

BOOK 3

Two armies,
The troops in divisions
Under their commanders,

The Trojans advancing across the plain

*Like cranes beating their metallic wings
In the stormy sky at winter's onset,
Unspeakable rain at their backs, their necks stretched
Toward Oceanic streams and down
To strafe the brown Pygmy race,
Bringing strife and bloodshed from the sky at dawn,*

10

While the Greeks moved forward in silence,
Their breath curling in long angry plumes
That acknowledged their pledges to die for each other.

*Banks of mist settle on mountain peaks
And seep into the valleys. Shepherds dislike it
But for a thief it is better than night,
And a man can see only as far as he can throw a stone.*

No more could the soldiers see through the cloud of dust
The armies tramped up as they moved through the plain.

And when they had almost closed—

20

Was it a god?—no, not a god

But Paris who stepped out from the Trojan ranks,
Leopard skin on his shoulders, curved bow, sword,
And shaking two bronze-tipped spears at the Greeks
He invited their best to fight him to the death.

When Menelaus, who was Ares' darling, saw him
Strutting out from the ranks, he felt

*As a lion must feel when he finds the carcass
Of a stag or wild goat, and, half-starving,
Consumes it greedily even though hounds and hunters
Are swarming down on him.*

30

It was Paris all right,
Who could have passed for a god,
And Menelaus grinned as he hefted his gear
And stepped down from his chariot. He would
Have his revenge at last. Paris' blood
Turned milky when he saw him coming on,
And he faded back into the Trojan troops
With cheeks as pale as if he had seen—
Had almost stepped on—a poisonous snake
In a mountain pass. He could barely stand
As disdainful Trojans made room for him in the ranks,
And Hector, seeing his brother tremble at Atreus' son,
Started in on him with these abusive epithets:

40

"Paris, you desperate, womanizing pretty boy!

I wish you had never been born, or had died unmarried.
Better that than this disgrace before the troops.
Can't you just hear it, the long-haired Greeks
Chuckling and saying that our champion wins
For good looks but comes up short on offense and defense? 50
Is this how you were when you got up a crew
And sailed overseas, hobnobbed with the warrior caste
In a foreign country and sailed off with
A beautiful woman with marriage ties to half of them?
You're nothing but trouble for your father and your city,
A joke to your enemies and an embarrassment to yourself.
No, don't stand up to Menelaus: you might find out
What kind of a man it is whose wife you're sleeping with.
You think your lyre will help you, or Aphrodite's gifts,
Your hair, your pretty face, when you sprawl in the dust? 60
It's the Trojans who are cowards, or you'd have long since
Been dressed out in stones for all the harm you've done."

And Paris, handsome as a god, answered him:

"That's only just, Hector. You've got a mind
Like an axe, you know, always sharp,
Making the skilled cut through a ship's beam,
Multiplying force—nothing ever turns your edge.
But don't throw golden Aphrodite's gifts in my face.
We don't get to choose what the gods give us, you know,
And we can't just toss their gifts aside. 70
So all right, if you want me to fight, fine.
Have the Trojans and the Greeks sit down,
And Menelaus and I will square off in the middle

To fight for Helen and all her possessions.
 Winner take all.
 And everyone else will swear oaths of friendship,
 You all to live here in the fertile Troad,
 And they to go back to bluegrass Argos
 And Achaea with its beautiful women."

Hector liked what he heard. 80
 He went out in front along the Trojan ranks
 Holding a spear broadside and made them all sit down.
 Greek archers and slingers were taking aim at him
 And already starting to shoot arrows and stones
 When Agamemnon boomed out a command
 For them to hold their fire. Hector was signalling
 That he had something to say, and his helmet
 Caught the morning sun as he addressed both armies:

"Listen to me, Trojans, and you warriors from Greece.
 Paris, on account of whom this war began, says this: 90
 He wants all the Trojan and Greek combatants
 To lay their weapons down on the ground.
 He and Menelaus will square off in the middle
 And fight for Helen and all her possessions.
 Winner take all.
 And everyone else swears oaths of friendship."

Utter silence,
 Until Menelaus, who was good at the war shout, said:

"Now listen to me, since my pain is paramount

In all this. It may be that the Greeks and Trojans 100
Can at last call it quits. We've had enough suffering
From this quarrel of mine that Paris began.
Whichever of us is due to die, let him die.
Then the rest of you can be done with each other.
Bring a pair of lambs, a white one and a black,
For Earth and Sun. Our side will bring another for Zeus.
And have Priam come, so he can swear oaths himself,
In person, since his sons are arrogant perjurers
Who would just as soon trample on Zeus' solemn word.
Younger men always have their heads in the clouds. 110
An old man looks ahead and behind, and the result
Is far better for both parties involved."

You could see their mood brighten,
Greeks and Trojans both, with the hope
That this wretched war would soon be over.
They pulled their chariots up in rows,
Dismounted, and piled up their weapons.

There was not much space between the two armies.

Hector dispatched two heralds to the city
To fetch the lambs and summon Priam. 120
Agamemnon sent Talthylus back to the ships
With orders to bring back a lamb.

While these human heralds were off on their missions,
Iris, the gods' herald (who is also the rainbow),
Came to white-armed Helen disguised as Laodice,

Her sister-in-law and Priam's most beautiful daughter.
She found Helen in the main hall, weaving a folding mantle
On a great loom and designing into the blood-red fabric
The trials that the Trojans and Greeks had suffered
For her beauty under Ares' murderous hands. 130
Iris stood near Helen and said:

"Come and see, dear lady, the amazing thing
The Greek and Trojan warriors have done.
They've fought all these years out on the plain,
Lusting for each other's blood, but now
They've sat down in silence—halted the war—
They're leaning back on their shields
And their long spears are stuck in the sand.
But Paris and Menelaus are going to fight
A duel with lances, and the winner 140
Will lay claim to you as his beloved wife."

The goddess's words turned Helen's mind
Into a sweet mist of desire
For her former husband, her parents, and her city.
She dressed herself in fine silvery linens
And came out of her bedroom crying softly.
Two maids trailed behind, Aethre,
Pittheus' daughter, and cow-eyed Clymene.
They came to the Western Gate,
Where a knot of old men sat— 150

Priam, Panthous, Thymoetes,
Lampus, Clytius, Hicetaon

(Who was in Ares' bloodline)
Ucalegon and Antenor,
Who lived and breathed wisdom—

These veterans sat on the wall by the Western Gate,
Too old to fight now, but excellent counsellors.

*Think of cicadas perched on a branch,
Their delicate voices shrill in the woods.*

Such were the voices of these Trojan elders
Sitting on the tower by the Western Gate.
When they saw Helen coming
Their rasping whispers flew along the wall:

160

"Who could blame either the Trojans or Greeks
For suffering so long for a woman like this."

"Her eyes are not human."

"Whatever she is, let her go back with the ships
And spare us and our children a generation of pain."

But Priam called out to her:

"Come here, dear child, sit next to me
So you can see your former husband
And dear kinsmen. You are not to blame
For this war with the Greeks. The gods are.
Now tell me, who is that enormous man

170

Towering over the Greek troops, handsome,
Well-built? I've never laid eyes on such
A fine figure of a man. He looks like a king."

And Helen,
The sky's brightness reflected in her mortal face:

"Reverend you are to me dear father-in-law, 180
A man to hold in awe. I'm so ashamed.
Death should have been a sweeter evil to me
Than following your son here, leaving my home,
My marriage, my friends, my precious daughter,
That lovely time in my life. None of it was to be,
And lamenting it has been my slow death.
But you asked me something, and I'll answer.
That man is Agamemnon, son of Atreus,
A great king and a strong warrior both.
He was also my brother-in-law—shameless bitch 190
That I am—if that life was ever real."

The old man was lost in reverie and wonder:

"The son of Atreus. Born to power and wealth.
Blessed by the gods. Now I see
How many Greek lads you command.
I thought I saw it all when I went
To Phrygia once and saw thousands
Of soldiers and gleaming horses
Under the command of Otreus and Mygdon
Massed by the banks of the Sangarios, 200

An army in which I myself served
On that fateful day when the Amazons
Swept down to fight against men.
They were nothing compared to these wild-eyed Greeks."

Then he saw Odysseus and asked:

"Now tell me about this one, dear child,
Shorter than Agamemnon by a head
But broader in the shoulders and chest.
His armor is lying on the ground
And he's roaming the ranks like a ram,
That's it, just like a thick-fleeced ram
Striding through a flock of silvery sheep."

210

And Helen, Zeus' child:

"That is Laertes' son,
The master strategist Odysseus, born and bred
In the rocky hills of Ithaca. He knows
Every trick there is, and his mind runs deep."

Antenor turned to her and observed astutely:

"Your words are not off the mark there, madam.
Odysseus came here once before, on an embassy
For your sake along with Menelaus.
I entertained them courteously in the great hall
And learned each man's character and depth of mind.
Standing in a crowd of Trojans, Menelaus,

220

With his wide shoulders, was more prominent,
But when both were seated Odysseus was lordlier.
When it came time for each to speak in public
And weave a spell of wisdom with their words,
Menelaus spoke fluently enough, to the point
And very clearly, but briefly, since he is not
A man of many words. Being older, he spoke first.
Then Odysseus, the master strategist, rose quickly,
But just stood there, his eyes fixed on the ground.
He did not move his staff forward or backward
But held it steady. You would have thought him
A dull, surly lout without any wit. But when he
Opened his mouth and projected his voice
The words fell down like snowflakes in a blizzard.
No mortal could have vied with Odysseus then,
And we no longer held his looks against him."

230

240

The third hero old Priam saw was Ajax.

"And who is that giant of a Greek over there,
Head and shoulders above the other Achaeans?"

And Helen, shining in her long trailing robes:

"That is big Ajax, the army's mountain.
Standing beyond him is Idomeneus,
Like a god, with his Cretan commanders.
He used to come often from Crete
And Menelaus would entertain him
In our house. And now I can make out

250

All the other Greeks, those I know
And whose names I could tell you.
But there are two commanders I do not see,
Castor the horsebreaker and the boxer
Polydeuces, my brothers, born of one mother.
Either they didn't come here from lovely Lacedaemon,
Or else they did come in their seagoing ships
But avoid the company of the fighting men
In horror of the shame and disgrace that are mine."

But they had long been held by the life-giving earth
There in Lacedaemon, their ancestral land.

260

And now the heralds came up to the town
With the sacrificial victims, the two rams,
And as fruit of the fields, hearty wine
In a goatskin bag. The herald Idaeus
Held a gleaming bowl and a golden chalice
And roused the old man with this speech:

"Rise, son of Laomedon.
The best men of Troy and Achaea summon you
Down to the plain to swear solemn oaths.
Paris and Menelaus will fight
A duel for the woman, and she will
Follow the winner with all her possessions.
Everyone else will swear oaths of friendship,
We to live here in the fertile Toad,
And they to go back to bluegrass Argos

270

And Achaea with its beautiful women."

The old man stiffened.

He ordered his companions to yoke his horses,

Then mounted himself and took the reins.

280

Antenor rode with him in the beautiful chariot

And they drove out through the Western Gate

And onto the plain. They pulled up in the space

Between the two armies and stepped down to the earth.

Agamemnon rose,

And Odysseus, deep in thought.

Heralds brought the animals for the oaths

And mixed wine in the great bowl.

They poured water over the kings' hands,

Then Agamemnon drew the knife

290

That hung by his sword scabbard

And cut hairs from the rams' heads.

The heralds gave these to the leaders on both sides,

And Agamemnon lifted his palms to the sky:

"Zeus, Father, Lord of Ida,

Greatest and most glorious;

Helios, who sees all and hears all;

Rivers and Earth, and Powers below

Who punish perjurers after death,

Witness and protect these sacred Oaths:

300

If Paris Alexander kills Menelaus,

Helen and all her goods are his,

And we will sail away in our ships.
But if Menelaus kills Paris,
The Trojans will surrender Helen
With all her goods and pay the Argives
A fit penalty for generations to come.
If Priam and Priam's sons refuse,
Upon Paris' death, this penalty to me,
I swear to wage this war to its end."

310

He spoke, then slashed the rams' throats
And put the gasping animals on the ground,
Their proud temper undone by whetted bronze.

Then they all filled their cups
With wine from the bowl and poured libations
To the gods eternal and prayed,
Greek and Trojan alike, in words like these:

"Zeus almighty and most glorious
And all you other immortal gods,
Whoever breaks this oath and truce,
May their brains spill to the ground
Like this wine, theirs and their children's,
And may other men master their wives."

320

But Zeus would not fulfill their prayers.

Then Priam spoke his mind:

"Hear me, Trojans and Achaean soldiers:

I am going back now to windswept Ilion
Since I cannot bear to see with my own eyes
My dear son fighting with Menelaus,
Who is dear to Ares. Zeus and the other immortals
Doubtless know whose death is destined."

