



# MYTHOPOUCH

## RETELLING

---

THE ILIAD

*The Great Day*

Volume III of seven - Part Three

A modern educational version for readers aged 15 and up

*This is original Mythopouch wording. It is not Homer and not a translation.*

© 2026 Mythopouch. All rights reserved. Mythopouch™ is a trademark of Mythopouch.

## CONTENTS

This volume

The Great Day

## PART THREE: THE GREAT DAY

### CHAPTER 11: THE BATTLE AT THE WALL

### CHAPTER 12: PATROCLUS TO THE RESCUE

### CHAPTER 13: SARPEDON FALLS

### CHAPTER 14: PATROCLUS'S LAST HOUR

All volumes in this retelling

Vol. 1 The Quarrel

Vol. 2 The Battle Joined

Vol. 3 The Great Day (this file)

Vol. 4 The Day of Sorrow

Vol. 5 The Rage of Achilles

Vol. 6 The Taming of Achilles

Vol. 7 Guides and Tables

## PART THREE: THE GREAT DAY

### CHAPTER 11: THE BATTLE AT THE WALL

Eris (AIR-iss) arrived with the dawn.

The goddess of discord, grey-faced and grinning, took her stand on the black hull of Odysseus's ship, middlemost of the fleet, and raised a cry that split the morning like a bronze axe through pine. Her voice carried to the tents of Ajax at one end and to Achilles's silent camp at the other. It was not a human sound. It was the shriek of shields breaking, of mothers screaming, of cities burning. It made the Greeks reach for their spears with a desperate courage, as if each man had decided he would rather die here than run home to be called a coward.

Agamemnon heard it and knew his time had come. He armed himself in splendor: greaves of silver, a breastplate of ten layers of dark cyanus and twelve of gold, a sword with golden bosses, a shield blazoned with the Gorgon's head and the writhing snake. Two spears in his hand, and the gleam of his armour shot upward like flame.

Zeus thundered from Ida in answer. The omens were terrible. Dew fell red as blood.

For a morning, Agamemnon was unstoppable.

He killed Bienor, a Trojan captain, and his charioteer Oileus. He killed Isus and Antiphus, two sons of Priam, tearing the life from them as a lion tears fawns from a hind. He killed Pisander and Hippolochus, sons of the man who had once urged the Trojans to murder Menelaus and Odysseus when they came as envoys. Their pleas for ransom died on their lips. Agamemnon remembered. Agamemnon did not forgive.

The Greeks followed him, and the Trojan line bent, then broke. Hector himself was swept back, his shield ringing with blows, his voice lost in the din. The Greeks pressed forward, past the tomb of old Ilus, past the wild fig tree, towards the very walls of Troy.

But on the heights of Ida, Zeus sat with his thunderbolt in hand.

He called Iris (EYE-riss), his messenger, and his words were cold with fate. "Go to Hector. Tell him this: while Agamemnon rages at the front, hold back. Let others bear the shock. But when Agamemnon is wounded and quits the field, then I will give Hector strength to slay until he reaches the ships."

Iris sped down like a falling star and found Hector by his chariot. She spoke the word of Zeus, and Hector's face changed. He had been waiting for a sign. Now he had one.

It happened as Zeus had said.

Coon, eldest son of Antenor, saw Agamemnon kill his brother Iphidamas, and grief made him reckless. He crept unseen to the High King and drove his spear through Agamemnon's arm below the elbow. The bronze point punched through muscle and sinew, and blood poured down the king's fingers.

Agamemnon's war cry became a roar of pain. Still he fought on. He killed Coon as the Trojan tried to drag his brother's body away. But the wound would not stop bleeding. When the blood dried and the pain turned sharp as childbirth, Agamemnon's charioteer turned the horses towards the ships. The High King was leaving the field.

Hector saw it. His voice rose above the battle like a war horn.

"Trojans! Lycians! Dardanians! Their best man has left them! Zeus has given us this day! Forward! To the ships!"

He plunged into the fight like a tempest lashing the sea. The Trojans rallied, and the Greeks, who had been winning moments before, found themselves giving ground. Asaeus fell. Autonus fell. Opites fell. Hector killed them all, and more, and the plain ran dark with Greek blood.

Then came the worst hour.

Odysseus, seeing the disaster, cried out to Diomedes: "Son of Tydeus, what has happened to us? Stand by me, or we are shamed forever!"

"I stand," Diomedes answered. But his voice was hollow, for he knew what Zeus had decreed.

They fought together, the two lions of Greece, and for a time they held. But Paris (PAR-iss), crouching behind a pillar on the battlefield, drew his bow and shot Diomedes through the right foot. The arrow pinned itself in the earth beneath him, and Paris laughed.

"You are wounded!" he called. "The lion has a thorn in his paw!"

Diomedes's answer was defiant, but the wound was real. Under cover of Odysseus's shield, he pulled the arrow free with a grunt of agony and limped towards his chariot. The second greatest warrior of Greece was leaving the field.

Now Odysseus stood alone.

The Trojans closed around him like jackals around a wounded stag. He killed Deiopites, Thoon, Ennomus, Chersidamas. He killed Socus, who struck him through the shield and wounded his side. Odysseus pulled the spear from his own flesh, blood welling between his fingers, and still he fought, calling for help with all the strength left in his lungs.

Ajax heard him. Menelaus heard him. They came running, shields raised, and the Trojans scattered before them like birds before a hawk. Menelaus took Odysseus by the hand and led

him, bleeding and swaying, towards the ships. Ajax covered their retreat, killing as he went, a one-man wall of bronze.

But the gods were not finished.

Paris, still lurking with his bow, shot Eurypylus (yoo-RIP-ih-lus) in the thigh as the Greek hero came to Ajax's aid. Eurypylus dragged himself from the field, shouting for his comrades to defend Ajax, who now stood alone against the storm.

Then Paris struck again, this time wounding Machaon (mah-KAY-on), the healer, son of Asclepius. Machaon was worth more than any other man in the army, for he could cut out arrows and spread healing herbs that stopped the black blood. Nestor, seeing this, swept his chariot through the fighting, lifted Machaon into it, and drove for the ships with his mares foaming white.

Achilles, watching from the stern of his ship, saw Nestor pass. He called to Patroclus, and Patroclus came running. But that is another part of the story, and we will tell it in its time.

