

Funeral of Patroclus,  
from a red-figure krater  
(c. 5th century B.C.E.).

Museo Archeologico Nazionale, Napoli

## from BOOK 24: A Grace Given in Sorrow

*After he slays Hector in Book 22, Achilles prepares for Patroclus's ceremonial funeral. When the Greeks burn Patroclus's body, they also hold elaborate athletic contests, a custom in funeral services for distinguished men (Book 23).*

*As Book 24 opens, Achilles is still so enraged at Hector's killing of Patroclus that he refuses to give up Hector's body for burial. This is a particularly offensive form of revenge, for both the Greeks and the Trojans believed that certain funeral rites were necessary before the soul of a dead person could find rest. Achilles' shameful treatment of Hector's body offends Zeus, who finally orders Achilles to give up the body to Priam. The aged king, bowed with grief and bearing a rich ransom to exchange for his son's corpse, is escorted to the Greek camp by the god Hermes, who is disguised as a young man.*

Now night had fallen,  
bringing the sentries to their supper fire,  
but the glimmering god Hermes, the Wayfinder,  
showered a mist of slumber on them all.  
As quick as thought, he had the gates unbarred  
and open to let the wagon enter, bearing  
the old king and the ransom.

Going seaward  
they came to the lofty quarters of Achilles,  
a lodge the Myrmidons built for their lord  
of pine trees cut and trimmed, and shaggy thatch  
from mowings in deep meadows. Posts were driven  
round the wide courtyard in a palisade,<sup>o</sup>  
whose gate one crossbar held, one beam of pine.  
It took three men to slam this home, and three  
to draw the bolt again—but great Achilles  
worked his entryway alone with ease.  
And now Hermes, who lights the way for mortals,  
opened for Priam, took him safely in  
with all his rich gifts for the son of Peleus.  
Then the god dropped the reins, and stepping down  
he said:

“I am no mortal wagoner,  
but Hermes, sir. My father<sup>o</sup> sent me here  
to be your guide amid the Achaean men.  
Now that is done, I’m off to heaven again  
and will not visit Achilles. That would be  
to compromise an immortal’s dignity—  
to be received with guests of mortal station.  
Go take his knees, and make your supplication:  
invoke his father, his mother, and his child;  
pray that his heart be touched, that he be reconciled.”

Now Hermes turned, departing for Olympus,  
and Priam vaulted down. He left Idaeus<sup>o</sup>  
to hold the teams in check, while he went forward  
into the lodge. He found Achilles, dear  
to Zeus, there in his chair, with officers  
at ease across the room. Only Automedon<sup>o</sup>  
and Alcimus<sup>o</sup> were busy near Achilles,  
for he had just now made an end of dinner,  
eating and drinking, and the laden boards  
lay near him still upon the trestles.

Priam,

the great king of Troy, passed by the others,  
knelt down, took in his arms Achilles’ knees,  
and kissed the hands of wrath that killed his sons.

**1–7.** Hermes is the messenger of the gods. He also brings the spirits of the deceased to the Underworld.

**?** How does Hermes get Priam into Achilles’ camp?

**12.** palisade *n.*: barrier.

**22.** father *n.*: Zeus.

**?** **28–30.** What does Hermes suggest Priam do to win over Achilles?

**32.** Idaeus (ī’dē’əs): herald of the Trojans.

**36.** Automedon (ô-tăm’ə-dän): Achilles’ charioteer.

**37.** Alcimus (al-sī’məs): one of Achilles’ officers.



45 When, taken with mad Folly in his own land,  
a man does murder and in exile finds  
refuge in some rich house, then all who see him  
stand in awe.  
So these men stood.

Achilles

50 gazed in wonder at the splendid king,  
and his companions marveled too, all silent,  
with glances to and fro. Now Priam prayed  
to the man before him:

“Remember your own father,

Achilles, in your godlike youth: his years  
like mine are many, and he stands upon  
55 the fearful doorstep of old age. He, too,  
is hard pressed, it may be, by those around him,  
there being no one able to defend him  
from bane of war and ruin. Ah, but he  
may nonetheless hear news of you alive,  
60 and so with glad heart hope through all his days  
for sight of his dear son, come back from Troy,  
while I have deathly fortune.