330

And this man who was a god's equal
Loaded the rams onto his chariot
For interment in Trojan soil, mounted,
And took the reins. Antenor stood behind him
And together they drove back to Ilion.

Priam's son Hector and brilliant Odysseus
First measured off an arena and then
Shook lots in a bronze helmet to decide
Which of the two would cast his spear first.
You could see hands lifted to heaven
On both sides and hear whispered prayers:

340

"Death, Lord Zeus,
For whichever of the two
Started this business,
But grant us your peace."

Great Hector shook the helmet, sunlight
Glancing off his own as he looked away,
And out jumped Paris' lot.

The armies
Sat down, rank after rank, tooled weapons

350

And high-stepping horses idle by each man.

The heroes armed.

Paris, silken-haired Helen's present husband,
Bound greaves on his shins with silver clasps,
Put on his brother Lycaon's breastplate,
Which fit him well, slung around his shoulders
A bronze sword inlaid with silver
And a large, heavy shield. On his head he placed
A crested helmet, and the horsehair plume
Nodded menacingly.

360

Likewise Menelaus' gear.

They put their armor on in the ranks
And then stepped out into no-man's-land,
A cold light in their eyes.

Veterans on both sides, horse-breaking Trojans
And bronze-kneed Greeks, just sat and stared.

They stood close, closer, in the measured arena,
Shaking their spears, half-mad with jealousy.
And then Paris threw. A long shadow trailed his spear
As it moved through the air, and it hit the circle
Of Menelaus' shield, but the spearpoint crumpled
Against its tough metal skin. It was Menelaus' turn now,
And as he rose in his bronze he prayed to Zeus:

370

"Lord Zeus, make Paris pay for the evil he's done to me,
Smite him down with my hands so that men for all time
Will fear to transgress against a host's offered friendship."

With this prayer behind it Menelaus' spear
Carried through Paris' polished shield
And bored into the intricate breastplate, 380
The point shearing his shirt and nicking his ribs
As Paris twisted aside from black fatality.
Menelaus drew his silver-hammered sword
And came down with it hard on the crest
Of Paris' helmet, but the blade shattered
Into three or four pieces and fell from his hands.
Menelaus groaned and looked up to the sky:

"Father Zeus, no god curses us more than you.
I thought Paris was going to pay for his crimes,
And now my sword has broken in my hands, 390
And my spear's thrown away. I missed the bastard!"

As Menelaus spoke he lunged forward
And twisted his fingers into the thick horsehair
On Paris' helmet, pivoted on his heel,
And started dragging him back to the Greeks.
The tooled-leather chinstrap of Paris' helmet
Was cutting into his neck's tender skin,
And Menelaus would have dragged him
All the way back and won no end of glory.
But Aphrodite, Zeus' daughter, had all this 400
In sharp focus and snapped the oxhide chinstrap,

Leaving Menelaus clenching an empty helmet,
Which the hero, spinning like a discus thrower,
Heaved into the hands of the Greek spectators.
Then he went back for the kill.

But Aphrodite

Whisked Paris away with the sleight of a goddess,
Enveloping him in mist, and lofted him into
The incensed air of his vaulted bedroom.
Then she went for Helen, and found her
In a crowd of Trojan women high on the tower.

410

A withered hand tugged at Helen's fragrant robe.

The goddess was now the phantom of an old woman
Who had spun wool for Helen back in Lacedaemon,
Beautiful wool, and Helen loved her dearly.
In this crone's guise Aphrodite spoke to Helen:

"Over here. Paris wants you to come home.
He's propped up on pillows in your bedroom,
So silky and beautiful you'd never think
He'd just come from combat, but was going to a dance,
Or coming from a dance and had just now sat down."

420

This wrung Helen's heart. She knew
It was the goddess—the beautiful neck,
The irresistible line of her breasts,
The iridescent eyes. She was in awe
For a moment, and then spoke to her:

"You eerie thing, why do you love
 Lying to me like this? Where are you taking me now?
 Phrygia? Beautiful Maconia? Another city
 Where you have some other boyfriend for me? 430
 Or is it because Menelaus, having just beaten Paris,
 Wants to take his hateful wife back to his house
 That you stand here now with treachery in your heart?
 Go sit by Paris yourself! Descend from the gods' high road,
 Allow your precious feet not to tread on Olympus,
 Go fret over him constantly, protect him.
 Maybe someday he'll make you his wife—or even his slave.
 I'm not going back there. It would be treason
 To share his bed. The Trojan women
 Would hold me at fault. I have enough pain as it is." 440

And Aphrodite, angry with her, said:

"Don't vex me, bitch, or I may let go of you
 And hate you as extravagantly as I love you now.
 I can make you repulsive to both sides, you know,
 Trojans and Greeks, and then where will you be?"

Helen was afraid, and this child of Zeus
 Pulled her silvery-white linens around her
 And walked silently through the Trojan women,
 Eluding them completely The goddess went ahead
 And led her to Paris' beautiful house. The servants 450
 Suddenly all found something to do.
 Helen moved like daylight to the vaulted bedroom,
 Where Aphrodite, smiling, placed a chair for her

Opposite Paris. Helen, daughter of Zeus,
Sat down and, averting her eyes, said reproachfully:

"Back from the war? You should have died out there,
Beaten by a real hero, my former husband.
You used to boast you were better than Menelaus,
When it came to spear work and hand-to-hand combat.
Why don't you go challenge him to fight again,
Right now? I wouldn't recommend it, though,
A fair fight between you and Ares' redhead darling.
You'd go down in no time under his spear."

460

Paris answered her:

"Don't insult me, Helen.
Menelaus beat me this time—with Athena's help.
Next time I'll beat him. We have gods on our side too.
Enough of this.

Let's go to bed now and make love.

I've never wanted you so much,
Not even when I first took you away
From Lacedaemon in my sailing ship
And made love to you on the island of Cranae.
I want you even more now than I wanted you then."

470

He walked to the bed, and Helen followed.

While the two of them slept in their bed,
Menelaus prowled the ranks looking for Paris.
The Trojan troops, as much as they would have liked to,

Could not produce him. To a man,
They hated Paris as they hated death itself.
So Agamemenon, as commander-in-chief, proclaimed:

480

"Hear me, Trojans, allied troops, and Dardanians:
The victory clearly belongs to Menelaus.
Surrender therefore Argive Helen
And all the possessions that come with her.
We will further assess a suitable penalty,
A tribute to be paid for generations to come."

Thus Agamemnon. And the Greeks cheered.

BOOK 4

The gods were seated with Zeus
 On his golden terrace, and Hebe
 Was pouring them nectar. They toasted
 Each other with golden cups
 As they looked out at Troy.

Zeus all at once

Started to provoke Hera with taunts:

"Well, Menelaus has a pair of goddesses
 To help him, Hera of Argos
 And Athena the Defender,
 But they prefer to sit on the sidelines
 Enjoying themselves. Aphrodite, now,
 Smiling as always, stays with her hero
 And manages to stave off his doom.
 Did you see how she saved him just now
 When it looked like he was about to die!
 Still, Menelaus, Ares' favorite, clearly won.
 But we should decide all this now.
 Should we let war rage again
 Or establish peace between the two sides?
 If somehow we all could agree to do this
 Priam's city might still be a place to live,
 And Menelaus could take Argive Helen home."

He had no sooner finished
Than Athena and Hera were whispering
To each other with their heads together,
Plotting trouble for the Trojans.

Athena

Didn't say a word, although she was furious
With her father.

30

Hera, however,

Couldn't contain her anger, and said:

"Awesome son of Cronus! What a thing to say!
How dare you undo all my hard work.
The sweat I sweated driving my poor team
To raise an army against Priam and his sons!
Do it. But don't expect us all to approve."

Zeus brooded like a thunderhead, and answered:

"I don't understand you, woman. What have
Priam and his children done to you
That you are so fixed on demolishing
Ilium's stronghold down to its last well-laid brick?
Do you think if you were to enter its gates,
Get inside its long walls, and chew up Priam
And Priam's children raw, and the rest of the Trojans,
You might find some relief from this livid hate?
Do as you please. I don't want this quarrel
To become a source of strife between us.
But I'll tell you this, and you take it to heart.
The next time I have a passion to smash a city

40

50

And I choose one with men dear to you in it,
Don't try to curb my anger. Just let me do it.
I've given in to you, though unwilling at heart.
For of all the cities under the sun and stars,
Of all the cities on earth that men inhabit,
Sacred Ilion is the dearest to my soul,
And Priam and the people of ashen-spear Priam.
My altar there has never lacked libations
Or the steamy savor that is our due worship."

And Hera, the queen, her eyes big as an ox's:

60

"There are three cities especially dear to me:
Argos, Sparta, and broad Mycenae.
Waste these if they ever annoy you.
I won't stand in the way or take it too hard.
Even if I begrudged you their destruction,
What could I do against your superior strength?
Still, it's not right to cancel all my hard work.
I too am a god, from the same stock as you,
The eldest daughter of devious Cronus,
And honored both by position of birth
And as the wife of the lord of all the immortals.
Let's call this a draw and yield to each other,
I to you, and you to me, and the other gods
Will all fall in line. Quickly now,
Dispatch Athena into the war zone
To maneuver the Trojans to break the truce
And do some damage to the exultant Greeks."

70

Zeus had no wish to argue this,
And he winged these words to Pallas Athena:

"Go down instantly to the battlefield.
Get the Trojans to break the truce
And do some damage to the exultant Greeks."

80

Athena had been longing for action.
She flashed down from the peaks of Olympus

*Like a star that the son of devious Cronus
Sends as a portent to sailors, or to an army
Camped on a wide plain, a brilliant meteor
That sheds sparks all along its shining furrow.*

This was Pallas Athena rocketing down
Into no-man's-land. They were frozen with awe,
Horse-breaking Trojans and bronze-kneed Greeks,
Soldiers glancing at each other, saying things like:

90

"We'll be fighting again soon."

"This could mean peace."

"It means war, if Zeus wants to bring it."

While they exchanged words to this effect,
Athena blended into the crowd, disguised
As a Trojan, Antenor's son Laodocus,
A good man with a spear, and went in search

Of Pandarus and found that son of Lycaon,
Strong and not a blemish on him, standing
With rank on rank of tough, shield-bearing troops
Around him, his men from the banks of Aesepus.
Athena stood next to him and her words flew fast:

100

"If you listened to me, wise son of Lycaon,
You would take a shot at Menelaus
And win glory and gratitude from the Trojans,
Especially from prince Alexander.
He would give you splendid gifts
If he saw Menelaus, Atreus' warrior son,
Felled by your arrow and laid on the pyre.
Come on, one swift arrow aimed at Menelaus,
And vow to Apollo, the Wolf-born Archer,
That you will offer a hundred firstling lambs
When you come home to your city, sacred Zeleia."

110

Athena spoke and convinced the fool.
He took out his polished bow, made of the horns
Of a wild ibex that he himself had killed
As it came from behind a rock. Waiting for it,
He shot it in the chest, and it fell back in a cleft.
The horns measured sixteen palms from the head,
And the worker in horn fitted them together,
Smoothed it all and tipped it with gold.
This was the bow he bent, bracing it
Carefully on the ground while his men concealed him
With shields, so the Greeks couldn't react
Before Menelaus was hit. He took the lid

120

From the quiver and drew out a feathered arrow,
Barbed with black pain, that had never been shot.
He fit the bitter arrow quickly to the string 130
And vowed to Apollo, the Wolf-born Archer,
He would offer a hundred firstling lambs
When he came home to his city, sacred Zeleia.
He drew back the notched arrow until the string
Reached his nipple and the iron arrowhead the bow,
Which bent until it arched into a circle,
Then snapped back twanging, and the string hummed
As the arrow needled over the crowded plain.

But the gods were watching you, Menelaus,
Yes, and especially Athena, who stretched out 140
Her immortal hand and whisked the arrow away
From your bare flesh as lightly as a mother
Sweeps a fly from her sleeping child.
The goddess redirected the arrow
To the golden clasps of your belt
Where the corselet had an extra fold.
The bitter arrow hit the buckled belt
And drove right through its rich design
And pierced the filigreed corselet
And penetrated even the kilt-piece beneath 150
That he wore as proof against javelins.
The arrow's tip just grazed the human skin,
And dark blood started to flow from the wound.

*In Maeonia and Caria women stain ivory
With scarlet, to be cheek pieces for horses.*

*Such a piece will lie in a treasure chamber,
And though many horsemen pray to use it
As an ornament for the horse and glory
For the driver, it lies there as a king's prize.*

That, Menelaus, was how your thighs were stained
With blood, and your fine shins and ankles beneath.

