

## Book 19

Now saffron-robed Dawn rose up from Ocean's streams  
to bring light to the immortals and to mortal mankind,  
and Thetis arrived at the ships bearing the god's gifts.  
She found her beloved son lying clasping Patroklos to him,  
and weeping loudly, while round him large numbers of his  
comrades 5  
were shedding tears too. The bright goddess came among them,  
stood at his side, clasped his hand, and spoke to him, saying:  
"My child, this man we must let lie, for all our sorrow,  
since from the start it was the gods that willed his death.  
Accept rather now, from Hēphaistos, this splendid armor, 10  
fine gear, such as never man yet wore upon his shoulders."

So saying, the goddess set down the pieces of armor  
in front of Achilles: each rang clear in its intricate splendor.  
Trembling swept through the Myrmidons: no man dared  
to look directly at them, but flinched away. As Achilles 15  
viewed them, his wrath swelled further, his eyes glared out  
terribly under their lids, like blazing fire, and he  
rejoiced as he handled these dazzling gifts from the god.  
But when, to his mind, he'd spent enough time admiring  
their workmanship, then to his mother he spoke winged words: 20  
"Mother, these arms the god's given me are such as  
immortal work should be, what no mortal could accomplish!  
Now indeed I shall arm myself. Yet I'm desperately anxious  
for the valiant son of Menoitios, lest meanwhile flies  
may enter the wounds that the bronze has inflicted on him, 25  
engender worms there, to outrage his body, now that  
the life's killed from it—and so all his flesh will rot."

Then the goddess, silver-footed Thetis, replied: "My child,  
don't let these things bother your mind! I'll take good care  
to fend off from his body those savage tribes, the flies 30  
that feed on the flesh of men lately slain in battle. Suppose  
that he lies for a year's full cycle, his flesh will remain  
fresh and whole, or even better than now! But first

you must call the Achaian heroes to assembly, and renounce  
your rage against Agamemnōn, the people's shepherd: 35  
that done, you can arm yourself for battle, be clad in valor."

So saying, she filled him with dauntless strength, while for  
Patroklos she dripped ambrosia and red nectar  
through his nostrils, to keep his flesh forever unspoiled.

Along the seashore he went now, did noble Achilles, 40  
shouting scarily loud, to alert the Achaian heroes,  
and even those who before had stayed where the ships  
were hauled up—the steersmen, those who handled the ships'  
steering oars, or the ships' stewards, who served out rations—  
all now made their way to the meeting place, since Achilles 45  
had appeared, after long abstention from grievous battle.

Two men, veterans both, came limping in together—  
Tydeus's son, steadfast fighter, and noble Odysseus,  
both of them leaning on spears, since their wounds still hurt them—  
and went and sat down in the front of the assembly. 50

Last of all there arrived the lord of men, Agamemnōn,  
he too nursing a wound: in the grind of battle he'd been  
hit by the bronze-tipped spear of Koōn, Antēnōr's son.  
Then, when all the Achaians were gathered together,  
swift-footed Achilles stood up and addressed them, saying: 55

"Son of Atreus, was it really the best thing for both of us,  
for you, for me, that we two, grief-filled as we were,  
should rage on in heart-eating strife because of a girl?  
I wish she'd been killed by an arrow from Artemis  
that day at the ships when I chose her, after sacking Lyrnessos! 60  
Fewer Achaians then would have bitten the boundless earth  
at the enemy's hands, on account of my fierce wrath.

Good news, this, for the Trojans and Hektōr; but the Achaians  
will long, I think, remember the strife between you and me!  
Still, despite our grief, we'll treat this as past and done with, 65  
restraining, as now we must, the spirit in our breasts.

So now I renounce my wrath: that I should rage on for ever  
unrelentingly is not fitting. Come then, waste no time,  
urge on the long-haired Achaians into battle,  
let me, once again, face these Trojans, make trial of them, 70  
find out if they're still ready to spend a night by the ships—

though I think there are some who'll be happy to rest their knees—  
those who escape my spear, and the struggle of battle.”

