

Book 18

So these fought on in the likeness of blazing fire;
but swift-footed Antilochos came to Achilles as messenger,
and found him in front of his high-sterned ships, his mind
foreboding what indeed had already been fulfilled.
Deeply vexed, he addressed his own proud spirit: “Ah me, 5
why yet again are the long-haired Achaians being driven
over the plain, panic-stricken, back to their ships?
May the gods not be fulfilling that grim grief for my heart
spelled out to me once by my mother, when she told me
that the very best of the Myrmidons, while I still lived, 10
would flee the light of the sun, at the Trojans’ hands!
It must be that he’s dead, Menoitios’s valiant son!
The fool! I told him, when he’d beaten the fierce fire back,
to return to the ships, not match his strength with Hektōr’s.”

While he was reflecting thus, in his mind and heart, 15
the son of illustrious Nestōr came into his presence
shedding hot tears, and announced his unhappy message:
“Alas, son of warlike Pēleus, painful indeed
is the news you must hear, of what never should have been—
Patroklos lies dead, and they’re fighting over his body, 20
his naked body: his armor bright-helmeted Hektōr holds.”

So he spoke: a black cloud of grief closed over Achilles.
With both hands he gathered up the dark grimy dust,
scattered it over his head, befouled his handsome features,
and on his fragrant tunic the black ash settled. 25
There stretched in the dust, great in his greatness he lay;
with his own hands he tore and defiled his hair.
Those maidservants won as spoils by Achilles and Patroklos
shrieked aloud in their heartfelt anguish, ran out of doors,
stood around warlike Achilles, all with their hands 30
beat on their breasts, the limbs of all were weakened.
Antilochos, opposite them, lamented, shedding tears—
and grasped the hands of Achilles, whose heartfelt groans

made Antilochos fear he might cut his throat with his knife.
 So terrible was his outcry, his lady mother heard him, 35
 ensconced in the sea's depths, beside the Old Man, her father,
 and shrieked in her turn, and the goddesses gathered round her,
 all of Nereus's daughters there were in the sea's depths.
 Thither came Glaukē and Thaleia, Kymodokē,
 Nēsaia, Speiō, and Thoē, and ox-eyed Haliē, 40
 Kymothoē and Aktaia, along with Limnōreia,
 Melitē and Iaira, Agauē, Amphithoē,
 Dōtō and Prōtō, Dyamenē and Pherousa,
 Dexamenē and Amphinomē and Kallianeira,
 Dōris and Panopē and far-famed Galateia, 45
 Nēmertēs, Aspeudēs, and Kallianassa.
 With these also came Klyménē, Ianeira, and Ianassa,
 Maira and Ōreithyia and fair-tressed Amatheia,
 and other Nēreïds from elsewhere in the sea's depths;
 and with them the bright cave was filled, and all alike 50
 beat their breasts, and their lamentation was led by Thetis:
 "Listen, my Nēreïd sisters, that one and all you may hear
 and know well the sum of the sorrows within my heart!
 Ah, wretch that I am, most miserable in my splendid offspring!
 A son indeed I bore, incomparable and mighty, 55
 preeminent among heroes: like a sapling he shot up,
 and when, like a tree on an orchard knoll, I'd reared him,
 I sent him out to Ilion in the curved ships, to fight
 the Trojans; but now I'll never welcome him back
 to his home, he'll never return to the house of Pēleus! 60
 Now, even while he still lives and sees the sunlight,
 he has sorrow, nor can I be of help by going to him;
 but go I will, to see my dear child, and learn what grief
 has come upon him while he's still keeping out of the war."
 So saying, she left the cave, and the nymphs went with her, 65
 shedding tears: on each side of them the waves of the sea
 broke into surf. When they came to rich-soiled Troy they stepped
 out onto the beach one by one, where, in serried ranks,
 the Myrmidons' ships were drawn up round swift Achilles.
 As he groaned heavily, his lady mother went to him, 70
 gave a sharp cry, then cradled the head of her son
 in her arms, and, lamenting, addressed him with winged words:

“Why are you weeping, child? What grief has touched your heart?
Tell me, don’t hide it! What you wanted has been fulfilled
by Zeus, what you earlier prayed for, hands uplifted— 75
that all the Achaians’ sons should be huddled by their ships,
in desperate need of you, enduring shameful treatment.”