160

The warlord Agamemnon went numb
When he saw black blood flowing from the wound,
As did Menelaus himself, whom Ares loved.
But when he saw that the ferrule and barbs
Had not gone in, he breathed easier and revived.
Agamemnon, though, was still groaning deeply,
Holding Menelaus' hand, and his comrades
Added their groans. Agamemnon spoke for them all:

"Dear brother, my oath was your death,
Setting you up to fight the Trojans for us,
And now they've trampled their oath and hit you.
But oaths are not empty: we pledged lambs' blood,
Poured strong wine, and clasped our right hands.
If the Olympian does not act on this immediately
He will in good time, and they will pay heavily
With their heads, their wives, and their children.
Deep down inside I know this for sure:
There will come a day when holy Troy will perish,
And Priam and the people under Priam's ashen spear.
Zeus himself, throned in heaven on high,
Will shake his dark aegis over them all

170

180

In his wrath for this treachery. This shall be done.
But dreadful grief will be mine if you die,
Menelaus, and meet your destiny now.
I will return to Argos in utter disgrace,
For the Greeks will turn their minds homeward now,
And we will leave Priam and the Trojans to boast
They have Argive Helen. And your bones will rot
As you lie in Trojan soil, your work unfinished.
And some arrogant Trojan will say as he leaps
Onto the barrow of glorious Menelaus:
'So much for the wrath of Agamemnon,
Who led the Greek army here for nothing
And has now gone home to his native land
With empty ships, and without good Menelaus.'
On that day may the earth gape open for me."

190

And Menelaus, cheering him up:

"It's all right. Don't frighten the others.
The arrow didn't hit a fatal spot. My belt
Stopped it before it got in very far, that
And the banded kilt-piece the bronzesmiths made."

200

And lord Agamemnon's response:

"May it be so, dear Menelaus.
But our physician will palpate the wound
And apply medications to stop the pain."

And he said to Talthybius, the godlike herald:

"Talthybius, call Machaon here on the double,
Asclepius' son, our faultless physician,
To see Menelaus. Someone has shot him,
Someone really good with a bow, a Trojan
Or Lycian, to his glory and our grief."

210

Following his orders, the herald
Went through the welter of Greek bronze,
Looking for Machaon, and spotted him
Standing in the midst of his men, tough
Shield-bearing troops from Tricca's pastures.
He came up to him and spoke winged words:

"Son of Asclepius, lord Agamemnon calls you
To see Menelaus. Someone has shot him,
Someone really good with a bow, a Trojan
Or Lycian, to his glory and our grief."

220

Machaon's heart was pounding as he made his way
Across the crowded sand and through the troops
Until he came to where Menelaus lay wounded,
All the army's best gathered around him
In a circle, into which he stepped like a god
And quickly drew the arrow from the clasped belt.
As it came out the barbs were broken backward.
Then he undid the metallic belt and, beneath it,
The band with the beaten bronze kilt-piece.
When he saw the wound the arrow had made
He sucked out the blood and smeared on

230

Soothing ointments Chiron had given his father.

While they were attending to Menelaus,
The Trojans came on under their shields,
As the Greeks strapped on their gear,
And reminded themselves of the joys of war.

Agamemnon swung into action.
You could not have detected in him then
Any tendency toward sloth or cowardice.
He left his bronze-filigreed chariot
With his squire, Eurymedon, who held
The snorting horses off to the side,
And charged him to have them ready
Should he become fatigued. Then he set out,
On foot, to tour the ranks of his army.
He had two set speeches. When he saw men
Eager to fight, he used encouraging words:

240

"Soldiers of Greece, keep up your fighting spirit!
Father Zeus will not aid Trojan perjury.
Those who violated their sacred oaths
Will have vultures feeding on their pudgy flesh,
And their wives and children will be our cargo
After we have taken their city's high rock."

250

But when he saw men shirking the rigors of war,
He scalded their ears with words like these:

"You pansy archers, you're a disgrace to Greece!
Standing here like a bunch of knock-kneed fawns
Worn out from running across a wide field,
Gaping stupidly without an ounce of strength left.
Are you waiting for the Trojans to come over here
Where your pretty boats are lined up on the shore
So you can see if Zeus will lend you a hand?"

260

Thus Agamemnon, ranging through the troops,
And in his tour he came to where the Cretans
Were arming themselves around their commander,
Idomeneus, a man with a razor-sharp mind
And the imposing presence of a wild boar,
As he stood in the front ranks, while Meriones
Was busy marshalling the lines in the rear.
The warlord Agamemnon liked what he saw
And had some cordial words for Idomeneus:

270

"Idomeneus, I hold you in the highest regard,
Both in war and in every other activity,
Certainly in the feast, when the Argive lords
Mix wine in the bowl at the council of elders.
Even if every flowing-haired Greek chieftain
Drinks a fixed measure, your cup stays full,
And you drink, as I do, to your heart's content.
To battle then, and live up to your old boasts!"

280

And Idomeneus, the Cretan commander:

"Son of Atreus, you can count on me

To live up to my original pledge.
 But rouse the other flowing-haired Greeks
 So we can get into battle. The Trojans
 Have broken their oath. They will suffer and die
 For violating their sacred word."

Agamemnon smiled and moved on,
 Coming next to the two captains
 Who shared the name Ajax
 As they were strapping on their helmets.
 Behind them a cloud of infantry loomed.

290

*A goatherd standing on a rocky lookout
 Sees a cloud moving in over the purple sea.
 As a westerly gale sweeps it closer to land
 It looks blacker than pitch. The sea ruffles
 Beneath it, the air suddenly turns cold,
 And the goatherd drives his flock to a cave.*

So the dark battalions behind the two Ajaxes,
 Squall lines of young men nurtured under the sky,
 Bristling with shields and spears.

300

Agamemnon
 Was glad to see them, and his words flew out:

"Ajax, both of you, Achaean commanders,
 I would be out of line if I issued you orders.
 You push your men to fight hard on your own.
 By Father Zeus, by Athena and Apollo,
 If all of my men had your kind of heart,

King Priam's city would soon bow her head,
Taken and ravaged under our hands."

310

He spoke and moved on to the next contingent.
There he found Nestor, the clear-toned orator,
Urging his Pylians on to battle
And arraying them around his captains:
Great Pelagon, Alastor, Chromius,
Haemon, and Bias, shepherd of his people.
Nestor positioned the chariots in front
And massed the best foot soldiers at the rear.
Within this double wall he stationed the riffraff,
So that willing or not they would be forced to fight.
Nestor briefed his charioteers first,
Reminding them to control their horses
And not drive recklessly into the mêlée:

320

"Now don't get overconfident, any of you,
Or be too eager to fight the Trojans alone,
In front of the rest. But no falling back either.
Either course will weaken the line.
When you make contact with an enemy chariot,
Stay in your own and thrust with your spear.
These are battle-proven, time-tested tactics
Used by our ancestors to capture walled towns."

330

The old man had years of experience in battle.
The warlord Agamemnon was glad to see him
And addressed him with winged words:

"Nestor, old sir! If only your knees
 Were as strong as your spirit, but old age
 Has worn you down. I'd rather have
 Someone else old, and you among the young."

And Nestor, the Gerenian horseman, answered:

340

"Son of Atreus, I wish so myself! To be
 As I was when I killed Ereuthalion!
 But the gods do not give us all things at once.
 I was young then, and now I am old.
 Even so, I will be with the charioteers
 And urge them on with counsel and words,
 As is an elder's privilege. Spearwork
 Is for the young men, who trust their strength."

And Agamemnon moved on, glad in his heart.
 He found Menestheus next, Peteus' son, standing
 With his Athenians, masters of the war cry,
 And farther up the line crafty Odysseus
 With his tough Cephallenians. These troops
 Had not yet heard a signal—since the armies
 On both sides were just now starting to move—
 And were waiting for other Greek battalions
 To advance and begin the attack on the Trojans.
 When the warlord Agamemnon saw them,
 He sent a few barbed words winging their way:

350

"Son of Peteus—a king nurtured by Zeus—
 And you, with all your famous dirty tricks,

360

Why are you lagging back here, waiting for others?
You two should be taking your stand up front
And throwing yourselves into the heat of battle.
Both of you are first in line when you hear
I am giving a feast for the council of elders.
You like to eat roast meat well enough then
And drink cups of honeyed wine all night,
But now you'd be glad to see ten Greek battalions
Carving up the enemy ahead of you with bronze."

Odysseus scowled darkly as he answered:

"What kind of talk is that, Agamemnon?
How can you say we are slack in battle
Whenever the Greeks engage the Trojans?
You will have a chance to see, if you really care,
How Telemachus' father mixes it up
With the horse-whipping Trojans.
What you're saying now is a lot of hot air."

Agamemnon could see he was angry,
And, with a smile, he took back his words:

"Son of Laertes in the line of Zeus,
Odysseus, the master tactician,
I don't mean to give you a hard time.
You and I understand each other.
Go now. We will make it up later.
If there have been any hard words here
May the gods blow them away on the winds."

Leaving them there he went on
And found Diomedes, son of Tydeus,
Standing by his horses and chariot,
With Sthenelus, Capaneus' son, at his side.
When the warlord Agamemnon saw them,
He sent a few barbed words winging their way:

390

"What's this, the son of the hero Tydeus
Squinting down the lanes of battle from the rear?
It wasn't like Tydeus to cower like this.
He fought the enemy out front with his friends,
As those who saw him in action say. I never
Saw him myself, but they say he was the best.
He came to Mycenae once, not as an enemy
But as a guest, when he and Polyneices
Were taking the field against Thebes' sacred walls.
They needed allies, and the Mycenaeans
Were ready to accede to their request,
But Zeus changed their minds with unlucky omens.
So they left and came in their journey
To the Asopus' deep reeds and grassy banks,
And the Achaeans sent Tydeus out again
On another mission, north to Thebes.
So he went, and found a crowd of Cadmeians
At a feast in mighty Eteocles' house.
Alone as he was, and a stranger there,
The horseman Tydeus was not afraid.
He challenged them all to athletic contests
And easily won every single event,

400

410

So much help did Athena give him.
The Cadmeians were angry, and when he left
They laid an ambush along his route back,
Fifty young men under two commanders,
Maeon, son of Haemon, a match for the gods,
And Autophonus' son, staunch Polyphontes.
But Tydeus brought them to an ugly end,
Killing all but one. Maeon alone
He allowed to return, persuaded by portents.
That's what Tydeus the Aetolian was like,
But he had a son who cannot fight so well,
Though he speaks better in council."

420

He spoke, and Diomedes said nothing at all,
A mark of respect for the royal reproach.
But Capaneus' son, Sthenelus, responded:

430

"Son of Atreus, don't lie when you know
How to speak the plain truth. We are proud
That we are better than our fathers. We took
Thebes with its seven gates, a lesser army
Against a stronger wall, trusting in the gods.
But our fathers perished by their own recklessness.
So don't put them on a level with us."

Diomedes frowned at this and said:

"Take it easy there, and listen to me.
I don't hold anything against Agamemnon
For getting the troops into gear. After all,

440

He has more at stake here, greater glory
 If the Greeks win and capture Ilium,
 And greater grief if the Greeks are defeated.
 Let's you and I just keep our minds on fighting."

And he jumped down from his chariot
 In full metal. The clang of bronze on his chest
 As he moved out would have unnerved anyone.

*A swollen wave pushed by the West Wind
 Moves closer and closer to a thundering beach.
 It crests in deep water and then breaks
 Onto the shore with a huge roar and curls over
 And around the jutting rocks in a spray of brine.*

450

So too wave after wave of Greek battalions
 Moving into combat.

The captains

Issued commands; the rest marched on
 In such an eerie silence you would have said
 That not a soldier in the army had a voice,
 But in fact the silence was terror
 Of their commanders, and only the mute glow
 From their detailed weaponry signalled their advance.
 Not so with the Trojan army.

460

*More ewes than anyone could ever count
 Are penned in the court of a man of means,
 Waiting, waiting to give their white milk
 And bleating incessantly when they hear the lambs.*

Thus the clamor from the immense Trojan muster,
Not one voice, one language,
But a cacophony of tongues from different lands.

470

Behind them, Ares, as behind the Greeks
The goddess Athena with sea-grey eyes,
And on both sides Terror and Panic
And Ares' murderous sister, Eris,
Small when her crest first appears
But so ravenous and relentless in her ways
That she soon thrusts her head into the sky
Even while she keeps her feet on the earth.
This horror now infused equal parts of strife
Into both armies as she patrolled their ranks,
Swelling the volume of human suffering.

480

When the two sides closed with each other
They slammed together shields and spears,
Rawhide ovals pressed close, bronze thoraxes
Grinding against each other amid the groans
And exultations of men being slain
And of those slaying, as the earth ran with blood.

*Swollen winter torrents flow together
Where two valleys meet. The heavy water
From both streams joins in a gorge,
And far off in the mountains
A shepherd hears a single, distant roar.*

490

Equally indistinguishable the shrieking
Of these warriors laboring in union.