So he spoke, and the well-greaved Achaians all rejoiced,  
because Pēleus's great-hearted son had abandoned his wrath. 75

There then addressed them the lord of men, Agamemnōn,  
from the place where he sat, not standing up among them:<sup>1</sup>

“My friends, you Danaän heroes, you henchmen of Arēs!  
It's good to hear out a man on his feet, nor is it seemly  
to interrupt him—vexation to even a skilled speaker! 80

Against the clamor of many how can a man either listen  
or speak? He's disabled, however clear his voice.

It's to Pēleus's son I'll declare myself, but you other Argives  
should pay attention too, and mark my words, all of you.  
Many times have the Achaians addressed me in the same terms, 85

reviling me; yet it's not I who am the one at fault,  
but rather Zeus, and Fate, and some night-walking Fury,  
who in the assembly cast wild delusion on my mind  
that day when, acting alone, I took his prize from Achilles.  
But what could I do? It's a god that fulfills all matters: 90

Zeus's eldest daughter, Delusion, who blinds all mortals—  
accursed creature, with delicate feet, for it's never  
the ground she touches: she treads on the heads of men,  
damaging mortals' minds, has trapped others before me.

Indeed, she once blinded Zeus, though men declare him 95  
the greatest of men and gods both: him even Hērē,  
though only a woman, deceived by her crafty wiles  
the day when that mighty force Hēraklēs was due to be born,  
to Alkmēnē, in Thēbē with its fair crown of walls.

Zeus spoke in boastful tones, among all the gods: 100

‘Listen to me, every god, and all you goddesses,  
while I tell you what the heart in my breast now bids me say.  
Eileithyia, spirit of birth pangs, today will bring to the light  
a man who will rule over all those dwelling about him,  
one of that line of men whose ancestry is my own.’ 105

To him, with deception in mind, Lady Hērē then declared:

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1. The Greek is ambiguous, and there has been considerable debate as to what exactly Agamemnōn does, and why. I agree with those who argue that he not only stays put, but delivers his speech sitting, using the privilege of a wounded man to emphasize the difference between himself and Achilles, who has for long been safely out of the fighting. See Edwards 2011, 243–44.

‘You’ll turn out a liar, once more not see your words fulfilled!  
 Very well, then, Olympian: swear me a strong oath  
 that he’ll truly rule over all those dwelling about him,  
 he who today drops between the feet of a woman 110  
 and is of the line whose blood is also your own.’  
 So she spoke, but Zeus failed to understand her deception,  
 and swore a great oath, and thus was greatly deluded.  
 Now Hērē swooped down from the peaks of high Olympos,  
 and quickly made her way to Achaian Argos, where, 115  
 she knew, was the noble wife of Perseus’s son Sthenelos,  
 then pregnant with a son, and her seventh month had come.  
 This child Hērē brought out, though its months were incomplete,  
 while delaying Alkmēnē’s delivery, restraining her birth pangs.  
 Then she herself broke the news to Zeus, the son of Kronos: 120  
 ‘Zeus, Father, lord of the bright thunderbolt, just let me  
 drop a word in your mind. A great man indeed is born,  
 who’ll be lord of the Argives: Eurystheus, Sthenelos’s son,  
 Perseus’s grandson<sup>2</sup>—your line, so not unfit to rule Argos.’  
 So she spoke, and sharp pain struck him, deep in his mind, 125  
 and promptly he seized Delusion by her glossy-tressed head,  
 infuriated at heart, and swore a powerful oath  
 that never more to Olympos and the starry heavens  
 should Delusion come, she who blinds all. So saying,  
 he flung her down from the starry heavens, whirling 130  
 her round with one hand, and soon she reached human soil.  
 Ever after Zeus groaned at the thought of her, when he saw  
 his son demeaned by the tasks that Eurystheus set him.<sup>3</sup>  
 So I too, then, at the time bright-helmeted Hektōr  
 was busy slaughtering Argives at the sterns of their ships, 135  
 could not forget Delusion, by whom I was first blinded.  
 But since blinded I was, and robbed of good sense by Zeus,  
 I’m willing to make amends, to give recompense past counting.  
 So up with you to the battle, rouse the rest of your troops!  
 Gifts I’m ready to offer you, all that you were promised 140  
 by noble Odysseus earlier when he came to your hut!  
 Or wait a bit, if you’d rather, eager to fight though you are,

2. Thus great-grandson of Zeus (who begot Perseus on Danaë) and cousin to Hēraklēs, son of Zeus and Alkmēnē (though Amphitryōn was his nominal father).