#### MYTHOLOGY NOTE

The wounding of the Greek leaders in Book 11 is one of the most carefully structured sequences in the Iliad. Agamemnon (the king) falls first, then Diomedes (the greatest warrior after Achilles), then Odysseus (the wisest), then Machaon (the healer). Each wound is progressively more dangerous to the Greek cause, and each withdrawal leaves a gap that cannot be filled. Homer understood something that modern military writers would rediscover thousands of years later: wars are not won by killing enemy soldiers, but by removing the leaders who make an army function. When the healers themselves need healing, the cause is lost.

Hector did not pause. The wall was before him, and beyond it, the ships.

He called the Trojans to him, and they came in five battalions. Polydamas (pol-ih-DAM-ass), Hector's most trusted counsellor, advised wisely: leave the horses at the trench, attack on foot. The trench was too wide for chariots, the stakes too sharp. Hector agreed, and the Trojans dismounted, forming themselves for the assault.

But as they tried to cross, an omen appeared. A great eagle flew over them, clutching a blood-red snake, still writhing. The snake twisted and struck the eagle on the breast, and the bird, crying in pain, dropped its prey into the midst of the Trojan host and flew away.

Polydamas turned pale. "Hector, I know you rebuke me when I speak against your will, but hear me. That eagle was Troy, and the snake was Greece. We will not succeed. Even if we break through, many of us will die at the ships and never return home."

Hector's eyes blazed. "Polydamas, I despise your reading. One omen matters: that a man should fight for his country. If you will not fight, my spear will find you first."

He turned and led the charge himself. The Trojans stormed the wall, tearing at the breastworks, uprooting the buttresses, hammering at the gates. The two Ajaxes walked the ramparts, urging the Greeks on, their voices hoarse with shouting. Stones fell like winter snow, crushing helmets, shattering shields.

Then Zeus sent Sarpedon (sar-PEE-don), king of Lycia, against the wall.

Sarpedon was a son of Zeus, and he looked like one. Before him he held a great shield of hammered bronze, lined with ox-hide and riveted with gold. Two spears in his hands, he came on like a lion who has not eaten in days, who will break into a fenced homestead rather than starve.

He turned to Glaucus (GLAW-kus), his companion and prince of Lycia. "Glaucus, why do we hold the highest place in Lycia? Why do men honour us at table, give us the choicest portions, keep our cups brimming? Because we fight. Because we stand in the forefront. If we could live forever, I would not press forward. But death in ten thousand shapes hangs over every man. No one can escape it. So let us go forward, and win glory, or yield it to another."

Glaucus answered nothing. He only raised his shield and followed.

They charged the wall where Menestheus (men-ESS-thyoos) of Athens commanded. The Athenian looked along the rampart for help and found Ajax, son of Telamon, with Teucer his brother. "Ajax!" he shouted. "The Lycians are upon us! If ever you were going to fight, fight now!"

Ajax came, and Teucer with him, and Pandion carrying Teucer's bow. The battle for the wall became a struggle of inches, of breath, of pure will. Ajax killed Epicles with a stone so large that no modern man could lift it with two hands, crushing his helmet and the skull beneath. Teucer shot an arrow that struck Glaucus in the shoulder, and the Lycian prince slipped down from the wall, covertly, ashamed that anyone might see him wounded.

Sarpedon saw his friend fall, and grief drove him to fury. He seized the battlement with his bare hands and tore it loose, stone and timber together, opening a gap through which many men might pass.

Ajax and Teucer turned on him. Teucer's arrow struck the strap of Sarpedon's shield; Ajax's spear punched through the bronze but did not reach the flesh beneath. Zeus would not let his son die, not yet. But Sarpedon fell back, bleeding, gasping, and the Lycians surged around him to cover his retreat.

Still the wall held. Barely.

Then Hector acted.

He found a stone at the gate, thick at one end and pointed at the other, so massive that two strong men of this age could barely lift it onto a wagon. But Zeus made it light in Hector's hands. He raised it as a shepherd lifts a fleece, one-handed, and drove it at the centre of the double gate.

The sound was like thunder.

The hinges shattered. The crossbars snapped. The doors flew open, one inward, one outward, broken by the sheer force of the blow.

Hector leaped through.

His face was dark as night itself. Bronze blazed about his body. Two spears in his hands, his eyes burned with a fire that was not human. He turned and shouted to the Trojans behind him, and they poured through the breach after him, scaling the walls, flooding through the gate, and the Greeks fled towards their ships in terror.

No god could have withstood Hector in that moment. He was not a man. He was the storm of war itself, made flesh and bronze, and he had broken through.

| Greek Leader | Wounded By           | Nature of Wound       | Who Helped Them          |
|--------------|----------------------|-----------------------|--------------------------|
| Agamemnon    | Coon (Antenor's son) | Spear through the arm | His charioteer; withdrew |

to ships

| Diomedes  | Paris (Alexandros)       | Arrow through the right  | Odysseus (shielded him); |
|-----------|--------------------------|--------------------------|--------------------------|
| foot      | withdrew to ships        |                          |                          |
| Odysseus  | Socus (son of Hippiasus) | Spear through shield and | Menelaus and Ajax; led   |
| side      | from the field           |                          |                          |
| Eurypylus | Paris (Alexandros)       | Arrow in the thigh       | Retreated under cover of |

comrades

| Machaon  | Paris (Alexandros) | Arrow in the right | Nestor (carried him away |
|----------|--------------------|--------------------|--------------------------|
| shoulder | in his chariot)    |                    |                          |

## FOOTNOTES

The wounding sequence: The progressive disabling of the Greek leadership in Book 11 follows a deliberate pattern. Agamemnon (command) falls first. Diomedes (offense) falls second. Odysseus

(cunning) falls third. Machaon (medicine) falls fourth. Each loss compounds the others, until only Ajax (defence) remains standing. This is not coincidence; it is Homer's understanding of how armies collapse. When leadership, offense, strategy, and medicine are all removed, only raw defensive will remains, and even that cannot hold forever.

