

Il. 24.1-76

After the funeral games, the men left the assembly and scattered each to their own ship, ready for supper and then their fill of sweet sleep. But Achilles wept in remembrance of his friend, and sleep that conquers all refused to come. He tossed this way and that, regretting Patroclus' bravery and strength, remembering all they had done together and the hardships they had shared, embroiled in war or on the cruel sea. He shed great tears, thinking of these things, lying now on his side, his back, or on his face. Each night he would stagger to his feet, at last, and wander grieving along the sand.

Dawn would find him there, as she lit the sea and shore. Then he would harness his swift team to his chariot, and rope Hector's corpse to the rear, and when he had dragged him three times round Patroclus' mound, return to rest in his hut, leaving Hector's body stretched out on its face in the dust. Yet Apollo kept the flesh from being spoiled, pitying the warrior even in death, and he covered the body with his golden aegis so that Achilles could not damage the skin as he dragged the corpse along.

Though Achilles in his anger tried to disfigure Hector, the blessed immortals felt pity as they watched, and urged the sharp-eyed Hermes to steal the corpse. Though this thought pleased most of them, Hera, Poseidon and bright-eyed Athene were opposed. They still hated sacred Ilium, Priam and his whole race, because of Paris and his foolish error, in humiliating the two goddesses, at the parade by his shepherd's hut, when he showed his preference for Aphrodite, praising her for furthering his sad lust.

After eleven days of this, on the twelfth dawn Phoebus Apollo addressed them all: 'Harsh and cruel you are, you immortals! Did Hector not burn the thighs of unblemished bulls and goats for you, and yet you have not the decency, now he is dead, to rescue his corpse for his wife, his mother, his child to watch over, nor for his father Priam and his friends, who might then swiftly give him to the fires, and enact his funeral rites. You would rather help this brute, Achilles, whose mind is warped, his will of adamant. The man's heart is like a lion's, wild and powerful is that creature's in its urge to slaughter the shepherds' flocks for meat. Achilles is as devoid of pity, and of the shame that benefits men, urging restraint. Many a man loses someone closer to him than this, a brother born of the one mother, or a son, yet when he has finished weeping and wailing he has done, since the Fates grant men patient endurance. But this man, having robbed Hector of life, ties him to his chariot and drags him round his dead friend's mound, as if that brought him honour or profit. Great as he is, let him be wary of our wrath; not disfigure the mute clay in his fury.'

But white-armed Hera took exception to all this: 'That might make sense, Lord of the Silver Bow, if the gods valued Hector as highly as Achilles. But Hector was a mere mortal, suckled at a woman's breast, while Achilles is child to a goddess. I nurtured her and reared her myself, and gave her in marriage to Peleus, a warrior dear to us immortals. All of you, all you gods, came to the wedding, and you Apollo were there yourself, sitting down to feast, lyre in hand, you faithless friend of wrongdoers.'

Zeus, the Cloud-Gatherer now replied: 'Hera, curb your anger against us. These men will not be honoured equally. Yet of all the mortals in Ilium, Hector was dearest to the gods. At least he was so to me, never failing in his gifts towards me. My altar never lacked for sacrifice, for a share of all his meat and drink, the offerings that are our privilege. But, no talk now of stealing brave Hector's corpse, for Achilles would hear of it from his mother who visits him night and day. Better for one of you to summon Thetis to me, so I may advise her wisely, to have Achilles accept a ransom, and give Hector's body back to Priam.