3. These were the famous Twelve Labors, imposed upon Hēraklēs by Eurystheus as a penalty for having in a fit of madness killed his three children by Kreōn’s daughter Megara.

and attendants will gather and fetch you these gifts from my ships,  
to let you see that I'll give you what will satisfy your heart."

Then in answer to him swift-footed Achilles declared: 145  
"Most glorious son of Atreus, Agamemnōn lord of men,  
as regards the gifts, if you want to, present them, as is proper,  
or keep them—your choice. But for now, let's turn to battle  
right away! We've no business to sit here wasting our time  
in idle chatter when there's great work still to be done! 150  
As each of you once again sees Achilles among the foremost,  
with his bronze spear spreading death through the ranks of the  
Trojans,  
let him have that in mind as he battles his own opponent."

In answer to him resourceful Odysseus now said:  
"Do not thus, godlike Achilles, brave warrior though you are, 155  
urge the Achaians' sons to go against Ilion fasting  
to fight the Trojans, since it's for no short time  
that this struggle will last, from when the warriors' ranks  
first engage, and the god breathes might into either side.  
Rather command the Achaians by their swift ships to consume 160  
both food and wine first, for in them is strength and courage.  
No man through the livelong day, till the setting of the sun,  
will be able to stand and fight who hasn't eaten:  
for though in his heart he may be eager for battle,  
yet his limbs unawares grow heavy, hunger and thirst 165  
come on him, while as he moves his knees get weaker—  
but the man who's taken his fill of wine and food  
can fight with enemy warriors all day long:  
the heart in his breast's still steadfast, his limbs don't tire  
until everyone's disengaged from the business of fighting. 170  
Come then, dismiss the troops, give the order to make ready  
their meal; and as for the gifts, the lord of men, Agamemnōn,  
should have them brought to the meeting place, where all  
the Achaians can see them, and your heart may be comforted;  
and let him stand up and swear an oath before the Argives, 175  
that he never went into that woman's bed nor lay with her—  
as is the custom, my lord, between men and women—  
and let the heart in your own breast be gracious!  
Let him give you a feast in his hut by way of amendment,  
a lavish one, that you may lack nothing that's due to you. 180

And you, son of Atreus, will be more just in future  
to others; there's nothing blameworthy in a king,  
when he's started the trouble, making amends to any man."

Then the lord of men, Agamemnōn, answered him, saying:  
"I'm very glad, son of Laertēs, to have heard your speech: 185  
all you set forth and discussed was properly stated.  
This oath I'm ready to swear: my heart bids me do so,  
nor will I perjure myself to a deity. But Achilles  
should stay here, however eager he may be for battle,  
and all the rest of you too, until the gifts are fetched 190  
from my hut, and we pledge ourselves in solemn agreement.  
And you yourself I charge with this duty, that you  
choose the best young warriors out of all the Achaians  
to bring the gifts from my ship, all that earlier we promised  
to bestow on Achilles, and also to fetch the women. 195  
And in the Achaians' broad camp let Talthybios right now  
prepare a boar, to sacrifice to Zeus and the Sun."

Then swift-footed Achilles made answer to him, saying:  
"Most glorious son of Atreus, Agamemnōn lord of men,  
better at some other time for you to fix these matters, 200  
when perhaps there's a break in the fighting, when at least  
the rage in my breast's less intense. But at this moment  
they are lying there, flesh rent open, all those warriors  
that Priam's son Hektōr slew when Zeus gave him his glory—  
and you two are saying we should eat! If I had my way 205  
I'd tell the Achaians' sons to join battle, here and now,  
fasting, unfed, and *then*, when the sun went down,  
to prepare their great feast—when we'd wiped out this defilement!  
But until that moment, down my own throat at least,  
neither food nor drink will pass, now my comrade is dead, 210  
who lies in my hut, flesh rent by the keen-edged bronze,  
feet facing the door,<sup>4</sup> while around him our companions  
shed tears. So it's not such things that at all concern me now,  
but killing, and blood, and the groans of dying men."