Hector's stone: The boulder Hector throws to shatter the gate is described as so heavy that "two of the best men in a town, as men now are, could hardly raise it." This is one of several passages in the Iliad where Homer suggests that the heroes of the Trojan War generation were physically mightier than the men of his own day. This "race of heroes"

motif reflects a common belief in ancient Greece that the world had declined from an age of gold and bronze to the lesser age of iron in which Homer himself lived.

### QUESTIONS FOR REFLECTION

Agamemnon fights brilliantly until he is wounded, then withdraws. Diomedes mocks Paris even while limping away. Odysseus bleeds but refuses to retreat until help arrives. Which kind of courage do you admire most: Agamemnon's force, Diomedes's defiance, or Odysseus's stubborn endurance?

Sarpedon tells Glaucus that they fight because mortality demands it: "death in ten thousand shapes hangs over every man." Is this a good reason to risk your life in battle? Does Sarpedon's speech make you more or less sympathetic to the warrior's code?

Hector ignores Polydamas's warning about the eagle omen and threatens to kill him. Moments later, Hector breaks through the wall in his greatest triumph. Was Polydamas wrong to speak, or was Hector wrong to ignore him? What does this tell us about leadership in crisis?

### CHAPTER 12: PATROCLUS TO THE RESCUE

Patroclus (pah-TROH-klus) could not bear it any longer.

From the entrance of Achilles's tent, he watched the Greeks streaming back towards the ships, their armour dragged with dust, their faces grey with defeat. He heard the shouting at the wall, the crash of stones, the war cry of Hector rising above all other sounds like a wolf's howl above the wind. He had been Achilles's companion since boyhood, had shared every meal and every sorrow, but this was the hardest thing he had ever endured: to watch good men die and do nothing.

He was running an errand for Achilles when he found Eurypylus (yoo-RIP-ih-lus).

The Greek captain was limping between the ships, one hand pressed to his thigh, blood black and thick between his fingers. Sweat poured down his face. Every step was a separate act of will. Yet his mind was clear, and when he saw Patroclus, he grasped him like a drowning man.

"Patroclus," he gasped. "There is no hope. The princes are all wounded. Diomedes, Odysseus, Agamemnon. Eurypylus hit. Machaon hit. The Trojans are at the wall. Save me. Take me to your ship. Cut out the arrow. Wash the blood away. You have the herbs that Achilles learned from

Chiron. Use them."

Patroclus looked towards Nestor's ships, where Achilles had sent him to learn who the wounded man was that Nestor carried. Then he looked at Eurypylus, whose legs were buckling beneath him.

"I was sent on an errand," he said. "But I will not leave you like this."

He put his arm around Eurypylus's waist and half-carried, half-dragged him to the nearest shelter. A servant spread ox-hides on the ground. Patroclus laid the wounded man down and looked at the wound: a ragged tear in the thigh where Paris's arrow had punched through, the flesh purple and swollen around the entry point. He took out his knife, its blade catching the light from the entrance, and cut the bronze arrowhead free. Eurypylus bit down on a leather strap and made no sound, though his whole body went rigid with the pain of it.

Patroclus washed the black blood away with warm water, again and again, until the wound ran clean and pink. Then he crushed the bitter herb between his palms, releasing its sharp scent, and pressed it to the torn flesh. The herb was one Chiron the centaur had taught Achilles, and Achilles had taught Patroclus. It killed pain on contact. The wound dried. The bleeding stopped.

Eurypylus's breathing slowed. His eyes, which had been wide with agony, softened into something like rest.

"The Greeks needed you as a healer long ago," he murmured. "But we need you more as a fighter now."

Patroclus said nothing. He knew.

When Eurypylus was stable, Patroclus continued on his errand.

He found Nestor (NES-tor) in his tent, seated with Machaon (mah-KAY-on), the wounded healer. A woman named Hecamede (hek-AM-eh-dee), whom Nestor had taken as a prize from Tenedos, was mixing them a restorative drink of Pramnian wine, grated goat's cheese, and barley meal. She moved like a goddess among the old man's treasures: the bronze cups, the tables with cyanus feet, the drinking vessel studded with golden doves that Nestor had brought from home and which no other man could lift when full.

When Nestor saw Patroclus in the doorway, he sprang up.

"Come in! Sit! Eat with us!"

"I cannot stay," Patroclus said. "Achilles sent me to learn who you carried from the field. I see now that it is Machaon. I must return."

Nestor's face changed. The warmth drained from it, replaced by something harder and sadder.

"Why does Achilles care now?" the old man asked. "He has ignored our suffering. He has let our best men fall. Diomedes lies wounded. Odysseus bleeds. Agamemnon's arm is pierced through. Eurypylus took an arrow in the thigh. Machaon sits here beside me, and the physician Podalirius is wounded too. Our healers need healing. Our fighters cannot fight. And Achilles asks who it was I carried away?"

Patroclus stood silent, ashamed without knowing precisely why.

"I am old, Patroclus. Older than you can imagine. I have seen three generations of men grow up and die in Pylos. But there was a time when I was young, and the gods gave me strength that I have not felt in fifty years."

Nestor's voice grew distant, carrying itself back across the decades.

"There was a cattle raid, a quarrel between Pylos and Elis. I was a young man, but my father Neleus would not let me arm. He hid my horses. He said I was too young for war. But Athena gave me strength even without armour. I fought on foot among the horsemen, and I was the first to kill my man: Mulius, the son-in-law of King Augeas. I took his chariot and drove it into the enemy ranks. Fifty chariots I captured that day, Patroclus. Fifty pairs of men bit the dust before my spear. I would have killed the Moliones too, sons of Actor, but Poseidon hid them in mist and bore them away."

He paused, his eyes bright with the memory of glory.

"Such was I, once. But Achilles keeps all his strength for himself. He will rue it. The host is being cut to pieces around him."

Then Nestor leaned forward, and his voice dropped to something almost intimate, almost conspiratorial.

"Do you remember, Patroclus, the day your father Menoetius (men-EE-shus) sent you to Agamemnon? Odysseus and I were in the house of Peleus that day, recruiting for the war. We found your father and you, and Achilles, and the old knight Peleus in the courtyard, sacrificing to Zeus. You were busy cutting up the heifer. After we had eaten, your father took you aside. I heard what he said."

Patroclus went very still.