Noble sons

I fathered here, but scarce one man is left me.  
Fifty I had when the Achaeans came,  
65 nineteen out of a single belly, others  
born of attendant women. Most are gone.  
Raging Ares cut their knees from under them.  
And he who stood alone among them all,  
their champion, and Troy’s, ten days ago  
70 you killed him, fighting for his land, my prince,  
Hector.

It is for him that I have come  
among these ships, to beg him back from you,  
and I bring ransom without stint.<sup>o</sup>

Achilles,

75 be reverent toward the great gods! And take  
pity on me, remember your own father.  
Think me more pitiful by far, since I  
have brought myself to do what no man else  
has done before—to lift to my lips the hand  
of one who killed my son.”

80 the evocation of his father stirred  
new longing, and an ache of grief. He lifted  
the old man’s hand and gently put him by.  
Then both were overborne as they remembered:  
the old king huddled at Achilles’ feet

Now in Achilles

85  
90  
9  
1  
?  
52–62. In what ways  
are Achilles’ father and  
Priam similar? In what ways  
are they different?

73. **stint:** limit; restriction.

?  
79–93. What images  
in these lines emphasize  
Priam’s age and frailty?

85 wept, and wept for Hector, killer of men,  
while great Achilles wept for his own father  
as for Patroclus once again; and sobbing  
filled the room.

But when Achilles' heart  
had known the luxury of tears, and pain  
within his breast and bones had passed away,  
90 he stood then, raised the old king up, in pity  
for his gray head and graybeard cheek, and spoke  
in a warm rush of words:

"Ah, sad and old!

Trouble and pain you've borne, and bear, aplenty.  
95 Only a great will could have brought you here  
among the Achaean ships, and here alone  
before the eyes of one who stripped your sons,  
your many sons, in battle. Iron must be  
the heart within you. Come, then, and sit down.  
100 We'll probe our wounds no more but let them rest,  
though grief lies heavy on us. Tears heal nothing,  
drying so stiff and cold. This is the way  
the gods ordained the destiny of men,  
to bear such burdens in our lives, while they  
105 feel no affliction. At the door of Zeus  
are those two urns° of good and evil gifts  
that he may choose for us; and one for whom  
the lightning's joyous king dips in both urns  
will have by turns bad luck and good. But one  
110 to whom he sends all evil—that man goes  
contemptible by the will of Zeus; ravenous  
hunger drives him over the wondrous earth,  
unresting, without honor from gods or men.  
Mixed fortune came to Peleus. Shining gifts  
115 at the gods' hands he had from birth: felicity,  
wealth overflowing, rule of the Myrmidons,  
a bride immortal at his mortal side.  
But then Zeus gave afflictions too—no family  
of powerful sons grew up for him at home,  
120 but one child, of all seasons and of none.  
Can I stand by him in his age? Far from my country  
I sit at Troy to grieve you and your children.  
You, too, sir, in time past were fortunate,  
we hear men say. From Macar's isle of Lesbos  
125 northward, and south of Phrygia and the Straits,°  
no one had wealth like yours, or sons like yours.  
Then gods out of the sky sent you this bitterness:  
the years of siege, the battles and the losses.  
Endure it, then. And do not mourn forever



Bust of Zeus (c. 150–c. 200 C.E.)  
Ammon. Marble.  
The British Museum, London.

106. urns *n. pl.*: vases with  
pedestals.

**?** 105–128. How does  
Achilles explain good  
and bad fortune? How have  
the fortunes of his father  
(Peleus) and King Priam  
been similar?

125. the Straits: the  
Dardanelles, a narrow  
waterway between the Aegean  
Sea and the Sea of Marmara.



- 130 for your dead son. There is no remedy.  
You will not make him stand again. Rather  
await some new misfortune to be suffered."

The old king in his majesty replied:

- 135 "Never give me a chair, my lord, while Hector  
lies in your camp uncared for. Yield him to me  
now. Allow me sight of him. Accept  
the many gifts I bring. May they reward you,  
and may you see your home again.  
You spared my life at once and let me live."

- 140 Achilles, the great runner, frowned and eyed him  
under his brows:

"Do not vex me, sir," he said.