Then in answer to him resourceful Odysseus said: 215  
"Ah, Achilles, Pēleus's son, far the greatest of the Achaians,

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4. As Leaf reminds us (2: 275) this was an ancient funeral custom, symbolic of imminent departure—"facing the journey", as Vermeule says (12-13).

You are stronger than me, and greater by no small measure  
 with the spear; but as for wisdom, I'd far surpass you,  
 since I'm the older man, with much more knowledge—  
 so let your heart be receptive to what I have to say. 220  
 Mankind very soon gets surfeited with its crop of fighting,  
 the stalks of which the bronze spreads in plenty on the ground;  
 but the harvest is all too small, since the scales are tipped  
 by Zeus, who is for mankind the steward of warfare.  
 No way by denying the belly can Achaians mourn a corpse: 225  
 too many, one after another, are endlessly falling  
 day after day—when would anyone get a respite?  
 No: what we have to do is to bury our casualties,  
 harden our hearts, shed tears on that one day only,  
 and all those of us who survive the loathsome struggle 230  
 must be mindful of drink and food, that we may the better  
 battle it out with our enemies, for ever, unceasingly,  
 flesh clad in the stubborn bronze. Let no one of our troops  
 hold off from action while awaiting some other order:  
 there's one order only: ill betide any man who hangs back 235  
 at the ships of the Argives! Let's all advance together,  
 and raise a sharp battle against these horse-breaking Trojans!"

That said, he took with him far-famed Nestōr's sons,  
 and Phyleus's son Megēs, and Thoas, and Mērionēs,  
 and Kreiōn's son Lykomēdēs, and Melanippos, 240  
 and they made their way to the hut of Atreus's son Agamemnōn.  
 The word had been given, and straightway the thing was done:  
 seven tripods they fetched from the hut, as he'd promised Achilles,  
 a score of bright cauldrons, a dozen horses; and then  
 quickly they led out the women, skilled in fine handiwork: 245  
 seven there were of these, with fair-cheeked Briseïs the eighth.  
 Odysseus weighed out gold, ten talents in all, and led off,  
 while the other Achaian warriors carried the gifts, and set them  
 down in the midst of the meeting place. Then Agamemnōn rose,  
 while Talthybios, a man whose voice was like a god's, 250  
 stood, with the boar in his hands, beside the people's shepherd.  
 The son of Atreus now grasped and drew the knife  
 that always hung at the side of his sword's great scabbard,  
 cut the first ritual hairs from the boar, and raising his hands  
 prayed to Zeus, while every Argive sat silent in his place, 255

as was right and proper, ears alert to the king, who now,  
 looking up to the broad heavens, made his prayer:  
 “Let Zeus, first, be my witness, highest and best of gods,  
 and Earth, and Sun, and the Furies that underground  
 exact retribution from those men who swear false oaths, 260  
 that never did I lay hands on the girl Briseïs, either  
 to bed her, or with any other intention, and that  
 she’s remained untouched all the time she’s been in my huts!  
 If any of this is sworn falsely, may the gods give me  
 all the many griefs they inflict on perjurers in their name.” 265

That said, he cut the boar’s throat with the pitiless bronze,  
 and the body Talthybios swung round and hurled into  
 the grey sea’s wide gulf, food for fishes. Then Achilles  
 stood up and spoke among the battle-minded Argives:  
 “Zeus, Father, great the delusions with which you visit mankind! 270  
 Not otherwise would the son of Atreus have so stirred up  
 the heart in my breast, nor would he have taken the girl  
 against my will, so determinedly: it may be that Zeus  
 was set on bringing death to large numbers of Achaians!  
 Go eat your meal now, and then let’s move to battle.” 275

So he spoke, and broke up this very brief assembly.  
 The rest all scattered, each man to his own vessel,  
 while the great-hearted Myrmidons busied themselves with the gifts,  
 and carried them off to the ship of godlike Achilles.  
 Some they stowed in the huts, and settled the women there, 280  
 while stalwart henchmen drove off the horses to the herd.

