Hērē cried out in a loud voice, being scared for Achilles,
 lest the huge deep-eddying River should sweep him away,
 and at once called upon Hēphaistos, her own dear son: 330
 "Up with you, my lame child! You are the one, we thought,

best matched in battle with Xanthos, the eddying River—
 so bring help at once to Achilles, create widespread fire,
 while I quickly stir from the sea a violent gale, its force
 fed by the west and the white-cloud southern winds, 335
 that will burn up the Trojans—their selves and their battle gear—
 by spreading destructive flames. Along Xanthos's banks now
 go set his trees alight, ring him with fire, don't allow him
 in any way to dissuade you, with honeyed words or threats,
 and don't relax your pressure until the moment 340
 when I call to you: only then should you curb your tireless fire."

So she spoke. Hēphaistos set up a marvelous conflagration:
 First on the plain the blaze was kindled, burning the dead,
 all the corpses thickly strewn there, slain by Achilles,
 and the whole plain was dried up now, the bright water halted. 345
 As when at harvest time the north wind quickly parches
 a fresh-watered threshing floor, and he who raked it rejoices,
 so now the whole plain was scorched, and the corpses completely
 consumed. Then against the River he turned his blazing flames:
 the elms caught fire, and the willows and tamarisks, 350
 the celandine burned, the rushes, the galingale—everything
 that grew in abundance along the sweet course of the River,
 and the eels and fish in the eddies were sorely distressed,
 somersaulting this way and that along the sweet streams,
 tormented by the fire blast that wily Hēphaistos discharged. 355
 Burned too was the mighty River, who now addressed the god:
 "Hēphaistos, no other god can match himself against you,
 nor am I minded to fight you, ablaze with fire as you are!
 So, stop your assault! The Trojans? Let noble Achilles drive them
 out of their city! Why should I help or hinder here?" 360

Ablaze with flames he spoke, his sweet streams bubbling up:
 as a cauldron will boil over when forced by a hot fire,
 that's rendering down the lard of a fattened porker,
 bubbling up all round, dry firewood stacked beneath it—
 so the River's sweet streams blazed, and their water bubbled, 365
 and he stopped, with no will to flow further: the fiery blast
 of inventive Hēphaistos had stalled him, and now to Hērē
 he addressed an urgent prayer, speaking in winged words:
 "Hērē, why is your son giving me and my waters trouble
 above all others? I surely am not so much at fault 370

as all those who have acted as supporters of the Trojans!
 Even so, I'll desist, if that's what you want of me—but
 let this fellow desist as well! What's more, I'll swear an oath
 that I'll never ward off from the Trojans their day of evil,
 not even when all Troy is ablaze with devouring fire,
 and the Achaians' warlike sons are those who lit the flames!" 375

When the goddess, white-armed Hērē, heard these words,
 she at once addressed Hēphaistos, her dear son:
 "Hēphaistos, desist, famed child! It is not seemly
 to assail an immortal god thus on behalf of mortals." 380

So she spoke, and Hēphaistos quenched his astounding blaze,
 and the current went rolling back down the River's sweet streams.

When the might of Xanthos was vanquished, both he and Hēphaistos
 desisted, held back by Hērē, furious though she was;
 but upon the rest of the gods strife descended, both momentous 385
 and agonizing: their spirits were blown in opposite directions,
 they engaged with a huge clatter, the wide earth reechoed,
 the great firmament trumpeted. Zeus heard it all
 from where he sat on Olympos, broke out in delighted
 laughter to see the gods all fighting with one another, 390
 standing aloof no longer. First into combat was Arēs,
 piercer of shields, who began by assailing Athēnē,
 bronze spear in hand, with a stream of insulting words:
 "Why once more now, you dog fly, are you setting gods
 against gods—as your proud heart bids you, so fierce, so daring? 395
 Don't you recall setting up Diomēdēs, Tydeus' son,
 to wound me? You yourself, in full view, grabbed his spear
 and thrust it straight at me, tore open my handsome flesh!
 So now I think you'll pay me the price for all you did."