- 145 "I have intended, in my own good time,  
to yield up Hector to you. She who bore me,<sup>o</sup>  
the daughter of the Ancient of the sea,  
has come with word to me from Zeus. I know  
in your case, too—though you say nothing, Priam—  
that some god guided you to the shipways here.  
No strong man in his best days could make entry  
into this camp. How could he pass the guard,  
or force our gateway?

Therefore, *let me be.*

- 150 Sting my sore heart again, and even here,  
under my own roof, suppliant though you are,  
I may not spare you, sir, but trample on  
the express command of Zeus!"

When he heard this,

- 155 the old man feared him and obeyed with silence.  
Now like a lion at one bound Achilles  
left the room. Close at his back the officers  
Automedon and Alcimius went out—  
comrades in arms whom he esteemed the most  
160 after the dead Patroclus. They unharnessed  
mules and horses, led the old king's crier  
to a low bench and sat him down.  
Then from the polished wagon  
they took the piled-up price of Hector's body.  
165 One chiton and two capes they left aside  
as dress and shrouding for the homeward journey.  
Then, calling to the women slaves, Achilles  
ordered the body bathed and rubbed with oil—

143. She who bore me:  
Thetis.

**? 141–154.** What does  
Achilles realize about  
the way Priam was able to  
enter the camp? How does  
he threaten Priam?

170 but lifted, too, and placed apart, where Priam  
could not see his son—for seeing Hector  
he might in his great pain give way to rage,  
and fury then might rise up in Achilles  
to slay the old king, flouting Zeus's word.  
So after bathing and anointing Hector  
they drew the shirt and beautiful shrouding over him.  
175 Then with his own hands lifting him, Achilles  
laid him upon a couch, and with his two  
companions aiding, placed him in the wagon.  
Now a bitter groan burst from Achilles,  
who stood and prayed to his own dead friend:

“Patroclus,

180 do not be angry with me, if somehow  
even in the world of Death you learn of this—  
that I released Prince Hector to his father.  
The gifts he gave were not unworthy. Aye,  
185 and you shall have your share, this time as well.”

The Prince Achilles turned back to his quarters.  
He took again the splendid chair that stood  
against the farther wall, then looked at Priam  
and made his declaration:

“As you wished, sir,

190 the body of your son is now set free.  
He lies in state. At the first sight of Dawn  
you shall take charge of him yourself and see him.  
Now let us think of supper. We are told  
that even Niobe in her extremity  
195 took thought for bread—though all her brood had perished,  
her six young girls and six tall sons. Apollo,  
making his silver longbow whip and sing,  
shot the lads down, and Artemis with raining  
arrows killed the daughters—all this after  
200 Niobe had compared herself with Leto,  
the smooth-cheeked goddess.

She has borne two children,


Niobe said, How many have I borne!  
But soon those two destroyed the twelve.

Besides,

205 nine days the dead lay stark, no one could bury them,  
for Zeus had turned all folk of theirs to stone.  
The gods made graves for them on the tenth day,  
and then at last, being weak and spent with weeping,  
Niobe thought of food. Among the rocks  
of Sipylus' lonely mountainside, where nymphs

**163–173.** Achilles is careful not to allow Priam to see Hector's body.

**?** Why does Achilles insist that Hector's body be hidden from Priam?



*“As you wished, sir,  
the body of your  
son is now set free. He lies  
in state. At the first sight  
of Dawn you shall take  
charge of him yourself  
and see him.”*



210 who race Achelous's<sup>o</sup> river go to rest,  
she, too, long turned to stone, somewhere broods on  
the gall immortal gods gave her to drink.<sup>o</sup>

Like her we'll think of supper, noble sir.  
Weep for your son again when you have borne him  
215 back to Troy; there he'll be mourned indeed."