But now Briseïs, the image of golden Aphrodītē,  
 when she saw Patroklos, his flesh all rent by the sharp bronze,  
 flung herself on him, keening shrilly, her hands  
 tearing her breasts and tender neck and lovely face; 285  
 and amid her weeping this woman, so like a goddess, exclaimed:  
 “Patroklos, in my misery the man most dear to my heart,  
 it was living I left you when last I went out from the hut,  
 and now, great leader, it’s dead I return to find you!  
 Thus in my life does trouble always breed trouble: 290  
 the husband bestowed on me by my father and lady mother  
 I saw rent by the sharp bronze in front of our city,  
 and the three men who were born to that self-same mother,



my much-loved brothers, all these met their day of death.  
 Yet you'd not even let me weep when swift Achilles 295  
 killed my husband and sacked the city of godlike Mynēs—  
 you said you'd see me the lawful wedded wife  
 of godlike Achilles, you'd take me back on your ships to Phthiē,  
 and hold a marriage feast for me among the Myrmidons. So  
 I mourn your death without cease: you were always kind to me." 300

So she spoke, weeping: the women lamented with her,  
 for Patroklos professedly, but each one for her own sorrows.  
 Meanwhile the Achaian elders gathered around Achilles,  
 all imploring him to eat: but he refused them, sobbing:  
 "I beg you—if any of you, my dearest comrades, will listen— 305  
 please, please don't tell me to glut my heart with food  
 or drink, now this terrible grief has come upon me:  
 until sundown I shall remain thus, and endure, whatever."

So saying, he sent away all the other princes, except  
 the two sons of Atreus, who stayed, as did noble Odysseus, 310  
 and Nestōr and Idomeneus and Phoinix the old horseman,  
 to comfort him in his great sorrow, but not one whit  
 would his heart be comforted till he'd entered war's bloody jaws,  
 and as he reflected, he heaved a deep sigh, and said:  
 "Time was when you—so ill-fated, my dearest comrade— 315  
 would yourself lay out an enjoyable meal in our hut,  
 quickly and skillfully, when the Achaians were impatient  
 to bring grievous warfare against the horse-breaking Trojans.  
 But now here you lie, flesh rent, and my heart's indifferent  
 to food and drink, though both are to hand, through yearning 320  
 for you: no other worse thing is there that I could suffer,  
 not even news of the death of my own father,  
 who now perhaps in Phthiē is shedding heavy round tears  
 for the loss of a son such as I am, who now in a foreign land,  
 all because of hateful Helen, am at war with the Trojans; 325  
 not even were it my own dear son, now being raised on Skyros—  
 if indeed it is true that godlike Neoptolemos still lives.  
 Until now the heart in my breast had cherished the hope  
 that I alone should die far from horse-grazing Argos,  
 here at Troy, but that you should return to Phthiē, 330  
 and that you'd pick up my son in your swift black ship  
 from Skyros, and show him everything that was mine—

my possessions, my servants, my splendid high-roofed house,  
 since by now I suppose that Pēleus must either be at last  
 dead, or, if barely alive still, bowed down by the inroads  
 of loathsome old age, and by waiting forever to hear  
 unhappy tidings of me, that at last I've perished." 335

So he spoke, weeping: the old men lamented with him,  
 remembering, each of them, all that he'd left back at home;  
 and as they mourned, the son of Kronos observed them, 340  
 was moved to pity, and quickly spoke winged words to Athēnē:  
 "My child, you're completely neglecting your favorite mortal!  
 Do you no longer have the least care in your heart for Achilles?  
 There he sits, in front of his high-sterned vessels,  
 in mourning for his dear comrade: the others indeed 345  
 have all gone to dinner, but he stays fasting and foodless.  
 So off with you now, dribble nectar and sweet ambrosia  
 into his breast, so that hunger may not come on him."

So saying,  
 he encouraged Athēnē, herself already most eager,  
 and she, like a shearwater, long-winged and raucous-voiced, 350  
 swooped down through the high air from heaven. The Achaians  
 were promptly arming throughout the camp, while she  
 into Achillēs' breast dribbled nectar and sweet ambrosia  
 in order that joyless hunger should not come upon his knees.  
 Then she herself was gone to the strong abode of her mighty 355  
 father, while from their ships the Achaians poured out.