Antilochus drew first blood, killing
Echepolus, one of Troy's best.
The quick thrust of Antilochus' spear
Glanced off the rim of his plumed helmet,
But the bronze point pegged his forehead
And bored through the bone. Darkness
Enveloped him as he fell like a wall. 500
As he went down, Elephenor,
The Abantes' captain, grabbed him
By the feet and tried to drag him
Quickly out of range to strip the armor.
This effort was short-lived. As Elephenor
Stooped to haul the corpse, Agenor saw him,
And where his shield left his left side exposed
Agenor thrust, crumpling him with his spear.
The life drained out of him, and over his body 510
The fighting intensified, Greeks and Trojans
Battering each other like leaping wolves.
One early victim was Anthemion's son,
Simoeisus, a blossoming lad
Whom Telamonian Ajax marked and hit.
His mother bore him on the Simois' banks
On her way down from the slopes of Ida
Where she had gone to see her family's flocks.
So his parents called him Simoeisus,
But he died before he could pay them back 520
For rearing him. As he advanced

In the Trojan front lines, the bronze point
Of Ajax's spear pierced his right nipple
And ripped through his shoulder. He fell
Down to the ground and lay in the dust.

*A poplar that has grown up in rich bottom soil,
With a smooth trunk branching out at top,
Catches the eye of a wainwright, who wants
To curve it into a pole for a fine chariot.
He cuts it with a few flashing strokes of his axe,
And now it lies drying by the river bank.*

530

When Ajax had dispatched him, Antiphus,
One of Priam's sons, gleaming in his corselet,
Threw his javelin at him through the crowd,
Missing Ajax but hitting a man named Leucas,
One of Odysseus' companions, in the groin,
As he was hauling the body off to one side.
The corpse fell from his hands and he slumped over it.
Odysseus took his death hard. He strode forward
Through the front ranks glowing in his bronze
And, sweeping the enemy lines with his eyes,
Cast his javelin. The Trojans fell back
As the javelin homed in on Democoön,
Priam's bastard son from his horse farm in Abydos.
With the weight of Odysseus' anger behind it
The spearpoint entered one temple and came out
Through the other. Darkness enveloped
Democoön's eyes. He fell with a thud,
And his armor clattered on his back.

540

The Trojan front lines, and Hector with them,
Gave ground. The Greeks cheered, dragged off
The bodies, and charged far ahead.

Apollo,

Looking down at all this from Pergamum,
Was indignant, and yelled to the Trojans:

"Get back into the fight! Greek skin
Is not stone or iron. It will not deflect bronze.
Nor is Achilles, son of Thetis, in combat,
But nurses his rage in the beachhead camp."

Thus the dread god spoke from the city.

But the Greeks

Were urged on by Zeus' daughter
Wherever she saw them faltering.

Diores, though, was skewered by Fate.
Peirus, the Thracian leader, had caught him
Just above the ankle with a jagged stone
That crushed both tendons and bones.
He fell backward into the dust, hands stretched
Toward his friends, gasping out his life.
Peirus ran up and finished him off
With a slicing spear thrust near his navel.
His guts spilled out, and everything went black.
As Peirus jumped back, Thoas the Aetolian
Hit him in the chest above the nipple.
The bronze caught in his lung. Thoas closed,
Pulled the spear out, drew his sword

And slashed his belly open. This finished him,
But Thoas did not get to strip off Peirus' armor
Because his men, top-knotted Thracians
With long spears in hand, drove him off,
Big as he was, and sent him reeling.

580

And so the two lay side by side in the dust,
The Thracian leader stretched out by the Epeian,
And around them many others were killed.

No one could trust his immunity any longer,
Not even those who had danced their way through
Unscathed until now, led by the hand by Pallas Athena
Through the hail of whetted bronze instruments.
This was a day many Greeks and Trojans
Paired off with each other to lie in the dust.

590

Book 5

Pallas Athena now gave to Diomedes,
 Tydeus' son, the strength and courage
 That would make him shine
 Among the Greeks and win him glory.
 Starlight flowed from his helmet and shield,
 As if Sirius had just risen from the sea
 Before dawn in autumn, and that brightest of stars
 Was blazing from his torso and face
 Instead of from the sky.

Athena aimed him

To where the battle was thickest. 10

There was a Trojan named Dares,
 A rich man without a blemish on him
 And a priest of Hephaestus. He had two sons,
 Phegeus and Idaeus, trained warriors.
 These two now separated themselves
 From the crowd and went for Diomedes,
 They in their chariot, he on foot.
 When they closed, Phegeus threw.
 His spear sailed high, passing well over
 The left shoulder of Diomedes, 20
 Who kept on coming, launching a shot
 That hit Phegeus' chest between his nipples
 And knocked him from his rig. Idaeus

Jumped for it, abandoning his chariot
And his slain brother, whose prostrate corpse
He did not have the courage to defend.
He himself would not have escaped black death
If Hephaestus had not got him out of there,
Wrapping him in night, so that the old man,
His priest, would not be utterly bereaved.
Diomedes did get the horses though,
And had his men drive them back to the ships.
When the Trojans saw Dares' two sons,
One in flight, the other dead by his chariot,
Their hearts shrivelled. Athena's cold grey eyes
Bored in on Ares. She took his hand and said:

30

"Ares, you bloodthirsty marauder,
Why don't we let the Greeks and Trojans fight,
And see to which side Father Zeus gives glory.
We'd both best withdraw, and avoid his anger."

40

And with that she led Ares away from the battle
And made him sit on the Scamander's sandy banks,
While the Greeks pushed the Trojans back. Each leader
Took out his man. First, the warlord Agamemnon
Knocked Odius, the Halizones' commander,
Out of his chariot as he led the retreat,
Planting a spear between his shoulder blades
And driving it out through his chest. He fell
With a thud, and his armor clanged on his body.

50

Idomeneus killed Phaestus, the Maeonian

Who had come from Tarne's black soil,
Threading his spear through his right shoulder
As he tried to mount his chariot but instead
Fell back from it into the loathsome dark.
Idomeneus' squires stripped off his armor.

Menelaus killed Scamandrius.
This man had been taught to hunt
By Artemis herself, and could shoot
Any animal the mountain forest nourished. 60
But neither the goddess nor all his old skill
In archery could help him now. Menelaus
Planted a spear between his shoulder blades
And drove it out through his chest. He fell
With a thud, and his armor clanged on his body.

Meriones killed Phereclus, whose father
Was Tecton and grandfather Harmon
And who was himself a skilled craftsman,
For Pallas Athena loved him prodigiously.
He could build all sorts of intricate things, 70
And had built for Paris the doomed hulls
That first spelled evil for Troy, and for himself,
Since he had no inkling of the gods' oracles.
Meriones ran him down from behind
And hit him in the right buttock. The spearpoint
Slid beneath the bone clear through the bladder.
He fell to his knees, and groaned as death took him.

Meges took out Pedaeus, Antenor's son.

Though he was a bastard, Theano raised him
As one of her own, to please her husband.

80

Now Meges got close enough to him
To send his spear through the tendon
At the back of his neck and on into his mouth,
Cutting away the tongue at its root. He fell
Into the dust, his teeth clenched on cold bronze.

Eurypylus got Hypsenor, son of Dolopion
And honored priest of the River Scamander.

Euaemon's glorious son Eurypylus
Caught up with him as he sprinted away

And, without breaking stride, slashed
At the man's shoulder with his sword

90

And lopped off his arm, which fell
In a bloody mass to the ground. Death
Covered his eyes with a purple haze.

This was their labor in the crush of battle.
As for Diomedes, you could not tell
Which side he belonged to, Greek or Trojan,
As he boiled across the plain.

A winter torrent

*Will sweep away the thickset riprap
Meant to contain it, and flood over also
The vineyard walls, when the rain of Zeus
Makes its swollen waters suddenly rise
And obliterate many fine human works.*

100

So too before Tydeus' son were driven
Thick Trojan battalions. Many as they were,
They could not withstand this single human tide.

When Pandarus saw him storming across the plain
And driving entire battalions before him,
He bent his curved bow and, taking aim at Diomedes,
Hit him on the fly in his right shoulder,
The arrow piercing the corselet plate
And spattering it with blood as it punched through.
And Pandarus whooped:

110

"Got him! Take heart, Trojan horsemen,
The best of the Achaeans is hit! I don't think
He will hold up long under that stiff shaft
If Apollo in truth sent me forth from Lycia."

Half prayer, half boast. But the arrow didn't kill him.
Diomedes took cover next to his horses and car
And, still standing, said to Sthenelus, his driver:

120

"Son of Capaneus, get down from the car
And pull this arrow out of my shoulder."

Sthenelus vaulted down to the ground,
Steadied himself, and drew the arrow
Clean through his shoulder and out the other side.
Blood spurted through the linked tunic,
And Diomedes, good at the war shout, prayed:

"Hear me, daughter of Zeus! If ever
You stood by my father's side, a friend
In the heat of battle, stand by me now,
Goddess Athena. Deliver unto me
And place within the range of my spear
The man who hit me before I saw him
And boasted I would not see for long
The brilliant light of Helios the Sun."

130

Pallas Athena heard Diomedes' prayer.
She made his body lithe and light,
Then feathered these words into his ear:

"Go after the Trojans for all you're worth,
Diomedes. I have put into your heart
Your father's heroic temper, the fearless
Fighting spirit of Tydeus the horseman,
Tydeus the Shield. And I have removed
The mist that has clouded your eyes
So that now you can tell god from man.
Do not fight with any immortal
Who might come and challenge you,
Except Aphrodite, daughter of Zeus.
If she comes you may wound her with bronze."

140

150

With these words the grey-eyed one was gone,
And Diomedes returned to the front.
He had been eager before to fight the Trojans
But now his fury was tripled.

*A shepherd ivounds a lion as he leaps a pen's wall.
 But far from being weakened, the lion
 Gains in strength, and the unprotected flock
 Is little more than a pile of bloody fleece
 Before the angered lion leaps out again.*

So too Diomedes among the Trojans, 160
 Killing next Astynous and Hypeiron,
 One with a spearcast above his nipple,
 The other with a swordstroke to the collar-bone,
 Shearing off the entire shoulder
 From the neck and back. He let them lie
 And went after Abas and Polyidus,
 Sons of old Eurydamas, who read dreams,
 But read no dreams for them when they left home.
 Diomedes cut them down and moved on.
 There were two more brothers, Xanthus and Thoön, 170
 Sons of Phaenops, who loved them well.
 He was worn out with old age and its miseries
 And had no other son to be his heir.
 Diomedes killed them too, taking their lives
 And leaving for the father sorrow and grief.
 They would not live to be welcomed home,
 And others would divide their inheritance.

His next victims were two sons of Priam,
 Echemmon and Chromius, in one chariot.
 Diomedes jumped on them 180

as a lion

*Leaps on a heifer grazing peacefully
In a woodland pasture, and breaks her neck.*

It was a brutal dismount the son of Tydeus
Forced them to make. He then stripped their armor,
And his men drove their horses back to the ships.

Aeneas saw him wrecking the Trojan ranks
And made his way through the busy spears
Searching for Pandarus. When he found him,
Looking like the match for a god that he was,
He went up to him and had this to say:

190

"Pandarus, where are your arrows and bow,
And your fame? No one here or in all Lycia
Can compete with you or claim to be better.
Say a prayer to Zeus and take a shot at this man—
Whoever he is—who is beating the daylights
Out of the Trojans, some of our best too.
It could be he's a god, angry with the Trojans
Over some sacrifice. That would be tough."

Lycaon's splendid son came back with this:

200

"Aeneas, he looks like Diomedes to me,
His shield, his grooved helmet, his horses.
I'm not at all sure that he's not a god,
But if he is who I think he is, Tydeus' son,

He's not fighting like this without some god
Standing at his side and cloaked in mist.
I swear one of the immortals turned aside
An arrow I already shot at him
Just as it struck. It wound up hitting him
In the right shoulder, clean through his breastplate. 210
I thought I had sent him down to Hades,
But I didn't get him. *Some* god is sure angry.
Anyway, I don't have a chariot now,
Or horses to pull it—not that there aren't eleven
Beautiful new chariots back in Lycaon's palace,
Covered with cloths, and a yoke of horses
Beside each one eating white barley and spelt.
Yes, and Lycaon, the old spearman,
Told me as I left to go to war mounted,
Advice I should have taken but didn't, 220
Sparing the horses because I was afraid
That in an army this big they would lack feed,
And they had been used to eating all they wanted.
So I left them, and came to Ilion on foot,
Trusting my bow, for all the good it has done.
I've taken shots at two of their best,
Diomedes and Menelaus, and hit them both,
Drew blood for sure, and only made them madder.
Curse the day I took my bow from its peg
And led my Trojan troops to lovely Ilion 230
As a favor to Hector. If I ever return
And see my land, my wife, and my high-roofed home,
May my throat be cut by a thief in the night
If I fail to smash my bow in pieces

And throw it in the fire. It's been a piece of junk."