"My son," Menoetius said, "Achilles is nobler born than you, and stronger. But you are older. Counsel him wisely. Guide him. He will follow your advice, if you give it with love." That is what your father charged you with, Patroclus. To be the voice of reason to Achilles's passion. Have you forgotten?"

Patroclus's eyes were wet.

"Even now," Nestor continued, pressing gently but relentlessly, "go to him. Speak to him. Perhaps heaven will help you move his heart. If he fears some oracle from his mother, then let him send you. Let you go into battle wearing his armour. Let the Myrmidons follow you. The Trojans would think you were Achilles himself. The Greeks would have time to breathe. You are fresh. The enemy is tired. You could drive them back from the ships."

The seed was planted. It was a terrible seed, and it would grow into the darkest flower in all of Greek poetry. But Patroclus did not know that yet. He only knew that Nestor's words had awakened something in him that had been sleeping for too long: the desire to act.

"I must go," Patroclus whispered.

And he ran.

The journey back was worse than the journey out.

He ran along the line of ships, and everywhere he looked, he saw the wreck of the Greek army. Wounded men were being carried past him on makeshift stretchers of shields and cloaks, their groans barely human. Dead men were being dragged from the field by their heels, stripped of armour they no longer needed. Soldiers sat on the ground with blank faces, too exhausted to weep, staring at their own hands as if wondering how those hands had failed them. The wall still stood in places, but the Trojans were pouring through the breach that Hector had made, and the sound of hand-to-hand fighting came from somewhere near the ships themselves. A man Patroclus did not recognise ran past him, screaming words that made no sense, his eyes fixed on something no one else could see.

He passed the place where Odysseus's ships were drawn up, the assembly ground where captains had once debated in orderly council, the altars to the gods where sacrifices had been offered with confidence and hope. Everything seemed fragile now, as if the whole Greek expedition might collapse into the sea before nightfall, as if the ten years of war had been for nothing.

And then he reached Achilles's tent.

The Myrmidons were there, the finest fighters in Greece, and they were doing nothing. Some sat sharpening swords that did not need sharpening, the rhythmic scrape of stone on bronze the only sound they made. Others dined for small prizes, betting copper rings and ivory knucklebones, though their hearts were not in it. Most simply stared at the ground, listening to the battle rage beyond the wall and knowing they should be in it. Younger men looked to their elders, waiting for an order that did not come. Veterans who had stormed walls and broken ranks sat with their spears across their knees, their faces closed and bitter. Their captain had withdrawn, and so they withdrew with him, bound by a loyalty that was now their prison. They were the army of the absent man, and their absence from the fight was a wound the Greeks could not staunch.

Patroclus found Achilles beside the cooking fire, a strange and terrible stillness about him. Automedon (aw-TOM-eh-don) held a spit of meat. Alcimus (AL-sih-mus) tended the coals. Achilles looked up when Patroclus entered, and his face changed instantly.

"You are weeping," Achilles said.

Patroclus had not realized it until that moment, but tears were streaming down his face. He tried to speak and could not. He had meant to deliver Nestor's message, to relay what he had seen and heard, to make a reasoned argument. But the sight of the camp, the memory of Eurypylus's wound, Nestor's words about his father, the idle Myrmidons, the distant screaming, all of it rose up in his throat and choked him.

"Patroclus." Achilles's voice was sharp now, worried. "What has happened? Are they weeping because of me? Has someone died? Tell me."

And Patroclus, weeping, made his plea.

"Achilles, greatest of the Greeks, do not be angry with me. The Greeks are in agony. Our best men are wounded: Diomedes, Odysseus, Agamemnon, Eurypylus, Machaon. The Trojans are at the ships. Hector has broken through the wall. He will burn the fleet, and we will all die here. I saw Eurypylus bleeding by the hull of your own ship, and I carried him to shelter. I cut the arrow from his thigh myself. He told me there is no hope left. None. If you will not fight, if some oracle holds you back, then at least let me go. Give me your armour. Let me lead the Myrmidons. Let the Trojans think it is you. Even a feint would save them."

He fell silent, breathing hard, tears on his cheeks, waiting for an answer that would decide everything.

### MYTHOLOGY NOTE

The relationship between Achilles and Patroclus is the emotional centre of the Iliad, and it has been interpreted in many ways across the centuries. In Homer's version, they are clearly "the dearest of friends," but later Greek writers, including Plato, described them as lovers. The exact nature of their bond matters less than its depth: each man defines himself through the other. Achilles without Patroclus is rage without restraint; Patroclus without Achilles is compassion without protection. When Patroclus begs to borrow the armour, he is stepping across an invisible line from helper to replacement, from companion to sacrifice.

### FOOTNOTES

Chiron's herbs: The healing herbs that Patroclus uses on Eurypylus represent one of the most detailed medical passages in the Iliad. Bronze Age Greek medicine combined practical wound care (washing, bandaging, poultices) with knowledge inherited from the centaur Chiron, who was the legendary tutor of both Achilles and Asclepius (Machaon's father). The specific herb described, likely a kind of yarrow or achillea, was known in the ancient world for its styptic (blood-stopping) and analgesic properties. Archaeological evidence from Mycenaean sites confirms that wound treatment using herbal remedies was practiced in Bronze Age Greece.

### QUESTIONS FOR REFLECTION

Nestor's speech to Patroclus is one of the most influential conversations in Western literature. Is Nestor genuinely trying to help, or is he manipulative? Does it matter whether his intentions are good if the result is disaster?

Patroclus weeps openly while begging Achilles to let him fight. In ancient Greek culture, weeping was not seen as unmanly. What does Patroclus's tears tell us about his character? Is he motivated by compassion, by duty to his father, or by something else?

Achilles has drawn a line: he will fight only when Hector reaches his ships. In this chapter, Hector has broken through the wall. Does Achilles's condition justify his continued refusal? At what point does pride become cruelty?

## CHAPTER 13: SARPEDON FALLS

Achilles (ah-KILL-eez) looked at his friend, really looked at him, and saw a grief that mirrored his own.

Patroclus stood weeping in the firelight, tears cutting clean tracks through the dust on his face, his hands trembling. He had begged to wear Achilles's armour. He had begged to lead the Myrmidons. Behind him, through the open flap of the tent, the glow of actual fire was rising from the Greek ships. Hector had done what Agamemnon's bribes, Odysseus's cunning, Phoenix's stories, and Ajax's blunt honesty could not: he had brought the war to Achilles's doorstep.