As when, thick and fast, Zeus's snowflakes come floating down,  
 ice-cold, and driven by the sky-born north wind's blast,  
 so now, thick and fast, the brightly gleaming helmets  
 emerged from the ships, and with them the bossed shields, 360  
 the well-plated corselets and the ash-wood spears. Their radiance  
 shone up to heaven, all the earth around was stirred  
 to laughter by the bright bronze, and a din rose from under  
 men's tramping feet: in their midst was noble Achilles,  
 arming himself, teeth grinding, eyes all ablaze 365  
 like flames of fire, while into his heart there now entered  
 unbearable grief. Enraged at the Trojans, he now put on  
 the god's gifts, that Hēphaistos had labored hard to make him.  
 The greaves first he fastened on about his shins—  
 finely worked, and fitted with silver ankle-pieces. 370

Next, to cover his chest, he put on the corselet.  
 About his shoulders he slung the silver-studded sword,  
 of bronze; then came the shield, both huge and sturdy,  
 from which gleamed afar a brightness like the moon's.  
 As out at sea the gleam is visible to sailors 375  
 of a burning fire, one alight high up in the mountains,  
 in some lonely farmhouse, but they cannot stop the gale  
 from driving them over the teeming deep, far distant from  
 their friends—so a gleam went skyward from Achilles' shield,  
 so fine, so intricate. Then he lifted the mighty helmet 380  
 and set it upon his head: it shone like a star,  
 this helmet with horsehair crest, and around it there waved  
 the lovely gold plumes that Hēphaistos had set thick about its crown.  
 Then noble Achilles tested himself in his armor  
 to see if it fitted well, if his lithe limbs had free movement, 385  
 and it buoyed him like wings, delighting the people's shepherd.  
 Lastly he drew from its stand his father's spear,  
 weighty and huge and massive. No other Achaian  
 could wield it: only Achilles could manage its handling—  
 that spear of Pēlian ash wood that Cheirōn gave his dear father, 390  
 felled on Pēlion's summit, to embody death for heroes.  
 Alkimos and Automedōn were about the business of yoking  
 the horses: fitting fine girth straps, thrusting the bits between  
 their jaws. Now they drew back the reins to the dovetailed  
 chariot; then grasping the bright whip that fitted his hand 395  
 Automedōn sprang aboard, to the driver's place,  
 and behind him, armed and ready, came Achilles,  
 a gleam in his battle gear like Hyperīon the bright Sun.  
 and called out in a terrible voice to his father's horses:  
 "Xanthos and Balios,<sup>5</sup> famed offspring of Podargē! 400  
 Think of some other way to bring your charioteer  
 back safe to the Danaān camp when we're through with fighting—  
 don't leave him dead there, as you did Patroklos."

Then

from under the yoke the fleet-footed horse addressed him—  
 Xanthos: he bent his head sharply, and all his mane 405  
 streamed to the ground from the yoke-pad, on both sides of the yoke,

5. I.e., "Bay" and "Dapple"; their dam, Podargē, is "Swiftfoot".

and the goddess, white-armed Hērē, made him articulate:  
“Yes, this time we’ll bring you back safely, mighty Achilles!  
But the day of your death is near, though we shall not  
be its cause, but rather a great god and all-mastering Fate: 410  
it was through no slowness or sloth of ours that the Trojans  
succeeded in stripping the armor from Patroklos’s shoulders:  
it was the best of the gods, whom fair-hired Lētō bore,  
that slew him among the front-liners, gave Hektōr the glory.  
We two could run with the speed of the west wind’s blast, 415  
which, they say, is the swiftest of all! But you yourself  
are destined to be laid low by a god’s might, and a man’s.”

When he’d said this, the Furies cut off his power of speech.  
Then, deeply moved, swift-footed Achilles addressed him:  
“Xanthos, why foretell my death? You need not do so. 420  
I know well myself that it’s my fate to perish here,  
far from my father and mother. But nevertheless  
I shan’t stop till I’ve driven the Trojans to their fill of war.”

With a shout,  
out among the foremost he urged on his whole-hoofed team.