And Aeneas, the Trojan commander, replied:

"Don't talk like that. Things won't get any better
Until you and I take a chariot
And face him in combat. Come on, get in mine,
And you'll see what the horses of Tros can do.
They know how to eat up the plain, and how to
Cut and turn, in pursuit or flight,
And they will get us back to the city in safety
If Zeus gives Diomedes the glory again.
Get in and take the lash and the reins,
And I'll dismount to fight; or you
Take him on, and leave the horses to me."

240

Lycaon's splendid son came back with this:

"Keep the reins, Aeneas, and drive your own horses.
They will pull better for a driver they know
In case we have to run from the son of Tydeus.
I wouldn't want them to be spooked, and shy
From pulling us out because they miss your voice—
Not with Diomedes all over us. He'd kill us both
And make off with your horses. No, you drive them,
And I'll meet his charge with my spear."

250

So they mounted the chariot and drove off
Full speed ahead toward the son of Tydeus.

Sthenelus saw them coming and said to Diomedes:

"Here comes a duo now with muscle to spare
And hot to fight you. One is good with a bow,
Pandarus, who boasts he is Lycaon's son.
The other is Aeneas, who says his mother
Is Aphrodite, and Anchises his father.
Let's retreat in the chariot. Calm down
And get out of action or you'll get yourself killed."

260

Diomedes looked him up and down and said:

"Don't talk to me about retreating, Sthenelus.
It's not in me to dodge a fight. Besides,
I still have my strength. I'm not even going
To get in the chariot, much less retreat in it.
I'll take them on just like this. Pallas Athena
Won't *let* me back down. As for these two,
Their horses won't be carrying them both away,
Even if one of them manages to escape.
And one thing more. Athena has many plans,
But if she does give me the glory here
And I kill them both, hold our horses
On this spot, tying the reins to the chariot rail,
And rush Aeneas' horses. Drive them back
Away from the Trojans and to the Greek lines.
These horses come from the stock that Zeus
Gave to Tros as payment for his son Ganymede.
The finest horses under the sun. Anchises
Stole some of the breed from Laomedon

270

280

His javelin followed his voice, and Athena
Guided it to where the nose joins the eye-socket.
The bronze crunched through the pearly teeth
And sheared the tongue at its root, exiting
At the base of the chin.

Pandarus fell from the car,
His armor scattering the hard light
As it clattered on his fallen body.
His horses shied—

Quick movement of hooves—
As his soul seeped out into the sand.

Aeneas vaulted down with his shield and spear,
Afraid that the Greeks might drag the body away.
He straddled it like a lion sure of its strength,
Spear straight out, crouched behind his shield's disk,
Only too glad to kill whoever stood up to him,
His mouth open in a battle-howl.

But Tydeus' son
Levered up in one hand a slab of stone
Much too large for two men to lift—
As men are now—lifted it and smashed it
Into Aeneas' hip, where the thighbone turns
In the socket that medics call the cup.
The rough stone shattered this joint and severed
Both tendons, ripping open the skin. The hero
Sank to his knees, clenching the dirt with one hand,
While midnight settled upon both his eyes.

That would have been the end of Aeneas,
But his mother Aphrodite, Zeus' daughter
(Who bore Aeneas to Anchises the oxherd),
Had all this in sharp focus. Her milk-white arms
Circled around him and she enfolded him
In her radiant robe to prevent the Greeks
From killing him with a spear to the chest.

340

As she was carrying him out of the battle,
Sthenelus remembered the instructions
Diomedes had given him. He held his own horses
Away from the boiling dust, tying the reins
To the chariot rail, and, on foot, stampeded
Aeneas' beautiful horses toward the Greek lines,
Giving them to Deipylus, the boyhood friend
He valued most and whose mind was like his,
To drive back to the ships. Then he mounted
His own chariot, took the glossy reins in hand,
And drove his heavy-hooved horses off to find
Tydeus' son, who was himself in armed pursuit
Of Aphrodite. Diomedes knew

350

This was a weakling goddess, not one of those
Who control human warfare—no Athena,
No Enyo here, who demolishes cities—
And when he caught up to her in the mêlée
He pounced at her with his spear and, thrusting,
Nicked her on her delicate wrist, the blade
Piercing her skin through the ambrosial robe
That the Graces themselves had made for her.
The cut was just above the palm, and the goddess'

360

Immortal blood oozed out, or rather
The ichor that flows in the blessed gods' veins,
Who, eating no bread and drinking no wine,
Are bloodless and therefore deathless as well.
The goddess shrieked and let her son fall,
And Phoebus Apollo gathered him up
In an indigo cloud to keep the Greeks
From killing him with a spear to the chest.

370

And Diomedes, yelling above the battle noise:

"Get out of the war, daughter of Zeus!
Don't you have enough to do distracting
Weak women? Keep meddling in war and
You'll learn to shiver when it's even mentioned."

The goddess, in extreme distress now,
Went off in a daze. Wind-footed Iris
Took her and led her through the throng,
Throbbing with pain, her pale skin bruised.
After a while she found Ares, sitting
On the left of the battle, his spear propped
Against a bank of mist, his horses standing by
Aphrodite fell to her knees and begged
Her brother for his gold-frontleted horses:

380

"Brother dear, lend me your horses
And help me get to Olympus. I'm hurt,
Wounded by a mortal, Diomedes,
Who would fight even Father Zeus."

390

Ares gave her the gold-frontleted horses.
She mounted the chariot gingerly,
And Iris stepped in and took the reins.
She cracked the whip and the team flew off
And came in no time to steep Olympus,
The gods' homestead.

Iris, a blur of windy light,
Halted the team, unyoked them,
And cast before them their ambrosial fodder.

400

Aphrodite went in to her mother,
Dione, and fell in her lap.
And Dione,
Cradling her daughter in her arms,
And stroking her with her hand, said:

"Oh my poor baby, who did this to you?
To treat you like this! What did you do?"

And Aphrodite, the goddess who loved to smile:

"Tydeus' son wounded me, that bully
Diomedes, because I was carrying my son
Out of range, Aeneas, who is my dearest.
The war has gone far beyond Trojans and Greeks.
The Greeks are fighting the immortal gods."

410

Dione answered in her lustrous voice:

"You must bear it, my child. I know it hurts.
Many of us Olympians have suffered harm
From men, giving tit for tat to each other.
Ares did, when Otus and Ephialtes,
Those bullies, sons of Aloeus, kept him tied him up
In a bronze jar for thirteen months. 420
They would have destroyed the God of War
If their stepmother, beautiful Eëriboea,
Hadn't told Hermes. He got Ares out,
But the painful bonds had about done him in.
Hera suffered too, when Heracles shot her
Right in the breast with a triple-pronged arrow,
And there was no helping the pain she had then.
Hades too, formidable as he is, had to endure
An arrow the same man shot him with
Among the dead in Pylos, making him suffer. 430
He went to the house of Zeus on Olympus
In agony, pierced with pain. The arrow
Had driven right through his shoulder.
Paieon rubbed on an anodyne
And healed him, Hades being no mortal.
Heracles was simply outrageous and reckless
To provoke the Olympian gods with arrows.
And now Athena has set this man upon you,
This fool Diomedes, who doesn't understand
That a man who fights with gods doesn't last long, 440
His children don't sit on his lap calling him 'Papa'
To welcome him home from the horrors of war.
So as strong as he is, he had better watch out
Or someone braver than you might fight him,

And Aegialeia, Adrastus' heroic daughter,
The wife of Diomedes, tamer of horses,
Will wake her family from sleep with lamenting
Her wedded husband, the best of the Achaeans."

And with both her hands she wiped off the ichor.
The wrist was healed, and the pain subsided.

450

Athena and Hera were looking on
And making snide remarks to provoke Zeus.
The grey-eyed goddess opened with this:

"You won't get angry if I say something,
Will you, Father Zeus? The truth is this:
Aphrodite has been urging some Greek lady
To traipse after her beloved Trojans,
And while she was stroking this gowned beauty
She scratched her frail little hand on a golden brooch."

The Father of Gods and Men smiled
And calling Aphrodite said to her:

460

"Dear child, war isn't your specialty, you know.
You just take care of the pleasures of love
And leave the fighting to Ares and Athena."

While these gods were talking to each other,
Diomedes leapt upon Aeneas, even though
He knew Apollo's hands were there above him.

Great as Apollo was, Diomedes meant
To kill the Trojan and strip off his armor.
Three times he leapt in homicidal frenzy,
Three times Apollo flicked his lacquered shield,
But when he charged a fourth, last time,
He heard a voice that seemed to come
From everywhere at once, and knew it was
Apollo's voice, saying to him:

470

"Think it over, son of Tydeus, and get back.
Don't set your sights on the gods. Gods are
To humans what humans are to crawling bugs."

Even at this, Diomedes only backed up a little,
Just out of range of the wrathful god.

480

And Apollo took Aeneas from the swarm
Up to his temple on sacred Pergamum.
There Leto and arrowy Artemis healed him
In the great sanctuary, and made him glorious.
And silver-bowed Apollo made a phantom
To look like Aeneas, armor and all,
And over this wraith the Greeks and Trojans
Battered each other with their rawhide shields
Until the edges were tattered into leather fringe.
Apollo then called out to the God of War:

490

"Ares, you bloodthirsty marauder,
Would you be so kind as to take this Diomedes
Out of action, before he goes up against Zeus?"

He's already wounded Cypris on the wrist,
And came after me like a raging demon."

Apollo then sat down on Pergamum's height,
While Ares went to spur on the Trojans,
Disguised as Acamas, the Thracian commander.
He called out to the well-born sons of Priam:

"You sons of Priam, a king bred by Zeus,
How long will you allow your men to be killed
By the Achaean forces? Perhaps until
They are fighting right in front of our gates?
Aeneas is down, son of noble Anchises,
A man whom we honored as much as Hector.
Let's save our comrade from the boiling dust."

500

This caught their attention. And Sarpedon
Added his voice, scolding Hector sternly:

"Where has your will to fight gone, Hector?
You used to say you could hold the city
Without any allies, just yourself
Backed by your brothers and sisters' husbands.
I don't see a single one of them now
Who's not cringing like a dog before a lion.
The only ones fighting are us, the allies.
I'm only an ally myself, from a long way off.
It's a long way to Lycia, by eddying Xanthus,
Where I left my dear wife and baby boy,
And all my property and envied wealth.

510

And yet I press my Lycians into battle
 And take on my man, with nothing of mine here
 For the Achaeans to take or drive away.
 But you can't even be troubled to urge your men
 To take a stand and defend their own wives.
 Watch out you're not caught like flies in a web,
 An easy prey for your enemies,
 Who will waste your populous city.
 You should be worrying about this day and night
 And begging the captains of your gallant allies
 To hold their ground—or take the heat yourself."

520

530

Sarpedon's speech cut Hector to the quick.
 He leapt to the ground with all his gear
 And, brandishing a pair of sharp spears,
 Roamed the ranks, urging everyone to fight.
 The noise intensified, and with a roar
 The Trojans whirled to face the Achaeans,
 Who remained in tight formation and did not flinch.

*Wind carries chaff over the holy threshing floors
 When men are winnowing, and Demeter herself,
 Blonde in the blowing wind, separates
 The grain from the chaff, and the piles of chaff
 That accumulate grow whiter and whiter.*

540

So too the Greeks under the cloud of white dust
 Their horses' hooves kicked up from the plain
 As the chariots wheeled into action again
 And men locked up in hand-to-hand combat.

The bronze sky paled. Ares, who was everywhere
At once now, covered the battle with night
To help the Trojans, honoring the request
Of sungold Apollo, who had asked him to rouse
The Trojans' spirit when he saw that Athena,
Who supported the Greeks, had gone off.
Apollo chose this moment to send forth Aeneas
From his rich sanctuary, infused with strength.
Aeneas took his place in the ranks. The men
Were glad to see him come back to join them,
Alive and well and in good fighting form.
But they did not have time to question him,
Busy as they were with what Apollo was doing
With the help of Ares and ravenous Strife.

550

560

The Greeks were rallied by the two Ajaxes
Along with Odysseus and Diomedes—
Not that they quailed before the Trojan attack.

*In still weather, when the winds that usually
Scatter the shadowy clouds are asleep,
Huge banks of mist lie absolutely steady
Where Zeus has set them on the mountain tops.*

The Greeks met the Trojans without a tremor.

Agamemnon ranged among them, commanding:

"Be men, my friends. Fight with valor
And with a sense of shame before your comrades.
You're less likely to be killed with a sense of shame.
Running away never won glory or a fight."