"Patroclus," Achilles said slowly, "you are not yourself. Or perhaps you are more yourself than you have ever been. I do not know which it is."

He rose. The great chest that Thetis (THEE-tis) had given him, silver-footed, filled with shirts and cloaks and rugs, stood against the wall of the tent. From it Achilles drew the armour that his divine mother had commissioned. The breastplate, richly inlaid with gold and tin. The greaves fitted with silver clasps. The bronze sword on its baldric. The massive shield that covered a man from chin to ankle. And the helmet, horse-hair crest nodding like a living thing.

"Put these on," Achilles said.

Patroclus's hands moved with a terrible eagerness. The greaves clasped around his calves. The breastplate settled on his shoulders; it was made for Achilles's broader frame, but it fit well enough. The sword hung at his hip. The helmet transformed his face into something godlike and remote. When he lifted the shield, he became a figure from legend: Achilles in all but the spear, and that Achilles kept for himself. The ashen shaft from Mount Pelion, cut by Chiron the centaur. No other man could wield it.

"Listen to me." Achilles gripped his friend's shoulders, hard enough to leave marks. "Drive the Trojans from the ships. That is all. Burn their fire out. Give the Greeks room to breathe. Then come back. Even if Zeus himself offers you Troy on a platter, turn around and come back. Do not press on towards the city. Do not fight the Trojans on the open plain. Apollo loves them, and he will strike you down without warning. Do not make me regret this."

Patroclus met his eyes through the eyeholes of the divine helmet. "I hear you."

But the gods were already listening, and Zeus, who hears all prayers, granted only half of Achilles's plea.

Automedon (aw-TOM-eh-don) yoked the horses: Xanthus (ZAN-thus) and Balius (BAL-ee- us), the immortal steeds born from the west wind and the harpy Podarge, swift as thought itself. Beside them in the traces went mortal Pedasus (PED-a-sus), a horse of blood and bone who could somehow keep pace with divine stock. Fifty ships Achilles had brought to Troy, fifty men in each, and now all five companies of the Myrmidons (MER-mi-dons) surged forward with a roar.

Patroclus mounted the chariot, and Automedon took the reins. The Myrmidons poured from their camp like hornets whose nest had been struck: furious, swarming, and irresistible. They had sat idle for too long, sharpening swords that did not need sharpening, listening to the sounds of battle while their captain sulked. Now they had purpose, and they had a leader who looked like the

greatest warrior alive.

The Trojans saw the armour first. The flash of divine bronze in the late afternoon sun. The horse-hair crest cutting through the smoke. They saw the shield that no mortal smith could make, and they heard the battle cry of fifty hardened killers at full charge. And they did what any army would do when confronted with a legend they thought had abandoned the field.

They broke.

It was Pyraechmes (py-REK-meez) who fell first, leader of the Paeonians (pee-OH-nee-ans), a captain from the broad river Axius. Patroclus's spear caught him in the right shoulder, spinning him from his chariot like a child's toy. His men scattered, leaderless, and the fire that Hector had set at Protesilaus's (proh-teh-si-LAY-us) ship guttered and died under a rain of sand and sea water.

The Greeks took their first full breath in hours.

Patroclus drove on. Areilycus went down, thigh pierced clean through. Menelaus (men-eh-LAY-us) killed Thoas. Antilochus (an-TIL-oh-kus), Nestor's son, drove his spear through

Atymnius's throat, and when the boy's brother Maris rushed to avenge him, Thrasymedes (thras-ih-MEE-deez) struck him down in turn. The two sons of Amisodorus, who had once raised the monstrous Chimaera (ky-MEER-a), fell side by side. Peneleos killed Lycon with such force that his head hung from his neck by nothing but skin. Meriones (meh-RYE-oh- neez) caught Acamas mounting his chariot and drove a spear through his shoulder.

The Trojans streamed back from the ships in a mob of terror, chariots tangling, horses screaming, men trampling their own comrades in their desperation to escape the apparition that wore Achilles's face.

But one man did not run.

Sarpedon (sar-PEE-don) was the son of Zeus. That is the first thing you must understand about him. He was born from the king of gods and a mortal woman named Laodamia, and he ruled Lycia (LISH-ee-a), a kingdom far to the east across the wine-dark sea. He had crossed that sea to fight for Troy, not because he loved Paris or admired Hector, but because of something older and more binding: the sacred ties of guest-friendship, *xenia*, that bound kings to one another across generations.

He watched the Trojans streaming past him in rout, and his heart burned with shame.

"Glaucus!" he called to his companion. "Why do we hold the place of honour in Lycia? Why do men serve us the finest cuts and keep our cups full? Why do they look at us as if we were gods? Because we stand in front of them when the spears fly. That is the bargain. If we could live forever, I would not press you forward now. But no man escapes death: not the shepherd, not the king, not the son of Zeus himself. Come. Let us give them something to sing about."

Glaucus heard him. The two Lycian princes stepped forward together, and their warriors closed around them in a wall of bronze.

On Mount Ida, Zeus saw his son preparing to face the man who wore Achilles's armour. And the king of gods wept tears of blood.

"Hera," he said to his wife, "Sarpedon will die today. Patroclus will kill him. I am in two minds: snatch him from the field and set him down alive in Lycia, or let him fall in glory."

Hera's voice was gentle, gentler than it usually was when she spoke of Trojans. "My husband, you know the law. If you save Sarpedon, every god will want to save his mortal son. There are half-gods fighting all across this plain. You cannot save them all. Let him fall. Let him have his glory. Then send Sleep and Death to bear him home to Lycia, where his brothers will bury him with honour."

Zeus bowed his immortal head. A rain of blood fell upon the Trojan plain, the tears of a father who could not save his child.

#### MYTHOLOGY NOTE

The death of Sarpedon is one of the most moving scenes in the Iliad because it shows Zeus at his most human. Even the king of gods must bow to fate, moira, the iron law that governs all beings, mortal and divine alike. Sarpedon's speech to Glaucus about why they fight is justly famous: it captures the Bronze Age warrior ethic in its purest form. Honour (timê) is not given freely; it must be earned through courage in the face of certain death. The image of Sleep and Death bearing Sarpedon's body home to Lycia became one of the most powerful motifs in Greek art, appearing on countless vases and later inspiring the poet Shelley's famous line: "Look on my works, ye Mighty, and despair!"