In one swift movement now Achilles caught  
and slaughtered a white lamb. His officers  
flayed it, skillful in their butchering  
to dress the flesh; they cut bits for the skewers,  
220 roasted, and drew them off, done to a turn.  
Automedon dealt loaves into the baskets  
on the great board; Achilles served the meat.  
Then all their hands went out upon the supper.  
When thirst and appetite were turned away,  
225 Priam, the heir of Dardanos, gazed long  
in wonder at Achilles' form and scale—  
so like the gods in aspect. And Achilles  
in his turn gazed in wonder upon Priam,  
royal in visage<sup>o</sup> as in speech. Both men  
230 in contemplation found rest for their eyes,  
till the old hero, Priam, broke the silence:

"Make a bed ready for me, son of Thetis,  
and let us know the luxury of sleep.  
From that hour when my son died at your hands  
235 till now, my eyelids have not closed in slumber  
over my eyes, but groaning where I sat  
I tasted pain and grief a thousandfold,  
or lay down rolling in my courtyard mire.  
Here for the first time I have swallowed bread  
and made myself drink wine.

240 Before, I could not."

Achilles ordered men and serving women  
to make a bed outside, in the covered forecourt,  
with purple rugs piled up and sheets outspread  
and coverings of fleeces laid on top.  
245 The girls went out with torches in their hands  
and soon deftly made up a double bed.  
Then Achilles, defiant of Agamemnon,  
told his guest:

250 you'll sleep outside tonight, in case an Achaeon  
officer turns up, one of those men

210. Achelous (ə-kel'ō-əs);  
river god.

194–212. Niobe (nī'ō-be')...  
**drink:** woman whose children  
were killed by the goddess  
Artemis and the god Apollo  
because she boasted of her su-  
periority to their mother,  
Leto; Niobe was then turned  
into a rock, from which her  
tears are still said to flow. This  
rock is believed to be on a  
mountain called Sipylus  
(si'pil-əs) in Turkey.

229. **visage** *n.*: face;  
expression.

232–244. Priam has not  
been able to sleep since his  
son's death.

? What is the significance  
of Achilles' offering of  
hospitality to Priam?



King Priam begging Achilles to let him have the body of Hector, from a red-figure skyphos (detail) (c. 490 B.C.E.).  
Kunsthistorisches Museum, Vienna.

who are forever taking counsel with me—  
as well they may. If one should see you here  
as the dark night runs on, he would report it  
to the Lord Marshal Agamemnon. Then  
255 return of the body would only be delayed.  
Now tell me this, and give me a straight answer:  
How many days do you require  
for the funeral of Prince Hector?—I should know  
how long to wait, and hold the Achaean army.”

260 Old Priam in his majesty replied:

“If you would have me carry out the burial,  
Achilles, here is the way to do me grace.  
As we are penned in the town, but must bring wood  
from the distant hills, the Trojans are afraid.  
265 We should have mourning for nine days in hall,  
then on the tenth conduct his funeral  
and feast the troops and commons;

**?** 261–269. What conditions does Priam set for Hector’s burial?



on the eleventh we should make his tomb,  
and on the twelfth give battle, if we must."

Achilles said:

"As you command, old Priam,

270 the thing is done. I shall suspend the war  
for those eleven days that you require."

He took the old man's right hand by the wrist  
and held it, to allay his fear.

Now crier

275 and king with hearts brimful retired to rest  
in the sheltered forecourt, while Achilles slept  
deep in his palisaded lodge. Beside him,  
lovely in her youth, Briseis<sup>o</sup> lay.

And other gods and soldiers all night long,  
280 by slumber quieted, slept on. But slumber  
would not come to Hermes the Good Companion,  
as he considered how to ease the way  
for Priam from the camp, to send him through  
unseen by the formidable gatekeepers.

285 Then Hermes came to Priam's pillow, saying:

"Sir, no thought of danger shakes your rest,  
as you sleep on, being great Achilles' guest,  
amid men fierce as hunters in a ring.

You triumphed in a costly ransoming,  
290 but three times costlier your own would be  
to your surviving sons—a monarch's fee—  
if this should come to Agamemnon's ear  
and all the Achaean host should learn that you are here."