570

And with a quick throw of his spear he hit
One of Aeneas' men, Deicoön,
Son of Pergasus, whom the Trojans respected
As much as Priam's sons, quick as he was
To fight in the front lines. Agamemnon's spear
Hit his shield, which did not stop the bronze point
From penetrating all the way through
And into his belly, below his belt. He fell
With a thud, and his armor clanged.

580

Then Aeneas killed two of Greece's best,
Crethon and Orsilochus, the sons of Diocles,
A man of substance who lived in Pherae
And was descended from the river Alpheus,
Whose broad stream flows through the Pylians' land,
And who begot Ortilochus to rule over many.
This Ortilochus was the father of Diocles,
Who had twin sons, Crethon and Orsilochus,
Highly trained warriors. They had just reached
Manhood when they went with the Argives
On the black ships to Ilion, famed for its horses,
To win recompense for the sons of Atreus,
But death enfolded them both in that land.

590

Two cubs a mother lion has reared in the mountains,

*Where the woods are thick, will begin snatching
Cattle and sheep from human settlements
And continue ravaging the flocks for years
Until humans finally hunt them down.*

600

So these two brothers, beaten to the ground
By Aeneas.

They fell like tall fir trees,
And as they fell Menelaus pitied them.
He strode through the foremost fighters
Gleaming in his bronze and shaking two spears,
Spurred on by Ares, whose intention was
That Menelaus go down at Aeneas' hands.
But Antilochus, Nestor's son, saw him
And strode through the front lines, afraid
That if anything happened to Menelaus
The Greeks would be robbed of all their hard work.
The two had just squared off, their spears
Pointed directly at each other, when Antilochus
Took his place right next to Menelaus.
Aeneas, quick as he was in battle,
Did not stay around when he saw the two of them
Standing their ground together. They pulled
The dead brothers back to the Achaean lines
And put them in their comrades' arms,
Then returned to fight in the foremost ranks.

610

620

Working as a team, they killed Pylaemenes,
The great Paphlagonian commander,
And Mydon his charioteer. Menelaus

Put his spear through Pylaemenes' collarbone
As he stood stock-still. His squire Mydon
Was trying to turn the horses when Antilochus
Hit him with a stone on the elbow. The reins,
White with ivory, fell from his hands to the ground,
And Antilochus jumped him, driving his sword
Through his temple. He gasped and pitched forward,
Landing headfirst in the soft, deep sand,
Where he stuck up to his shoulders, feet upright,
And held that position for some time, until
His horses knocked him over with their hooves.
Antilochus drove them back toward the camp.

630

Hector saw all this from across the ranks
And charged them with a shout. Trojans
Poured after him in force, led by Ares
And Enyo in her power, who held in her hands
The deafening, shameless horror of War.
Ares cradled an enormous spear in his hands
And fell in with Hector, moving ahead of him
Or a pace or two behind. Diomedes
Stopped dead in his tracks when he saw him.

640

*A man crossing the great plains comes to a river
And is so startled when he sees the water
Churning to the sea that he takes a step backward.*

So Diomedes gave ground, and said to his men:

"Well, my friends, we always thought Hector

650

Was a good man with a spear, a real fighter.
It turns out a god is always at his side,
Ares right now, disguised as a mortal.
Keep your face toward the enemy and back up
Steadily. Don't be too eager to fight with gods."

Thus Diomedes, and the Trojans closed in.
Hector killed two men, good fighters,
Menesthes and Anchialus, riding together.
As they fell, big Ajax pitied them
And came to stand close by. He threw
His shining spear and hit Amphius,
Son of Selagus, a man from Paesus
Who had rich farms there, but Fate led him
To come to the aid of Priam and his sons.
Ajax's tree of a spear hit him in the belly,
Going right through the belt. He fell heavily,
And Ajax rushed up to strip his armor
But was met with a hail of Trojan missiles
Gleaming in the air, many of which
He collected on his shield. Still, big Ajax
Planted his heel upon the corpse and pulled out
His bronze spear. He was not able, though,
To get the armor unstrapped, pressed as he was
By the spears, and fearing a pincer movement
By the numerous and now confident Trojans.
Big as Ajax was, they pushed him back,
And he staggered as he gave ground.

660

670

While these struggles were going on,

Fate aroused Tlepolemus,
A son of Heracles, tall and handsome,
To go up against godlike Sarpedon.
When these two were in range of each other,
Son and grandson of Zeus in the clouds,
It was Tlepolemus who was first to speak:

680

"Well, well, Sarpedon the Lycian.
What are you doing skulking around here?
You wouldn't know what to do in a fight.
They lie when they say you're a son of Zeus.
You don't even come close to the heroes
Who were born from Zeus in the old days—
Like my father, lion-hearted Heracles,
Who came here once for Laomedon's mares
With only six ships and a few men
But sacked Troy and emptied her streets.
You have a coward's heart, and your race is dying.
Your coming from Lycia is not going to help
The men of Troy. I don't care how strong you are,
You're going through Hades' gates, beaten by me."

690

And Sarpedon, the Lycian commander:

"Tlepolemus, your father sacked Ilion
Because Laomedon was foolish enough
To deride the man who had helped him
And withhold the horses he had come so far to get.
As for you, I'm going to work out
A bloody death for you. You're going to give

700

Glory to me, and your soul to Hades."

Sarpedon spoke, and Tlepolemus lifted
His ash-wood spear. They both cast at once,
And the spears crossed in flight. Sarpedon's
Hit Tlepolemus full in the neck. The point
Passed completely, and painfully, through,
And ebony night enfolded his eyes.
Tlepolemus' spear hit Sarpedon's left thigh.
The point slashed through with a vengeance
And grazed the bone, but his father saved him, for now.

710

Sarpedon's men carried him out of battle,
The long spear trailing heavily. In their haste,
No one noticed it or thought to draw it out,
Which would have allowed him to use his legs.
It was difficult work tending him at all.

720

On the other side, the Greeks bore Tlepolemus
Away from the fighting.

Odysseus

Saw all this and longed for action.
He debated inwardly whether he should
Pursue the son of thundering Zeus
Or take instead many Lycian lives.
It was not Odysseus' fate to kill Sarpedon,
So Athena focussed his mind on the Lycians.
He killed Coeranus, Alastor, and Chromius,
Alcandrus, Halius, Noemon, and Prytanis,
And he would have killed more, but Hector

730

Was quick to see what was going on,
And strode through the foremost fighters,
Helmet shining above his flaming bronze,
Bringing terror to the Greeks and joy
To Sarpedon, who groaned as he spoke:

"Son of Priam, don't let me lie here
As prey for the Greeks. Help me.
If I must die, let me die in your city,
Since I will never return to my own land
To make glad my wife and infant son."

740

Hector did not waste any time answering
But sprinted past, helmet glancing in light,
In his passion to drive the Argives back
And kill as many of them as he could.

And godlike Sarpedon was made to sit
Beneath the beautiful oak sacred to Zeus,
And Pelagon, his comrade, pulled the spear
Out of his thigh. His spirit left him,
And a mist poured down over his eyes.
Then the North Wind blew upon him, and he
Breathed again, though he had gasped out his soul.

750

Under pressure from Ares and Hector,
The Greeks neither turned and made for their ships,
Nor held their own in the fight, but eased themselves
Backward, now that they knew the Trojans had Ares.
The killing began with certain Greeks

Distinguished as Hector's and Ares' victims:
Godlike Teuthras; Orestes, a horsedriver;
Oenomaus and Trechus, Aetolian spearmen;
Helenus, son of Oenops; and Oresbius,
A prosperous Boeotian with a gilded corselet.

The havoc continued, and when Hera noticed
That the Greeks were being crushed in battle,
Her words flew fast to Pallas Athena:

"This is a disaster, daughter of Zeus.
Our word to Menelaus that he would go home
With Troy demolished will come to nothing
If we allow Ares to rage on like this.
Come. It's time we remembered how to fight."

Athena, the grey-eyed goddess, agreed.
And Hera, queen of heaven, daughter of Cronus,
Got busy harnessing the horses, gold-frontleted,
While Hebe slid the bronze, eight-spoked wheels
Onto the car's iron axle, wheels with pure gold rims
Fitted with bronze tires, a stunning sight,
And the hubs spinning on both sides were silver.
The car's body was made of gold and silver straps
Stretched tight, and had a double railing.
From it projected a silver pole, and at its end
Hebe bound the golden yoke, and on that she hung
The golden harness. Hera led the quick-hooved horses
Beneath the yoke, her heart pounding for war.

Athena, meanwhile, Zeus' favorite daughter,
Let her supple robe slip down to her father's floor,
This embroidered garment her own handiwork.
She put on one of cloudy Zeus' tunics
And strapped on her armor. Around her shoulders
She flung the tasselled aegis, bordered with Rout
And inset with the blood-chilling horrors of War,
In the center of which was a Gorgon's head,
The dread insignia of Zeus Aegis-Holder.
On her head she put a gold helmet, knobbed and horned,
And embossed with a hundred cities' soldiery.
She stepped into the blazing chariot cradling a spear
Long and thick enough for heaven's daughter
To level battalions of heroes in her wrath.

790

Hera quickly flicked the horses with the lash,
And the automatic gates of heaven
Groaned open, as willed by the Hours,
Who control access to Olympus and heaven,
Opening and shutting the dense cloudbanks.
Through this gate they drove the patient horses
And found Zeus sitting apart from the other gods
On the highest peak of ridged Olympus.
White-armed Hera reined in the horses there
And put her questions to the Most High:

800

"Father Zeus, doesn't Ares infuriate you
With his reckless destruction of so many Greeks,
Much to my sorrow, while Cypris and Apollo,

810

Smug at their success, are lounging around
With this mindless bully who knows no law?
Father Zeus, will you be angry with me
If I knock Ares silly and out of the battle?"

And Zeus, clouds scudding around him:

"Better to put Athena onto him;
She's always been the best at giving him grief."

White-armed Hera did not disobey.
She lashed the horses and they flew with a will
Between the starry heavens and earth. 820
One bound of the gods' horses
Takes them as far into the misty distance
As a lookout can see over the wine-blue Aegean.
When they came to Troy and to the confluence
Of the Scamander and Simois rivers,
The white-armed goddess reined in the horses,
Unyoked them, and shed a thick mist around them.
Simois made ambrosia sprout up for them.

The two goddesses, though passionate to come 830
To the aid of the Greeks, stepped forward
As quietly as doves. They were soon in the thick of things
Where the army's elite, drawn to Diomedes' strength,
Clustered around him like huge animals, lions
Or razorback hogs that can rip a man apart.
Hera took her stance there and transformed herself
To look like Stentor, whose bronze voice sounds as loud

As fifty voices combined. And she yelled:

"For shame, Greeks! You're all show and no fight.
 When godlike Achilles used to enter battle
 The Trojans wouldn't so much as leave their gates
 Out of fear for what his spear could do.
 Now they have us backed up against our ships."

840

This got their fighting spirit up. Meanwhile,
 Grey-eyed Athena flashed to Diomedes' side.
 She found that prince beside his horses and car,
 Cooling the wound from Pandarus' arrow.
 The sweat where his broad shield strap rubbed
 Was bothering him, and his arm was sore.
 He was lifting the strap and wiping off
 The dark, clotted blood when the goddess,
 Casually grasping the horses' yoke, said to him:

850

"You're not very much like your father, you know.
 Tydeus had a small build, but he was a fighter—
 Even when I wouldn't allow him to fight
 Or show his stuff. Like the time he came to Thebes
 As a solo envoy to all those Cadmeians.
 I ordered him to keep his peace at the banquet,
 But he had a lot of heart, as he always had,
 And challenged the Cadmeian youths and beat them all,
 Effortlessly. Of course I was there beside him.
 But you, I stand by you, I protect you,
 I tell you not to worry, to fight the Trojans,
 And here you are, either bone-tired

860

Or paralyzed with fear. No, you're no son
Of Tydeus or grandson of sharp old Oeneus."

And Diomedes, as tough as they come, answered:

"I know it's you, goddess, daughter of Zeus,
And so I will answer you frankly. No, I'm not
Paralyzed by fear, and I'm not slacking off.
But I am following the orders you gave me
When you told me not to fight face to face
With any of the gods except Aphrodite.
If she came, you said I could wound her with bronze.
That's why I've withdrawn and given orders
For all of the troops to fall back to this spot.
I know that Ares is controlling the battle."

870

And Athena, whose eyes were as grey as owls:

"Diomedes, son of Tydeus, I do love you.
You don't have to fear Ares or any other
Of the immortals. Look who is here beside you.
Drive your horses directly at Ares
And when you're in range, strike.
Don't be in awe of Ares. He's nothing but
A shifty lout. He promised Hera and me
He would fight against Troy and help the Greeks.
Now he's turned Trojan and abandoned us."

