

### Homer *Iliad* extracts

“Even now glorious Hector and the Trojans would have failed to shatter the barred gates had not Zeus the Counsellor urged on his own son Sarpedon to assault the Argives, as a lion seizes cattle. Holding his round shield before him, bronze hammered by the smith and lined with ox-hides stitched with gold round the rim, brandishing two spears, he advanced like a lean mountain lion spurred on by hunger to attack the walled fold and ravage the flock. Though the armed herdsmen and their dogs watch the sheep, the lion will not desist, and leaps into the flock to seize one or be struck down swiftly by a ready spear. So Sarpedon was spurred on to rush the wall, and pierce the battlements.

He turned to Glaucus, Hippolochus’ son: ‘We hold the most honoured seats in Lycia, Glaucus. Ours are the best cuts at the feast; ours the ever-flowing cups. There they think us gods! Ours are the vast estates along the Xanthos, too, the tracts of orchard and the rich plough land. Now we must stand in the front rank and lead the fight, so that the mail-clad Lycians can say: “No cowards, these our Lycian kings. Theirs are the fattest sheep and the finest wines, but theirs the greatest courage too, who fight in the vanguard.” Friend, if we were spared this battle, and ageless could live forever, I would not choose to lead this charge, nor send you into glorious battle, but now, while the threat of death is upon us, death that is everywhere, death that no mortal can evade, let us advance, either to our own glory or that of others.’” (*Il.* 12.290-321, tr. Kline)

“Stretching out his arms, [Priam] called to him piteously: ‘Hector, dear child, I beg you, don’t face that man alone. Seek help, lest you meet your doom at the hands of Achilles, a stronger and tougher warrior than you. If the gods loved him as little as I do, the dogs and vultures would soon feed on his corpse, and my heart would be eased of a burden of sorrow, for he has robbed me of many fine sons, killing them or selling them in some far off isle. This very day I miss my two sons, Lycaon and Polydorus, whom Laothoe, princess among women, bore me. I failed to see them among the troops taking refuge in the city. If they are living, and held captive, we’ll ransom them with gold and bronze, from my great store. Altes, of glorious name, gave his daughter many gifts. But if they are dead, in Hades’ Halls, that is one more sorrow for their mother and I, who engendered them. Yet the people’s mourning will be briefer, if Achilles fails to kill you too. So take refuge behind the walls, my child, and be the saviour of the Trojans: stay alive, deny this son of Peleus glory. Have pity on me too while I live, I, poor wretch, for whom it seems Father Zeus reserves a dreadful fate, here after much sorrowful experience, on the threshold of old age, to see my sons slaughtered, my daughters dishonoured, their children hurled aside in anger, my son’s wives dragged away, my treasures fallen into savage Achaean hands. In the end, I shall be slain by a thrust from some sharp spear, and the flesh-eating dogs before my door will tear my corpse apart, the very dogs I fed from my table, reared to guard these same doors, dogs that will lie there in the gateway when in their savagery they’ve lapped my blood. It is fine for a young man, killed in battle, to lie there with his wounds on display: dead though he is, it’s an honourable sight. But an old man’s naked corpse, his grey hairs soiled by the dogs, is a pitiful matter for us wretched mortals.’

With this, the old man tore and plucked the grey hairs from his head, but failed to move Hector’s heart. Even though his mother in turn began to weep and wail, pushing aside the folds of her robe and baring her breast, imploring him as she wept: ‘Hector, my child, this is the breast that fed you: respect and pity me. Think of us, and oppose the foe from inside the wall, don’t stand and face that harsh warrior, for if he kills you I’ll not have your corpse to lay on a bier and grieve over, dear child of my body, nor will the wife you richly dowered; but far from us, by the Argive ships, the running dogs will devour you.’

So they entreated their dear son with tears. But all their earnest pleas could not change Hector's mind, and he waited on great Achilles' advance. Like a snake in the hills, full of venom due to the toxic herbs it eats, that glares balefully and writhes inside its hole, waiting as some man approaches, so Hector held his ground, filled with latent power, his bright shield resting on a jutting outwork. But his proud thoughts were troubled: 'Alas, if I retreat through the gate, to the safety of the wall, Polydamas will not be slow to reproach me, since he advised me to withdraw our forces to the city, on that fatal night when Achilles re-appeared. I refused, though it may have been better! Now, in my folly, having brought us to the brink of ruin, I'd be ashamed to hear some insignificant Trojan, or his long-robed wife, say: 'Hector has brought ruin on the army, trusting too much in his own right arm.' If that's what they'll say, then I'd be better by far to meet Achilles face to face and kill him before returning to the city, or die gloriously beneath its walls. Of course, I could ditch the bossed shield and heavy helmet, lean my spear on the wall, and go and promise peerless Achilles to return Helen and her treasure to the Atreidae, all that Paris brought in the hollow ships to Troy, to begin this strife. I could say too that we'll then divide all the remaining treasure in the city, and then induce the Elders to state on oath that they'll conceal no part of that treasure, but grant half of all the lovely city holds. But what's the point of such thoughts? I'll not approach him like a suppliant only to have him show neither mercy nor respect, but kill me out of hand, stripped of my armour and defenceless as a woman. This is no lover's tryst of lad and lass, by oak or rock! Lad and lass, indeed! Better to meet in bloody combat, now, and see to whom Zeus grants the glory!' (Il. 22.77-130, tr. Kline)