The old king started up in fright, and woke  
295 his herald. Hermes yoked the mules and horses,  
took the reins, then inland like the wind  
he drove through all the encampment, seen by no one.  
When they reached Xanthus,<sup>o</sup> eddying and running  
god-begotten river, at the ford,

300 Hermes departed for Olympus. Dawn  
spread out her yellow robe on all the earth,  
as they drove on toward Troy, with groans and sighs,  
and the mule-team pulled the wagon and the body.  
And no one saw them, not a man or woman,  
305 before Cassandra.<sup>o</sup> Tall as the pale-gold

### Vocabulary

**allay** (a·lā') v.: to relieve; calm.

**278. Briseis:** In order to appease Achilles, Agamemnon had Briseis returned to him.

**298. Xanthus** (zan'thəs): also called Scamander.

**305. Cassandra** (kə·san'drə): daughter of Priam and Hecuba in Greek mythology, Apollo gives her the gift of prophecy, but when she rejects his advances, he decrees that no one will believe her predictions. She figures more prominently in other versions of the Trojan War legend, such as Euripides' drama *The Trojan Women*.

goddess Aphrodite, she had climbed  
the citadel of Pergamus<sup>o</sup> at dawn.  
Now looking down she saw her father come  
in his war-car, and saw the crier there,  
and saw Lord Hector on his bed of death  
upon the mulecart. The girl wailed and cried  
to all the city:

“Oh, look down, look down,  
go to your windows, men of Troy, and women,  
see Lord Hector now! Remember joy  
at seeing him return alive from battle,  
exalting all our city and our land!”

Now, at the sight of Hector, all gave way  
to loss and longing, and all crowded down  
to meet the escort and body near the gates,  
till no one in the town was left at home.  
There Hector's lady and his gentle mother  
tore their hair for him, flinging themselves  
upon the wagon to embrace his person  
while the crowd groaned. All that long day  
until the sun went down they might have mourned  
in tears before the gateway. But old Priam  
spoke to them from his chariot:

“Make way,  
let the mules pass. You'll have your fill of weeping  
later, when I've brought the body home.”

They parted then, and made way for the wagon,  
allowing Priam to reach the famous hall.  
They laid the body of Hector in his bed,  
and brought in minstrels, men to lead the dirge.<sup>o</sup>  
While these wailed out, the women answered, moaning.  
Andromache of the ivory-white arms  
held in her lap between her hands  
the head of Hector who had killed so many.  
Now she lamented:

“You've been torn from life,  
my husband, in young manhood, and you leave me  
empty in our hall. The boy's a child  
whom you and I, poor souls, conceived; I doubt  
he'll come to manhood. Long before, great Troy  
will go down plundered, citadel and all,  
now that you are lost, who guarded it  
and kept it, and preserved its wives and children.  
They will be shipped off in the murmuring hulls

307. **Pergamus** (pur'gə-məs):  
citadel, or fortress, of Troy.

**311–320.** How do the  
Trojans react to the sight  
of Hector's body?



**N**ow, at the sight of  
Hector, all gave way  
to loss and longing, and  
all crowded down to meet  
the escort and body near  
the gates . . .

333. **dirge** *n.*: funeral hymn.

**340–355.** What does  
Andromache predict will  
happen to herself and her  
son? What reasons does she  
give for her prediction?



one day, and I along with all the rest.  
 You, my little one, either you come with me  
 to do some grinding labor, some base toil  
 for a harsh master, or an Achaean soldier  
 350 will grip you by the arm and hurl you down  
 from a tower<sup>o</sup> here to a miserable death—  
 out of his anger for a brother, a father,  
 or even a son that Hector killed. Achaeans  
 355 in hundreds mouthed black dust under his blows.  
 He was no moderate man in war, your father,  
 and that is why they mourn him through the city.  
 Hector, you gave your parents grief and pain  
 but left me loneliest, and heartbroken.  
 360 You could not open your strong arms to me  
 from your deathbed, or say a thoughtful word,  
 for me to cherish all my life long  
 as I weep for you night and day.”

Her voice broke,

365 and a wail came from the women. Hecuba  
 lifted her lamenting voice among them:

“Hector, dearest of sons to me, in life  
 you had the favor of the immortal gods,  
 and they have cared for you in death as well.  
 Achilles captured other sons of mine  
 370 in other years, and sold them overseas  
 to Samos, Imbros, and the smoky island,  
 Lemnos.<sup>o</sup> That was not his way with you.  
 After he took your life, cutting you down  
 with his sharp-bladed spear, he trussed and dragged you  
 375 many times round the barrow<sup>o</sup> of his friend,  
 Patroclus, whom you killed—though not by this  
 could that friend live again. But now I find you  
 fresh as pale dew, seeming newly dead,  
 like one to whom Apollo of the silver bow  
 380 had given easy death with his mild arrows.”