So saying, he hit her full on her tasseled aegis, 400
 that fearsome thing, not subduable even by Zeus's bolts:
 there it was bloodstained Arēs struck home with his long spear.
 Athēnē started back, and hefted in one strong hand
 a rock that lay on the plain, black, jagged, enormous,
 set up by men in the past as the boundary mark of a field. 405
 With this she hit furious Arēs on the neck, unstrung his limbs.
 Seven furlongs he stretched in his fall, fouled his hair in the dust,
 and his armor rattled about him. Pallas Athēnē laughed,

and vauntingly addressed him, speaking in winged words:

“Fool! Have you still not learned how much more warlike than you 410

I can claim to be, when you pit your strength against mine?

This is how you’ll pay the price to the Furies of your mother,

who’s planning trouble for you in her anger because

you’ve left the Achaians, are supporting the arrogant Trojans!”

This said, Athēnē turned her keen gaze from Arēs, 415

whom then Aphrodītē, Zeus’s daughter, caught by the hand

and led away, groaning deeply, still barely catching his breath.

But when white-armed Hērē, the goddess, noticed Aphrodītē,

straight away she addressed Athēnē with winged words:

“Well, now, unwearied child of Zeus of the aegis, 420

there’s that dog fly again, leading Arēs, ruin of mortals,

out through the fighting, away from grim warfare! After her!”

Thus she spoke, and Athēnē was glad to set off in pursuit,

caught up, and struck Aphrodītē a blow on the breast

with her strong fist, unstrung both her knees and her spirit. 425

So there Aphrodītē and Arēs lay on the nurturing earth,

and Athēnē exulted over them, speaking winged words:

“Let all suffer thus who lend support to the Trojans

when they dare to confront the mail-corseleted Achaians!

May they prove as daring and resolute as Aphrodītē, 430

who came out to rescue Arēs, and then faced my might—

this way we’d have long since put an end to the war,

by sacking Ilion, that well-founded citadel!”

So she spoke, and the goddess, white-armed Hērē, smiled.

But Poseidōn, the lordly Earth-Shaker, now called out to Apollo: 435

“Why, Phoibos, are we two standing aloof? That’s not seemly

when others have joined in! Too shameful, if without fighting

we went back to Olympos, to Zeus’s bronze-floored abode!

You begin: you’re the younger, it’s not proper for me to,

since I was born before you, and have more wisdom. 440

You fool, what a witless heart you have! Don’t you recall

all the ills that we two, alone of the gods, endured

in Ilion, when we came to serve haughty Laomedōn,

by Zeus’s command, for a year, as hired workers,

at a fixed wage, and he was our taskmaster, gave us orders? 445

I built for the Trojans a wall encircling their city—

both wide and splendid, to make the city unbreachable;
 while you, Phoibos, herded their sleek and shambling cattle
 among the foothills and woodlands of many-ridged Ida.
 But when the year's happy seasons brought round the due time 450
 for payment, then we were defrauded of all our hire
 by that monster Laomedōn, who dismissed us with threats,
 saying he'd put us in fetters, bound hand and foot,
 and sell us both abroad, dispatch us to some far island—
 threatened, too, to cut off our ears with the bronze! 455
 So home we both went, infuriated at heart
 because of the wages he'd promised, but not delivered—
 and now it's *his* people you're helping, you won't work with us
 to make sure these arrogant Trojans perish—and miserably,
 in utter ruin—they, their children, their honored wives.” 460

Lord Apollo, the deadly archer, made him this answer:
 “Earth-Shaker, you would not speak of me as one that's sound
 of mind, were I to fight you on behalf of those wretches—
 mortals, who, like the leaves, in one season are ablaze
 with life, and consuming the harvested fruits of the earth, 465
 in another waste into lifelessness. So let us speedily
 desist from our combat, leave them to fight it out on their own.”