880

With that, she pulled Sthenelus back and pushed him
Off the chariot. Sthenelus went flying,

And Athena got in next to Diomedes,
Who seemed to glow beside the eager goddess,
And the solid-oak axle groaned under the load
Of an awesome deity and a hero at his best.
Pallas Athena handled the reins and whip
And drove the horses directly at Ares,
Who at that moment was stripping the armor
From a warrior named Periphas, a huge man,
Aetolia's finest and his father's glory.
Ares was busy removing the dead man's armor
And getting smeared with blood. Athena
Put on Hades' helmet so Ares couldn't see her.
But Ares did see Diomedes, and when he did,
He dropped Periphas to lie in his own gore
And headed straight for the hero.
As soon as they were in range of each other
Ares leaned out over his horses' backs
And thrust, frantic for a kill. Athena's hand
Deflected the spear in mid-air and sent it
Sailing harmlessly over Diomedes' chariot,
And when Diomedes thrust next,
She drove his spear home to the pit
Of Ares' belly, where the kilt-piece covered it.
The spearhead sliced right through to the flesh,
And when Diomedes pulled it out,
Ares yelled, so loud you would have thought
Ten thousand warriors had shouted at once,
And the sound reverberated in the guts of Greeks and Trojans
As if Diomedes had struck not a god in armor
But a bronze gong nine miles high.

890

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*After a period of heat, when the low clouds
Are massed like wool, you will sometimes see
A darker clot of air whirling off
On its way to becoming a tornado—*

920

That is how Ares appeared to Diomedes,
Moving off through the clouds and up the big sky.

He quickly scaled the heights of Olympus,
Sat down sulking beside Cronion Zeus,
Showed him the immortal blood oozing
From his wound, and whined these winged words:

"Father Zeus, doesn't it infuriate you
To see this violence? We gods
Get the worst of it from each other
Whenever we try to help out men.
Why did you have to give birth to that madwoman,
Your marauding daughter who is always
Breaking the rules? All the rest of us gods,
Every one on Olympus, listen to you.
But she can say or do whatever she wants.
You even urge her on, your grey-eyed girl.
Just now she's been egging on Diomedes
To rampage against the immortal gods.
He wounded Cypris first, got her on the wrist,
Then charged at me like an avenging spirit.
My fast footwork saved me, or I would be
Lying in a heap of gruesome corpses,

930

940

Or barely alive from taking hits from his spear."

And Zeus, from under thunderhead brows:

"Shifty lout. Don't sit here by me and whine.

You're the most loathsome god on Olympus.

You actually like fighting and war.

950

You take after your hardheaded mother,

Hera. I can barely control her either.

One way or another, she got you into this.

Be that as it may, I cannot tolerate your being in pain.

Your mother did, after all, bear you to me.

But if you were born to any other god,

You'd be long buried in hell below the Titans."

And he called Paieon to doctor his wound.

Paieon rubbed on an anodyne to kill the pain.

And then,

960

As quickly as white milk

Thickened with fig juice

Curdles when stirred,

Paieon healed impetuous Ares.

And Hebe bathed him and dressed him handsomely,

And he sat beside Zeus exulting in glory.

Then back to the palace of great Zeus

Came Argive Hera and Athena the Protector,

Having stopped brutal Ares from butchering men.

BOOK 6

The battle was left to rage on the level expanse
Between Troy's two rivers. Bronze spearheads
Drove past each other as the Greek and Trojan armies
Spread like a hemorrhage across the plain.

Telamonian Ajax, the Achaean wall,
Was the first Greek to break the Trojan line
And give his comrades some daylight.
He killed Thrace's best, Acamas,
Son of Eussorus, smashing through the horn
Of his plumed helmet with his spear
And driving through until the bronze tip
Pierced the forehead's bone. Acamas' eyes went dark.

10

Diomedes followed up by killing Axylus,
Teuthras' son, a most hospitable man.
His comfortable home was on the road to Arisbe,
And he entertained all travellers, but not one
Came by to meet the enemy before him
And save him from death. Diomedes killed
Not only Axylus but Calesius, his driver,
Two men who would now be covered by earth.

20

Then Euryalus killed Opheltius and Dresus
And went on after Aesepus and Pegasus,

Twins whom the naiad Abarbarea
Bore to Bucolion, Laomedon's eldest
Though bastard son. He was with his sheep
When he made love to the nymph. She conceived,
And bore him the twins whom Euryalus
Now undid. He left their bright bodies naked.

Then Polypoetes killed Astyalus;
Odysseus got Pidytes with his spear;
And Teucer took out Aretaon, a good man.
Nestor's son Antilochus killed Alerus;
The warlord Agamemnon killed Elatus,
Who lived in steep Pedasus on the Satnioeis;
Leitus killed Phylacus as he fled;
And Eurypylus unmanned Melanthius.

30

But Menelaus took Adrastus alive.
Adrastus' terrified horses became entangled
In a tamarisk as they galloped across the plain,
And, breaking the pole near the car's rim,
Bolted toward the city with the others.
Their master rolled from the car by the wheel
And fell face-first into the dust. Menelaus
Came up to him with his long-shadowed spear,
And Adrastus clasped his knees and prayed:

40

"Take me alive, son of Atreus, and accept
A worthy ransom from the treasure stored
In my father's palace, bronze, gold, wrought iron.
My father would lavish it all on you if he heard

I was still alive among the Achaean ships."

50

The speech had its intended effect.
Menelaus was about to hand him over
To be led back to the ships, but Agamemnon
Came running over to call him on it:

"Going soft, Menelaus? What does this man
Mean to you? Have the Trojans ever shown you
Any hospitality? Not one of them
Escapes sheer death at our hands, not even
The boy who is still in his mother's womb.
Every Trojan dies, unmourned and unmarked."

60

And so the hero changed his brother's mind
By reminding him of the ways of conduct and fate.
Menelaus shoved Adrastus aside,
And Agamemnon stabbed him in the flank.
He fell backward, and the son of Atreus
Braced his heel on his chest and pulled out the spear.

Then Nestor shouted and called to the Greeks:

"Soldiers of Greece, no lagging behind
To strip off armor from the enemy corpses
To see who comes back to the ships with the most.
Now we kill men! You will have plenty of time later
To despoil the Trojan dead on the plain."

70

Nestor's speech worked them up to a frenzy,

And the Trojans would have been beaten
Back to Ilion by superior force
Had not Helenus, Priam's son
And Troy's prophet, approached Aeneas and Hector:

"Aeneas and Hector, the Trojans and Lycians
Are counting on you. You two are the leaders
In every initiative in council and battle—
So make a stand here. Go through the ranks
And keep our men back from the gates,
Before they run through them and fall
Into their women's arms, making our enemies laugh.

80

Once you have bolstered our troops' morale,
We will stand our ground and fight the Danaans,
Tired as we are. We have our backs to the wall.
Hector, go into the city and find our mother.

Tell her to take a company of old women
To the temple of Athena on the acropolis
With the largest and loveliest robe in her house,
The one that is dearest of all to her,

90

And place it on the knees of braided Athena,
And promise twelve heifers to her in her temple,
Unblemished yearlings, if she will pity
The town of Troy, its wives and its children,

And if she will keep from holy Ilion
Wild Diomedes, who is raging with his spear.

I think he's the strongest of all the Achaeans.

We never even feared Achilles like this,

100

And they say he is half-divine. But this man
Won't stop at anything. No one can match him."

Hector took his brother's advice.
He jumped down from his chariot with his gear
And toured the ranks, a spear in each hand.
He urged them on, and with a trembling roar
The Trojans turned to face the Achaeans.
The Greeks pulled back. It looked to them
As if some god had come from the starry sky
To help the Trojans. It had been a sudden rally.
Hector shouted and called to the Trojans:

110

"Soldiers of Troy, and illustrious allies,
Remember to fight like the men that you are,
While I go to the city and ask the elders
Who sit in council, and our wives, to pray
To the gods and promise bulls by the hundred."

And Hector left, helmet collecting light
Above the black-hide shield whose rim tapped
His ankles and neck with each step he took.

Then Glaucus, son of Hippolochus,
Met Diomedes in no-man's-land.
Both were eager to fight, but first Tydeus' son
Made his voice heard above the battle noise:

120

"And which mortal hero are you? I've never seen you
Out here before on the fields of glory,
And now here you are ahead of everyone,
Ready to face my spear. Pretty bold.

I feel sorry for your parents. Of course,
You may be an immortal, down from heaven.
Far be it from me to fight an immortal god. 130
Not even mighty Lycurgus lived long
After he tangled with the immortals,
Driving the nurses of Dionysus
Down over the Mountain of Nysa
And making them drop their wands
As he beat them with an ox-goad. Dionysus
Was terrified and plunged into the sea,
Where Thetis received him into her bosom,
Trembling with fear at the human's threats.
Then the gods, who live easy, grew angry 140
With Lycurgus, and the Son of Cronus
Made him go blind, and he did not live long,
Hated as he was by the immortal gods.
No, I wouldn't want to fight an immortal.
But if you are human, and shed blood,
Step right up for a quick end to your life."

And Glaucus, Hippolochus' son:

"Great son of Tydeus, why ask about my lineage?
Human generations are like leaves in their seasons.
The wind blows them to the ground, but the tree 150
Sprouts new ones when spring comes again.
Men too. Their generations come and go.
But if you really do want to hear my story,
You're welcome to listen. Many men know it.
Ephyra, in the heart of Argive horse country,

Was home to Sisyphus, the shrewdest man alive,
Sisyphus son of Aeolus. He had a son, Glaucus,
Who was the father of faultless Bellerophon,
A man of grace and courage by gift of the gods.
But Proetus, whom Zeus had made king of Argos,

160

Came to hate Bellerophon

And drove him out. It happened this way.

Proetus' wife, the beautiful Anteia,
Was madly in love with Bellerophon

And wanted to have him in her bed.

But she couldn't persuade him, not at all,

Because he was so virtuous and wise.

So she made up lies and spoke to the king:

'Either die yourself, Proetus, or kill Bellerophon.

He wanted to sleep with me against my will.'

170

The king was furious when he heard her say this.

He did not kill him—he had scruples about that—

But he sent him to Lycia with a folding tablet

On which he had scratched many evil signs,

And told him to give it to Anteia's father,

To get him killed. So off he went to Lycia,

With an immortal escort, and when he reached

The river Xanthus, the king there welcomed him

And honored him with entertainment

For nine solid days, killing an ox each day.

180

But when the tenth dawn spread her rosy light,

He questioned him and asked to see the tokens

He brought from Proetus, his daughter's husband.

And when he saw the evil tokens from Proetus,

He ordered him, first, to kill the Chimaera,

A raging monster, divine, inhuman—
A lion in the front, a serpent in the rear,
In the middle a goat—and breathing fire.
Bellerophon killed her, trusting signs from the gods.
Next he had to fight the glorious Solymi, 190
The hardest battle, he said, he ever fought,
And, third, the Amazons, women the peers of men.
As he journeyed back the king wove another wile.
He chose the best men in all wide Lycia
And laid an ambush. Not one returned home;
Blameless Bellerophon killed them all.
When the king realized his guest had divine blood,
He kept him there and gave him his daughter
And half of all his royal honor. Moreover,
The Lycians cut out for him a superb 200
Tract of land, plow-land and orchard.
His wife, the princess, bore him three children,
Isander, Hippolochus, and Laodameia.
Zeus in his wisdom slept with Laodameia,
And she bore him the godlike warrior Sarpedon.
But even Bellerophon lost the gods' favor
And went wandering alone over the Aleian plain.
His son Isander was slain by Ares
As he fought against the glorious Solymi,
And his daughter was killed by Artemis 210
Of the golden reins. But Hippolochus
Bore me, and I am proud he is my father.
He sent me to Troy with strict instructions
To be the best ever, better than all the rest,
And not to bring shame on the race of my fathers,

The noblest men in Ephyra and Lycia.
This, I am proud to say, is my lineage."

Diomedes grinned when he heard all this.
He planted his spear in the bounteous earth
And spoke gently to the Lycian prince:

220

"We have old ties of hospitality!
My grandfather Oeneus long ago
Entertained Bellerophon in his halls
For twenty days, and they gave each other
Gifts of friendship. Oeneus gave
A belt bright with scarlet, and Bellerophon
A golden cup, which I left at home.
I don't remember my father Tydeus,
Since I was very small when he left for Thebes
In the war that killed so many Achaeans.
But that makes me your friend and you my guest
If ever you come to Argos, as you are my friend
And I your guest whenever I travel to Lycia.
So we can't cross spears with each other
Even in the thick of battle. There are enough
Trojans and allies for me to kill, whomever
A god gives me and I can run down myself.
And enough Greeks for you to kill as you can.
And let's exchange armor, so everyone will know
That we are friends from our fathers' days."