Sarpedon and Patroclus met like eagles on a mountain crag, screaming and tearing.

Sarpedon cast first, but missed Patroclus, but struck mortal Pedasus in the shoulder. The horse screamed and fell in the dust, his life pouring out through the wound. Automedon slashed the traces with a single flashing stroke, and the immortal horses righted themselves, wild but unharmed.

Sarpedon cast again, and missed again, the spear passing over Patroclus's left shoulder.

Then Patroclus threw. The spear flew true. It struck Sarpedon where the midriff wraps the beating heart, and the son of Zeus fell like an oak that woodsmen have laid their axes to: slowly, heavily, with a sound like thunder. He clutched at the bloodied dust and called out one last time to Glaucus:

"Fight for me. Save my armour. My name must not be dishonoured."

Then darkness covered his eyes.

Glaucus was already wounded, an arrow from Teucer had torn his shoulder earlier, during the assault on the wall. He could barely lift his arm. But when he saw Sarpedon fall, something broke open in him. He prayed to Apollo (ah-POL-oh), far-shooter, god of healing and plague alike.

"Heal me," he begged. "Give me strength to fight for Sarpedon's body."

Apollo heard. The pain drained from Glaucus's shoulder. The black blood ceased to flow. He strode among the Lycian captains, rousing them to battle, then ran to Hector himself.

"Sarpedon is fallen!" he cried. "The bulwark of Lycia is gone, and the Myrmidons will strip him if you do not come. Where are the allies who have bled for your city? Will you let them die unavenged?"

Hector needed no second urging. He called his Trojans to the fight, and the battle over Sarpedon's body became a storm of bronze. Hector killed Epeigeus (eh-PY-jee-us), a

Myrmidon who had fled his own city after killing a kinsman and taken refuge with Peleus; a stone to the head as he tried to seize Sarpedon's corpse. Patroclus avenged him with a stone of his own, crushing Sthenelaus (sthen-eh-LAY-us) where his neck met his spine.

The fighting seesawed back and forth. But Zeus, watching from Ida, had already decided how this day would end. First he made Hector turn faint-hearted and retreat. The Trojans fell back. The Greeks stripped Sarpedon's armour and would have taken the body too, but Zeus sent Apollo to retrieve his son. The god washed Sarpedon in the river, anointed him with ambrosia, wrapped him in immortal garments, and handed him to Sleep and Death, twin brothers with wings like dark birds, who carried him gently home across the sea to Lycia.

He would never see Troy again. But he would be buried among his own people, with a pillar and a mound that sailors would point to for generations.

Meanwhile, the battle raged on. And Patroclus, brave, gentle, impulsive Patroclus, forgot Achilles's warning.

| Hero     | Divine Parent         | Mortal Parent           | Side        |
|----------|-----------------------|-------------------------|-------------|
| Achilles | Thetis (sea goddess)  | Peleus (king of Phthia) | Greek       |
| Sarpedon | Zeus (king of gods)   | Laodamia                | Trojan ally |
| Aeneas   | Aphrodite (goddess of | Anchises                | Trojan      |

love)

| Helen    | Zeus (in swan form)        | Leda   | Trojan (by marriage) |
|----------|----------------------------|--------|----------------------|
| Diomedes | Athena (indirectly; divine | Tydeus | Greek                |

protection)

| Automedon | (none) | (none)      | Greek       |
|-----------|--------|-------------|-------------|
| Glaucus   | (none) | Hippolochus | Trojan ally |
| Patroclus | (none) | Menoetius   | Greek       |

Three times Patroclus charged the Trojan lines. Three times he killed nine men in each rush: twenty-seven fathers, brothers, sons in the space of a few desperate minutes. The Trojans broke and ran, and Patroclus pursued them with a fury that was not entirely his own. Zeus had put that fire in his heart, just as he would later take it away.

He was heading for the walls of Troy itself. He had forgotten everything: the warnings, the limits, the promise he made to the man who loved him most in all the world. He was no longer playing Achilles's part. He believed he was Achilles, invincible, unstoppable, a force of nature rather than a mortal man.

This is what the Greeks called hubris, not mere pride, but the fatal overreaching that forgets a man's proper place. The gods do not forgive it.

And on the walls of Troy, Apollo waited.

## FOOTNOTES

The Myrmidon host: Achilles commanded fifty ships, each with fifty oarsmen, making his personal force approximately 2,500 men, a substantial army within the larger Greek coalition. The Myrmidons were legendary for their loyalty and discipline, said to have been transformed from ants (*myrmex* in Greek) into men by Zeus to populate the kingdom of Aeacus, Achilles's grandfather. Their name has entered English as "myrmidon," meaning a faithful follower who executes orders without question.

Sarpedon and Bronze Age Lycia: Sarpedon's kingdom of Lycia, in what is now southwestern Turkey, was a real historical entity that appears in Hittite records as Lukka. The Lycians were among Troy's most important allies, and archaeological evidence suggests they were a significant sea power in the Late Bronze Age. Sarpedon's burial, with a mound and pillar, reflects actual Lycian funerary practices, which involved raising distinctive pillar-tombs that can still be seen in the region today.

## QUESTIONS FOR REFLECTION

Achilles warns Patroclus three times not to go too far. Patroclus agrees each time. What causes him to forget these warnings in the heat of battle: divine influence, his own nature, or the desperation of the moment?

Zeus weeps blood for his son Sarpedon but does not save him. What does this tell us about the rules that even gods must follow? Is fate (*moira*) a comfort or a cruelty?

Sarpedon says that princes must fight because they receive the best portions at table. Is this a fair bargain: glory in exchange for a shorter life? Would you accept it?

## CHAPTER 14: PATROCLUS'S LAST HOUR

Patroclus (pah-TROH-klus) had become something more than mortal. Or that is what he believed.