So saying, he turned back, since he felt embarrassed
 at the prospect of coming to blows with his father's brother.
 But he got a strong rebuke from his sister, the Lady of Beasts, 470
 Artemis, wild huntress, who addressed him in scathing words:
 “Running away, deadly archer? Conceding a total triumph
 to Poseidōn? Letting him boast of his effortless victory?
 You fool! Then why carry that bow? It's useless as wind!
 From now on don't let me hear you, in our father's halls, 475
 boast—as you did a while back before the immortal gods—
 that you'd fight in single combat against Poseidōn!”

So she spoke, and Apollo, deadly archer, made no reply.
 But Zeus's revered bedmate, losing her temper, now
 upbraided the bow huntress in abusive language: 480
 “You shameless bitch, how come you're so hot to make a stand
 against me now? I'm a tough one for you to take on,
 though you carry that bow: Zeus made you a lion, but against
 women—let you kill any one of *them* that you chose to!

Better, I'd think, in the mountains to be hunting beasts of prey 485
and wild deer, than to battle those stronger than yourself!
Still, if you're bent on war, you'll find out, the hard way,
how much stronger I am, when you match your strength against mine."

This said, with her left hand Hērē gripped Artemis by both wrists,
while her right hand snatched from her shoulders the bow and quiver, 490
and beat her about the ears with them, a smile on her face,
as Artemis struggled, and her swift shafts were spilled. Then, weeping,
the goddess broke from Hērē's grasp, fled like a dove
that flies, pursued by a hawk, into some hollow rock's cleft,
and escapes, since it's not her destiny to be caught— 495
so Artemis fled in tears, bow and arrows left where they fell.

To Lētō then spoke Hermēs the guide, the slayer of Argos:
"Lētō, I'll not fight you: it's a disastrous business,
this exchanging of blows with the wives of Zeus the cloud-gatherer!
You can boast all you want among the immortal gods 500
that you vanquished me forcefully, by dint of your mighty strength."

So he spoke. Lētō picked up her daughter's back-bent bow,
and the arrows that had been scattered amid the swirling dust,
and retreated, taking them with her. But Artemis the maiden
made her way to Zeus's brazen-floored home on Olympos, 505
where she sat down, weeping, on the knees of her father,
and the ambrosial robe she wore quivered. Then her father,
Kronos's son, hugged her to him, and, laughing quietly, asked:
"Which of the gods in heaven, dear child, has done this to you,
without reason, as though you were openly misbehaving?" 510

Fine-garlanded Artemis of the loud chase answered him:
"Your wife it was beat me up, father, white-armed Hērē,
because of whom strife and fighting are the lot of the immortals."
Such was their conversation, the one to the other.

Phoibos Apollo now went down into sacred Ilion, 515
concerned in his mind for the wall of the well-built citadel,
lest the Danaäns sack it that day, before its destined time.
But the other immortal gods made their way to Olympos,
some enraged, some greatly exultant, and took their seats
in the house of the lord of the dark clouds. Now Achilles 520
was still slaughtering Trojans and their whole-hoofed horses;

and as smoke goes up and reaches the broad heavens
 from a burning town, fanned on by the wrath of the gods,
 causing hard work for all and suffering for many,
 so Achilles brought hard work and suffering to the Trojans. 525

Old Priam was standing out on the god-built rampart,
 and watching huge Achilles, and the way that before him
 the Trojans scattered in headlong flight, without resistance.
 He groaned, and went down from the ramparts to ground level,
 instructing his trusty gatekeepers along the wall: 530
 “Hold the gates wide open until our routed troops
 can make their way into the city—Achilles is right
 behind them, driving them on, I think disaster’s upon us!
 So the moment they’re inside the wall, still breathing hard,
 then slam shut the close-fitting gates, for I greatly fear 535
 that calamitous warrior may rush in beyond the ramparts.”

So he spoke: they undid the fastenings, shot back the bars,
 and the gates were flung wide, brought deliverance, while Apollo
 sprang out to meet the rush, fend off ruin from the Trojans,
 who were fleeing straight for the city and its lofty ramparts, 540
 parched with thirst and covered with dust from the plain,
 in rout, while Achilles herded them savagely with his spear,
 heart ever ruled by madness, ardent to harvest glory.