230

240

With this said, they vaulted from their chariots,
Clasped hands, and pledged their friendship.

But Zeus took away Glaucus' good sense,
For he exchanged his golden armor for bronze,
The worth of one hundred oxen for nine.

When Hector reached the oak tree by the Western Gate,
Trojan wives and daughters ran up to him,
Asking about their children, their brothers,
Their kinsmen, their husbands. He told them all,
Each woman in turn, to pray to the gods. 250
Sorrow clung to their heads like mist.

Then he came to Priam's palace, a beautiful
Building made of polished stone with a central courtyard
Flanked by porticoes, upon which opened fifty
Adjoining rooms, where Priam's sons
Slept with their wives. Across the court
A suite of twelve more bedrooms housed
His modest daughters and their husbands.
It was here that Hector's mother met him,
A gracious woman, with Laodice, 260
Her most beautiful daughter, in tow.
Hecuba took his hand in hers and said:

"Hector, my son, why have you left the war
And come here? Are those abominable Greeks
Wearing you down in the fighting outside,
And does your heart lead you to our acropolis
To stretch your hands upward to Zeus?
But stay here while I get you

Some honey-sweet wine, so you can pour a libation
To Father Zeus first and the other immortals,
Then enjoy some yourself, if you will drink.
Wine greatly bolsters a weary man's spirits,
And you are weary from defending your kinsmen."

Sunlight shimmered on great Hector's helmet.

"Mother, don't offer me any wine.

It would drain the power out of my limbs.

I have too much reverence to pour a libation

With unwashed hands to Zeus almighty,

Or to pray to Cronion in the black cloudbanks

Splattered with blood and the filth of battle.

But you must go to the War Goddess's temple

To make sacrifice with a band of old women.

Choose the largest and loveliest robe in the house,

The one that is dearest of all to you,

And place it on the knees of braided Athena.

And promise twelve heifers to her in her temple,

Unblemished yearlings, if she will pity

The town of Troy, its wives, and its children,

And if she will keep from holy Ilion

Wild Diomedes, who's raging with his spear.

Go then to the temple of Athena the War Goddess,

And I will go over to summon Paris,

If he will listen to what I have to say.

I wish the earth would gape open beneath him.

Olympian Zeus has bred him as a curse

To Troy, to Priam, and all Priam's children.

If I could see him dead and gone to Hades,
I think my heart might be eased of its sorrow."

Thus Hector. Hecuba went to the great hall
And called to her handmaidens, and they
Gathered together the city's old women. 300
She went herself to a fragrant storeroom
Which held her robes, the exquisite work
Of Sidonian women whom godlike Paris
Brought from Phoenicia when he sailed the sea
On the voyage he made for high-born Helen.
Hecuba chose the robe that lay at the bottom,
The most beautiful of all, woven of starlight,
And bore it away as a gift for Athena.
A stream of old women followed behind. 310

They came to the temple of Pallas Athena
On the city's high rock, and the doors were opened
By fair-cheeked Theano, daughter of Cisseus
And wife of Antenor, breaker of horses.
The Trojans had made her Athena's priestess.
With ritual cries they all lifted their hands
To Pallas Athena. Theano took the robe
And laid it on the knees of the rich-haired goddess,
Then prayed in supplication to Zeus' daughter:

"Lady Athena who defends our city,
Brightest of goddesses, hear our prayer. 320
Break now the spear of Diomedes
And grant that he fall before the Western Gate,

That we may now offer twelve heifers in this temple,
Unblemished yearlings. Only do thou pity
The town of Troy, its wives and its children."

But Pallas Athena denied her prayer.

While they prayed to great Zeus' daughter,
Hector came to Paris' beautiful house,
Which he had built himself with the aid
Of the best craftsmen in all wide Troy:
Sleeping quarters, a hall, and a central courtyard
Near to Priam's and Hector's on the city's high rock.
Hector entered, Zeus' light upon him,
A spear sixteen feet long cradled in his hand,
The bronze point gleaming, and the ferrule gold.
He found Paris in the bedroom, busy with his weapons,
Fondling his curved bow, his fine shield, and breastplate.
Helen of Argos sat with her household women
Directing their exquisite handicraft.

330

340

Hector meant to shame Paris and provoke him:

"This is a fine time to be nursing your anger,
You idiot! We're dying out there defending the walls.
It's because of you the city is in this hellish war.
If you saw someone else holding back from combat
You'd pick a fight with him yourself. Now get up
Before the whole city goes up in flames!"

And Paris, handsome as a god:

"That's no more than just, Hector,
 But listen now to what I have to say. 350
 It's not out of anger or spite toward the Trojans
 I've been here in my room. I only wanted
 To recover from my pain. My wife was just now
 Encouraging me to get up and fight,
 And that seems the better thing to do.
 Victory takes turns with men. Wait for me
 While I put on my armor, or go on ahead—
 I'm pretty sure I'll catch up with you."

To which Hector said nothing.

But Helen said to him softly: 360

"Brother-in-law
 Of a scheming, cold-blooded bitch,
 I wish that on the day my mother bore me
 A windstorm had swept me away to a mountain
 Or into the waves of the restless sea,
 Swept me away before all this could happen.
 But since the gods have ordained these evils,
 Why couldn't I be the wife of a better man,
 One sensitive at least to repeated reproaches?
 Paris has never had an ounce of good sense 370
 And never will. He'll pay for it someday.
 But come inside and sit down on this chair,
 Dear brother-in-law. You bear such a burden

For my wanton ways and Paris' witlessness.
Zeus has placed this evil fate on us so that
In time to come poets will sing of us."

And Hector, in his burnished helmet:

"Don't ask me to sit, Helen, even though
You love me. You will never persuade me.
My heart is out there with our fighting men.
They already feel my absence from battle.
Just get Paris moving, and have him hurry
So he can catch up with me while I'm still
Inside the city. I'm going to my house now
To see my family, my wife and my boy. I don't know
Whether I'll ever be back to see them again, or if
The gods will destroy me at the hands of the Greeks."

380

And Hector turned and left. He came to his house
But did not find white-armed Andromache there.
She had taken the child and a robed attendant
And stood on the tower, lamenting and weeping—
His blameless wife. When Hector didn't find her inside,
He paused on his way out and called to the servants:

390

"Can any of you women tell me exactly
Where Andromache went when she left the house?
To one of my sisters or one of my brothers' wives?
Or to the temple of Athena along with the other
Trojan women to beseech the dread goddess?"

The spry old housekeeper answered him:

"Hector, if you want the exact truth, she didn't go
To any of your sisters, or any of your brothers' wives,
Or to the temple of Athena along with the other
Trojan women to beseech the dread goddess.
She went to Ilion's great tower, because she heard
The Trojans were pressed and the Greeks were strong.
She ran off to the wall like a madwoman,
And the nurse went with her, carrying the child."

400

Thus the housekeeper, but Hector was gone,
Retracing his steps through the stone and tile streets
Of the great city, until he came to the Western Gate.
He was passing through it out onto the plain
When his wife came running up to meet him,
His beautiful wife, Andromache,
A gracious woman, daughter of great Eëtion,
Eëtion, who lived in the forests of Plakos
And ruled the Cilicians from Thebes-under-Plakos—
His daughter was wed to bronze-helmeted Hector.
She came up to him now, and the nurse with her
Held to her bosom their baby boy,
Hector's beloved son, beautiful as starlight,
Whom Hector had named Scamandrius
But everyone else called Astyanax, Lord of the City,
For Hector alone could save Ilion now.
He looked at his son and smiled in silence.
Andromache stood close to him, shedding tears,
Clinging to his arm as she spoke these words:

410

420

"Possessed is what you are, Hector. Your courage
Is going to kill you, and you have no feeling left
For your little boy or for me, the luckless woman
Who will soon be your widow. It won't be long
Before the whole Greek army swarms and kills you.
And when they do, it will be better for me
To sink into the earth. When I lose you, Hector,
There will be nothing left, no one to turn to,
Only pain. My father and mother are dead.
Achilles killed my father when he destroyed
Our city, Thebes with its high gates,
But had too much respect to despoil his body.
He burned it instead with all his armor
And heaped up a barrow. And the spirit women
Came down from the mountain, daughters
Of the storm god, and planted elm trees around it.
I had seven brothers once in that great house.
All seven went down to Hades on a single day,
Cut down by Achilles in one blinding sprint
Through their shambling cattle and silver sheep.
Mother, who was queen in the forests of Plakos,
He took back as prisoner, with all her possessions,
Then released her for a fortune in ransom.
She died in our house, shot by Artemis' arrows.
Hector, you are my father, you are my mother,
You are my brother and my blossoming husband.
But show some pity and stay here by the tower,
Don't make your child an orphan, your wife a widow.
Station your men here by the fig tree, where the city

430

440

450

Is weakest because the wall can be scaled.
Three times their elite have tried an attack here
Rallying around Ajax or glorious Idomeneus
Or Atreus' sons or mighty Diomedes,
Whether someone in on the prophecy told them
Or they are driven here by something in their heart."

460

And great Hector, helmet shining, answered her:

"Yes, Andromache, I worry about all this myself,
But my shame before the Trojans and their wives,
With their long robes trailing, would be too terrible
If I hung back from battle like a coward.
And my heart won't let me. I have learned to be
One of the best, to fight in Troy's first ranks,
Defending my father's honor and my own.
Deep in my heart I know too well
There will come a day when holy Ilion will perish,
And Priam and the people under Priam's ash spear.
But the pain I will feel for the Trojans then,
For Hecuba herself and for Priam king,
For my many fine brothers who will have by then
Fallen in the dust behind enemy lines-
All that pain is nothing to what I will feel
For you, when some bronze-armored Greek
Leads you away in tears, on your first day of slavery.
And you will work some other woman's loom
In Argos or carry water from a Spartan spring,
All against your will, under great duress.
And someone, seeing you crying, will say,

470

480

'That is the wife of Hector, the best of all
The Trojans when they fought around Ilion.'
Someday someone will say that, renewing your pain
At having lost such a man to fight off the day
Of your enslavement. But may I be dead
And the earth heaped up above me
Before I hear your cry as you are dragged away."

490

With these words, resplendent Hector
Reached for his child, who shrank back screaming
Into his nurse's bosom, terrified of his father's
Bronze-encased face and the horsehair plume
He saw nodding down from the helmet's crest.
This forced a laugh from his father and mother,
And Hector removed the helmet from his head
And set it on the ground all shimmering with light.
Then he kissed his dear son and swung him up gently
And said a prayer to Zeus and the other immortals:

500

"Zeus and all gods: grant that this my son
Become, as I am, foremost among Trojans,
Brave and strong, and ruling Ilion with might.
And may men say he is far better than his father
When he returns from war, bearing bloody spoils,
Having killed his man. And may his mother rejoice."

And he put his son in the arms of his wife,
And she enfolded him in her fragrant bosom
Laughing through her tears. Hector pitied her
And stroked her with his hand and said to her:

510

"You worry too much about me, Andromache.
 No one is going to send me to Hades before my time,
 And no man has ever escaped his fate, rich or poor,
 Coward or hero, once born into this world.
 Go back to the house now and take care of your work,
 The loom and the shuttle, and tell the servants
 To get on with their jobs. War is the work of men,
 Of all the Trojan men, and mine especially."

With these words, Hector picked up
 His plumed helmet, and his wife went back home,
 Turning around often, her cheeks flowered with tears.
 When she came to the house of man-slaying Hector,
 She found a throng of servants inside,
 And raised among these women the ritual lament.
 And so they mourned for Hector in his house
 Although he was still alive, for they did not think
 He would ever again come back from the war,
 Or escape the murderous hands of the Greeks.

520

Paris meanwhile

Did not dally long in his high halls.
 He put on his magnificent bronze-inlaid gear
 And sprinted with assurance out through the city.

530

*Picture a horse that has fed on barley in his stall
 Breaking his halter and galloping across the plain,
 Making for his accustomed swim in the river,*

*A glorious animal, head held high, mane streaming
Like wind on his shoulders. Sure of his splendor
He prances by the horse-runs and the mares in pasture.*

That was how Paris, son of Priam, came down
From the high rock of Pergamum,
Gleaming like amber and laughing in his armor,
And his feet were fast.

540

He caught up quickly
With Hector just as he turned from the spot
Where he'd talked with his wife, and called out:
"Well, dear brother, have I delayed you too much?
Am I not here in time, just as you asked?"

Hector turned, his helmet flashing light:

"I don't understand you, Paris.
No one could slight your work in battle.
You're a strong fighter, but you slack off—
You don't have the will. It breaks my heart
To hear what the Trojans say about you.
It's on your account they have all this trouble.
Come on, let's go. We can settle this later,
If Zeus ever allows us to offer in our halls
The wine bowl of freedom to the gods above,
After we drive these bronze-kneed Greeks from Troy."

550