He drove the Trojans back from the ships with the fury of a storm wind that strips the oaks bare. Adrestus fell before him. Autonus, Echeclus, Perimus son of Megas, Epistor, Melanippus. They went down like wheat before the scythe. Elasmus, Mulius, Pylartes. Nine names. Nine households that would weep that night. The Myrmidons followed him with a courage they had not felt in weeks, and the Greeks, watching from the ships, found their voices again. The tide had turned. The impossible had happened.

Patroclus pressed forward. The walls of Troy rose before him, stone and timber, the great Scaean (SKEE-an) Gates looming like the entrance to the underworld itself. He charged at an angle of the wall. Once. Twice. A third time. And each time, a figure met him on the battlements: a young warrior, shining, beautiful, terrible, who struck his shield with hands that were not human hands.

The fourth time, the god spoke.

"Draw back, Patroclus." Apollo's (ah-POL-oh) voice was the sound of a bowstring drawn to breaking. "It is not your fate to sack this city. Not yours. Not Achilles's. No Greek will enter through these gates while I stand watch. Go back."

Patroclus stumbled away, dazzled, and for a moment, the briefest moment, reason returned to him. He should retreat. He had saved the ships. That was what Achilles had asked. That was all.

But reason did not last.

#### MYTHOLOGY NOTE

Patroclus's fatal charge towards Troy's walls represents one of the oldest and most important concepts in Greek thought: hubris, the overreaching pride that leads a mortal to forget his proper place. The Greeks did not see hubris as simple arrogance; it was a cosmic crime, a disruption of the natural order that demanded divine punishment. Patroclus is not punished for being bad; he is punished for being too good, for too long. His aristeia, his moment of supreme glory, becomes the very instrument of his destruction. This paradox lies at the heart of Greek tragedy.

Meanwhile, inside the Scaean Gates, Hector (HEK-tor) hesitated. His horses stamped and fretted. He could hear the battle turning outside: the Greek war cry swelling, the Trojan shouts thinning and breaking. He was weighing whether to order a retreat inside the walls or to charge out again when Apollo came to him. The god wore the shape of Asius (AH-see-us), Hector's uncle, brother of Hecuba (HEK-yoo-ba).

"Why have you stopped fighting?" the false Asius demanded. "Drive straight at Patroclus. Apollo himself will grant you victory over him."

Hector needed no more. He signaled Cebriones (seh-bree-OH-nee-z), his bastard half- brother, to take the reins, and the chariot burst from the gates like a thunderbolt.

Patroclus saw Hector coming. He stood his ground beside the corpse of a Trojan he had already killed. Cebriones, as it happened, struck by a stone from Patroclus's own hand, tumbling from Hector's chariot like a diver. Patroclus had made a bitter jest about it: "Look how gracefully he dives. If we were at sea, he could earn his keep bringing up oysters."

Now that jest seemed to belong to another lifetime.

The two men, Hector of Troy and Patroclus of Opus, fought over Cebriones's body like lions over a stag. Back and forth they surged, neither giving ground, while around them the battle raged in all its confusion of dust and screams and clashing bronze. Spears flew in both directions. Stones cracked against shields with a sound like splitting wood. A Lycian captain went down beside Patroclus, then a Greek from Ormenius (or-MEE-nee-us), then two more Trojans whose names

were lost in the uproar. Patroclus called to the two Ajaxes,

and they came like towers walking, clearing a space around him with their great shields. Hector rallied his Trojans, pressing forward with a fury that matched Patroclus's own. Men fell on every side, and the air was so thick with dust that a man could not see his own shield.

Patroclus killed three times nine men in his fury: twenty-seven in that single charge. He was magnificent. He was doomed.

The gods had given him power beyond his nature, and now they were preparing to take it back.

For Zeus had already decided. The cloud-gatherer, watching from Ida, weighed the fates in his mind. Patroclus would die. But first he would drive the Trojans back, kill more of them, terrify them with the memory of this day. Then Apollo would strike. Then a mortal man would finish the work.

It was always the way with the gods. They prepared the victim. A human hand delivered the blow.

The sun was descending towards the western sea when it happened.

Patroclus had just killed his ninth man of the third wave. He was exhausted. Divine fire or no, he was still a man inside that god-made armour, and his limbs were heavy, his mouth dry, his vision beginning to blur at the edges. He turned to rally the Myrmidons for another push.

He did not see Apollo come up behind him.

The god was shrouded in darkness, so no mortal could have seen him. He struck Patroclus between the shoulders with the flat of his divine hand. The blow did not pierce. It did not need to. Patroclus's eyes filled with light and dizziness. His legs went numb. The world spun.

Then Apollo tore the helmet from Patroclus's head. That divine helmet, forged by Hephaestus (heh-FES-tus) for Achilles, which had never known defeat. It went rolling under the feet of the fighting men, its horse-hair plume trampled into blood and dust. The breastplate next: the clasps came undone beneath Apollo's fingers. The shield fell. The sword belt parted. Piece by piece, the god stripped away the protection of the forge, until Patroclus stood bare, dazed, unarmed, his ordinary tunic soaked with sweat and dust.

The great spear of Pelion, which he could not wield properly, snapped in his hands.

He tried to stumble back towards his own lines. But Euphorbus (yoo-FOR-bus) was waiting.

Euphorbus, son of Panthous, was the finest spearman of his generation. He had already unhorsed twenty men that day. He saw Patroclus staggering, defenseless, and he struck from behind, and drove his spear into Patroclus's back between the shoulder blades, where the spine meets the ribs.

Patroclus reeled. The wound was terrible. He collapsed against the shoulder of a comrade, fighting for breath, fighting for balance, knowing with a sudden cold clarity that his time had come.

And then Hector was upon him.

Hector saw the wounded man. He saw the armour, Achilles's armour, lying scattered on the ground. He understood in an instant what had happened, what trick the Greeks had played, and

fury seized him. He drove his spear into Patroclus's belly.

Patroclus fell.

The great battle paused. Men on both sides stopped, as if a god had frozen them in place. The Myrmidons watched their leader, their beloved leader, sink to the bloody earth. The Trojans could not believe it. This man who had driven them like sheep, who had killed Sarpedon and thirty more, who had seemed invincible. He fell like any other man. The armour had been a lie. The god inside it was just a mortal after all.

Hector stood over him, one foot on his chest, wrenching the spear free.

