

Il. 24.718-775

At Priam's request, the crowd parted and made way for the cart. The family led the way to the royal palace, and there they laid the body on a wooden bed, and summoned the chorus of singers to stand beside it, to sing the dirges and lead the lamentation, while the women wailed in chorus. White-armed Andromache made the first lament, cradling the head of man-killing Hector: 'Husband, you have died too young, leaving me a widow in the palace, and your son, whom we his unhappy parents brought into the world, is still a babe who I fear will never grow to manhood. For this city is doomed to perish utterly, as you have perished who watched over it, and kept its wives and children safe, who will soon be captive aboard the hollow ships, I among them. You my child will go with me, and labour somewhere at menial tasks for some harsh master. Or worse perhaps, some Greek will seize you by the arm and hurl you from the wall to your death, angered perhaps because Hector killed his brother, father, son, for many are the Achaeans whose mouths have bit the dust at the hands of Hector, and your father was not a kindly man in battle. Now the people lament you throughout the city, Hector, and unspeakable grief your death has brought your parents. The bitterest grief of all is mine, because you did not die in your bed, stretching out your arms to me, with some tender word that I might have treasured, in tears, night and day.'

Such was her lament, and the women added their grief to hers. Now Hecabe took up the impassioned dirge: 'Hector, dearest to me of all my children, dear to the gods when you were alive, who care for you now therefore in death. Swift-footed Achilles robbed me of other sons, selling them beyond the restless sea in Samothrace, Imbros or in Lemnos veiled in smoke. You he killed with the sharp bronze and dragged you round his friend Patroclus' barrow, whom you slew, not that he raised him from the dead by doing so, and yet you lie here fresh as dew, as if newly dead, like one whom Apollo of the Silver Bow has touched and killed with his gentlest dart.'

So she lamented, and stirred endless grief. Now Helen followed with a third lament: 'Handsome Hector, dearest to me of all my Trojan brothers! Godlike Paris, my husband, brought me to this land of Troy, though I'd rather I had died there and then, and this is now the twentieth year since I abandoned my native country, yet in all that time I had no harsh or spiteful word from you. If any in the palace reproached me, your brothers, sisters, your brother's fine wives, or your mother, for your father was ever gentle to me like my own, you would turn away their wrath, and restrain them with gentle acts and words. So I grieve aloud for you, and in my heart for my wretched self, since there is no one else in all wide Troy who'll be kind or gentle to me, all of them shudder as I pass.'