Hecuba sobbed again, and the wails redoubled.  
 Then it was Helen's turn to make lament:

“Dear Hector, dearest brother to me by far!  
 My husband is Alexandros,  
 385 who brought me here to Troy—God, that I might  
 have died sooner! This is the twentieth year  
 since I left home, and left my fatherland.  
 But never did I have an evil word  
 or gesture from you. No—and when some other  
 390 brother-in-law or sister would revile me,

351–352. **hurl you down from a tower:** Indeed, after the fall of Troy, Astyanax was thrown by the Greek conquerors from the walls of the city.

371–372. **Samos** (sā'mās'), **Imbros** (ēm'brōs) ... Lemnos (lem'nās'): islands in the Aegean Sea.

375. **barrow** *n.*: mound of earth and stones built over a grave.

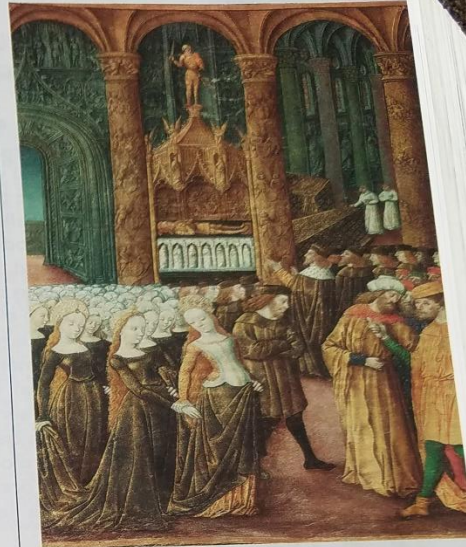
? **383–398.** How does Helen say most Trojans treated her? How did Hector treat Helen?

or if my mother-in-law spoke to me bitterly—  
but Priam never did, being as mild  
as my own father—you would bring her round  
with your kind heart and gentle speech. Therefore  
I weep for you and for myself as well,  
395 given this fate, this grief. In all wide Troy  
no one is left who will befriend me, none;  
they all shudder at me.”

Helen wept,  
and a moan came from the people, hearing her.  
400 Then Priam, the old king, commanded them:

“Trojans, bring firewood to the edge of town.  
No need to fear an ambush of the Argives.  
When he dismissed me from the camp, Achilles  
told me clearly they will not harass us,  
405 not until dawn comes for the twelfth day.”

Then yoking mules and oxen to their wagons  
the people thronged before the city gates.  
Nine days they labored, bringing countless loads  
of firewood to the town. When Dawn that lights  
410 the world of mortals came for the tenth day,  
they carried greathearted Hector out at last,  
and all in tears placed his dead body high  
upon its pyre, then cast a torch below.  
When the young Dawn with finger tips of rose  
made heaven bright, the Trojan people massed  
415 about Prince Hector’s ritual fire.  
All being gathered and assembled, first  
they quenched the smoking pyre with tawny wine  
wherever flames had licked their way, then friends  
and brothers picked his white bones from the char  
420 in sorrow, while the tears rolled down their cheeks.  
In a golden urn they put the bones,  
shrouding the urn with veiling of soft purple.  
Then in a grave dug deep they placed it  
425 and heaped it with great stones. The men were quick  
to raise the death-mound, while in every quarter  
lookouts were posted to ensure against  
an Achaean surprise attack. When they had finished  
raising the barrow, they returned to Ilion,  
430 where all sat down to banquet in his honor  
in the hall of Priam king. So they performed  
the funeral rites of Hector, tamer of horses.



King Priam before the Tomb of Hector in the Temple of Apollo, from *History of the Destruction of Troy* (c. 1500). From the workshop of Jean Colombe.

Bibliothèque nationale de France, Paris.

**414–432.** What are the key details of Hector’s funeral rites? Why do you think these details about a Trojan enemy’s funeral have been included in this Greek epic?