"Patroclus," he said, and there was no cruelty in his voice, only the hard satisfaction of a man who has won a desperate fight. "You thought you would sack our city. You thought you would take our women captive. Fool. Hector defends them. Hector and his horses. You should have listened to Achilles when he told you not to come back without my blood on your hands."

Patroclus's breath came in shallow gasps. Blood bubbled at his lips. But his mind was clear, clearer than it had been since he first put on the armour. He looked up at Hector, and in that gaze there was no fear. Only pity.

"Boast while you can, Hector." His voice was barely a whisper, but it carried. "Zeus and Apollo gave you this victory. They stripped me and handed me to you. Twenty men like you could not have beaten me otherwise."

He paused, gathering the last of his strength. The light was fading from the edges of his vision. But he had words left, and they were words that would haunt Hector for the rest of his short life.

"Hear my prophecy, son of Priam. Your own death stands at your shoulder. You will not live to see the leaves fall. Achilles will kill you. He will kill you here, on this plain, and you will die knowing that you brought it on yourself the moment you struck me down."

Hector's face went pale. But he mastered himself.

"Perhaps," he said. "But I will have my glory first."

He stripped the armour from Patroclus's body: the greaves, the breastplate, the sword. The armour that Thetis had given to Peleus, that Peleus had given to Achilles, that Achilles had given to his dearest friend. Hector put it on there, in the middle of the battlefield, while men watched from both sides. It fit him. The gods made it fit.

He turned to pursue Automedon, to kill Achilles's charioteer as well, but the immortal horses, Xanthus and Balius, bore their driver away with a speed no mortal steeds could match.

Patroclus lay alone on the plain. Around him, the battle began again, the Greeks and Trojans surging back and forth over the ground where he had fallen, as if the earth itself were fighting to claim him. Menelaus (men-eh-LAY-us), yellow-haired, was the first to reach the body. He stood over it like a cow lowing over her first calf, his round shield held before him, his spear ready to kill any man who approached. But the Trojan onslaught was ferocious. Hector, wearing Achilles's stolen armour, seemed to have doubled in strength and fury.

Hector seized Patroclus by the feet and tried to drag him towards the Trojan lines, screaming to his men to help him strip the corpse. The two Ajaxes beat him back with a storm of spears. Three times Hector grabbed the body. Three times the Greeks drove him away. Each time Hector retreated, he returned with more Trojans at his back, more desperate to claim the prize. Each time the Greeks threw him back, they lost good men doing it.

But the armour was gone. Hector wore it now. And that, in the end, was what mattered most. The man who had worn it lay naked on the earth, his tunic torn, his body exposed to the sky he would never see again. And somewhere, on a headland by the sea, a mother felt her heart break before she knew why.

| Victim                      | Location of Wound | Circumstance                        |
|-----------------------------|-------------------|-------------------------------------|
| Pyraechmes (Ch. 13)         | Right shoulder    | First kill; routed the Paeonians    |
| Areilycus                   | Thigh             | Turning to flee                     |
| Atymnius                    | Throat            | Killed by Antilochus; Maris avenged |
| Maris                       | Shoulder          | Avenging his brother                |
| Thrasymedes's kill          | (n/a)             | Brother of Atymnius                 |
| Pronous                     | Chest             | Exposed above shield rim            |
| Thestor son of Enops        | Jaw               | Speared while dazed in chariot      |
| Erylaus                     | Head              | Crushed with a stone                |
| Erymas, Amphoterus, Epaltes | (n/a)             | Named victims in the rout           |
| Tlepolemus, Echius          | (n/a)             | Killed in the press                 |
| Pyris, Ipheus, Euippus      | (n/a)             | Lycian warriors                     |
| Polymelus son of Argeas     | (n/a)             | Cut off from the city               |
| Sarpedon                    | Heart             | The great duel; son of Zeus         |
| Thrasymedus                 | Belly             | Sarpedon's squire                   |
| Epeigeus                    | Head              | Hector's stone; avenging Sarpedon   |
| Sthenelaus                  | Neck              | Stone-crushed by Patroclus          |
| Cebriones                   | Forehead          | Hector's charioteer; stone strike   |
| Adrestus, Autonous          | (n/a)             | First of the third wave             |
| Echeclus, Perimus           | (n/a)             | Sons of Megas                       |
| Epistor, Melanippus         | (n/a)             | Trojan allies                       |
| Elasus, Mulius, Pylartes    | (n/a)             | Final named kills                   |

## FOOTNOTES

The stripping of armour in Homeric warfare: To take a dead man's armour was the highest form of honour in Bronze Age combat. A warrior's panoply: breastplate, greaves, helmet, shield, and weapons, represented not only his wealth but his identity. When Hector strips Patroclus, he is claiming more than metal; he is claiming symbolic victory over Achilles himself. This practice was so central to heroic culture that the Greek word for "spoils" (geras) is the same word used for the honour-prize that started the quarrel between Achilles and Agamemnon.

Euphorbus and the multiple causes of death: Homer assigns Patroclus's death to three agents: Apollo (divine), Euphorbus (the first wound), and Hector (the killing blow). This is not poetic excess. It reflects the Greek understanding that significant events have multiple causes, both divine and human. Patroclus himself acknowledges this hierarchy in his dying words: "Fate and the son of Leto have overpowered me, and among mortal men Euphorbus; you are yourself third only in the killing of me." No single person bears full blame, yet all share in it.

### QUESTIONS FOR REFLECTION

Patroclus dies with a prophecy on his lips rather than a curse. Why does he warn Hector instead of simply condemning him? What does this tell us about Patroclus's character, even in his final moments?

Apollo strips Patroclus's armour piece by piece before any mortal touches him. What does this detail suggest about the role of the gods in human affairs? Are the gods unfair, or are they simply enforcing cosmic rules?

Hector puts on Achilles's armour in the middle of the battlefield. Is this an act of triumph, or does it carry an element of foreboding? What does it mean to wear another man's identity?

*Source note © 2026 Mythopouch. All rights reserved. Mythopouch™ is a trademark of Mythopouch. This retelling is original educational wording by Mythopouch, based on Homer's Iliad (about 750 BCE). A public-domain English witness used for checking is Samuel Butler's translation (1898). This file is not that translation and not the Greek. Written for readers aged 15 and up. [www.mythopouch.com](http://www.mythopouch.com)*