Then would the Achaians’ sons have taken high-gated Troy,
 had Phoibos Apollo not stirred up noble Agēnōr, 545
 Antēnōr’s son, a warrior of unmatched power:
 in his heart he put boldness, and himself stood by him,
 ready to fend off from him the heavy hands of death:³
 against the oak tree he leaned, enshrouded in thick mist.
 When Agēnōr caught sight of Achilles, the sacker of cities, 550
 he stood still, and much his heart brooded on while waiting,
 and deeply stirred he addressed his own proud spirit:
 “Ah, me! If faced with mighty Achilles I should now
 retreat to where all the others are being driven in rout,
 even so he’d still catch me and slit my throat as a coward. 555

3. One MS and one ancient commentator read not “hands” (*χείρας*, *cheiras*) here but “[death]-spirits” (*κῆρας*, *kēras*). Like Leaf and Richardson (99), but unlike Monro and Allen, Lattimore, and some other translators), I prefer *χείρας*. The phrase is striking, and hands are more likely than spirits to carry weight, whether physically or metaphorically.

But suppose I leave these men to be chased and herded
 by Pēleus's son Achilles, and run from the wall in a different
 direction, towards the Ilian plain, until I reach
 the foothills of Ida, and take refuge in their thickets?
 Then, when evening came, I'd wash myself in the river, 560
 clean off the sweat, and make my way back to Ilion.
 But why is my heart debating such matters with me?
 he might spot me taking off from the city towards the plain,
 and, being swift-footed, pursue and overtake me.
 No chance then of my avoiding death and the death-spirits, 565
 so strong he is, far stronger than all other mortal men.
 But suppose that I go to confront him before the city?
 His flesh, too, can be pierced by the keen-edged bronze,
 and there's only one life in him—men say he's mortal—
 however much Zeus son of Kronos endows him with glory." 570

That said, he crouched awaiting Achilles, and in him
 his courageous heart was eager for warfare and battle.
 As a leopard will sally forth from the deepest thicket
 to confront a hunter, nor does her courage fail her,
 nor does she panic on hearing the baying of hounds, 575
 for though the hunter may spear her or shoot her first,
 yet she'll still not abandon her prowess, even when spitted
 on the spear, till she either grapples with him or is slain—
 so the son of lordly Antēnōr, noble Agēnōr,
 would not retreat till he had made trial of Achilles, 580
 but holding before him his trimly balanced shield,
 and pointing his spear at Achilles, now shouted aloud:
 "I'm sure you hoped in your heart, illustrious Achilles,
 that on this day you'd sack the proud Trojans' citadel—
 you fool! Much sorrow's to come still in the matter of Troy, 585
 since within her we, her warriors, are many and strong,
 who, protecting our beloved parents and wives and sons,
 stand guard over Ilion. It is you who will meet your end here,
 however fearsome and daring a warrior you may be."

With that he let fly the sharp spear from his massive hand, 590
 and did not miss, but hit Achilles' shin under his knee,
 and the greave of fresh-wrought tin that was fastened round it
 rang fearsomely when struck; but the bronze rebounded
 and did not pierce through, for the god's gift held it back.

Then Pēleus's son in his turn went at godlike Agēnōr, 595
 but Apollo did not allow him to gain fresh glory:
 he snatched Agēnōr away, enshrouding him in thick mist,
 and sent him off quietly to take himself out of the fighting;
 but Pēleus's son by a trick was kept well clear of the troops
 by the deadly archer—assuming Agēnōr's exact likeness 600
 he stood close in front of Achilles. Achilles rushed after him,
 and during the chase across the wheat-rich plain Apollo
 nudged him towards the river, deep-eddying Skamandros,
 while keeping a little ahead, tricked Achilles into thinking
 he was always just on the point of catching up with his quarry. 605
 Meanwhile the rest of the Trojans, a routed mass, were happy
 to get to Troy, and the city was overflowing with them.
 They no longer dared to wait outside the city ramparts
 for one another, to learn which warriors had escaped
 and who had died fighting: instead they hurriedly crowded back 610
 into the city, each one whose feet and knees could save him.