To her, sighing deeply, swift-footed Achilles replied:
“Mother, all this indeed the Olympian managed for me,
but what joy have I from it, now my dear comrade is dead— 80
Patroklos, whom I honored above all other comrades,
as I would my own life? Him I’ve lost, while his armor
Hektōr stripped when he’d killed him—a marvel to look at,
fine gear, that the gods gave to Pēleus as glorious gifts
the day they delivered you into the bed of a mortal! 85
Better you’d stayed among the sea’s deathless maidens,
and that Pēleus had brought to his home a mortal bride!
But now there’s measureless grief awaiting you too,
for the death of your son, whom you’ll not welcome home
ever again: my heart won’t let me live on, either, 90
in mankind’s company, unless it happens that Hektōr,
struck down by my spear, shall lose his life first, and pay
for the way he despoiled Patroklos, Menoitios’s son.”

Thetis then answered him, shedding tears: “Oh, my child,
what you say now means that you’re doomed to an early death, 95
since your own fate awaits you very soon after Hektōr’s.”

Deeply moved, swift-footed Achilles replied:
“Let me die very soon, then! Clearly I wasn’t fated to save
my comrade from being killed—far away from his native soil
he perished, in need of me as his protector from harm! 100
So now, since I’ll not return to my own dear fatherland,
nor have been of the slightest help to either Patroklos
or my other comrades—those many destroyed by noble Hektōr—
but sit, a useless burden on earth, here by the ships—
I, who am such as no other bronze-corseleted Achaian 105
is as a fighter, though others may be better in council—
would that strife might perish among both gods and men,
and bitter resentment, that stirs even sensible men
to fury, and, far sweeter than honey dripping down,
increases in men’s breasts like billowing smoke! Thus, lately, 110

did the lord of men, Agamemnōn, arouse my resentment. Still,
 all this, despite our grief, we'll treat as past and done with,
 restraining, because we must, the heart in our breast. So now
 I shall come out, to run down that dear soul's killer,
 Hektōr; my own death I'll accept whenever Zeus 115
 and the other immortal gods decide to bring it on;
 for not even the mighty Hēraklēs could escape death,
 dearest of all though he was to Zeus the son of Kronos,
 but fate overcame him, and Hērē's grim resentment.
 So I too—if indeed there's a like fate's in wait for me— 120
 shall lie when I'm dead. But for now, let me win high renown,
 causing many a one of all those deep-bosomed women—
 Trojan, Dardanian—to wipe tears from their tender cheeks
 with both hands, to keen ceaselessly, to get it into their heads
 that I'd held off too long from battle! So do not try, 125
 though you love me, to stop me fighting: you'll not persuade me.”

Then the goddess, Thetis the silver-footed, replied:
 “Yes, this is certainly true, child: it's no bad thing
 to fend off sheer destruction from hard-pressed comrades.
 But your fine battle gear's in Trojan hands, your armor 130
 of gleaming bronze: bright-helmeted Hektōr himself
 wears it now on his shoulders, flaunts it—but won't, I think,
 glory in it for long, since his own killing's very close.
 Do not, for now, go into the turmoil of battle
 until with your own eyes you see me return here: 135
 I'll be back in the morning at sunrise, bringing with me
 fine new armor for you from the lord Hēphaistos.”

With that
 she turned away from her son, and having left him
 approached her marine sisters, and spoke thus among them:
 “You now go back down into the sea's wide gulf, 140
 call on the Old Man of the Sea, visit our father's house,
 tell him all the news. I myself am off to high Olympos,
 to approach Hēphaistos, famed craftsman, and see if he'll agree
 to furnish my son with new battle gear, fine and gleaming.”

So she spoke: at once they plunged under the sea's waves, 145
 while she, Thetis, the goddess, silver-footed, made her way
 to Olympos, to fetch splendid armor for her beloved son.

Her then her feet took to Olympos; but the Achaians,
with deafening outcry, pursued by Hektōr, killer of men,
came in their flight to the ships and the Hellespont. 150

Nor could these well-greaved Achaians drag Patroklos
out of missile range, corpse though he was, and Achilles' squire,
for now once more Troy's troops and chariots were on him,
and Hektōr, Priam's son, a man of flame-like valor.

Thrice did illustrious Hektōr seize his feet from behind, 155
bent on dragging him off, and yelling to the Trojans,
while thrice the two Aiases, clothed in courage and daring,
beat him back from the corpse—yet, sure of his own prowess,
he'd now make a charge in the fray, and now stand firm,
shouting aloud; but he backed off not one step. 160

Just as there's no way country shepherds can drive off
a tawny lion from a carcass when he's starving hungry,
so the two Aiases could not, prime warriors though they were,
scare Priam's son Hektōr away from the corpse. And now
he'd have dragged it off, and garnered ineffable glory, 165
had not swift Iris, wind-footed, come to Pēleus's son
from Olympos in haste, with a message to arm himself for battle,
sent by Hērē, unknown to Zeus and the other gods.

Now standing beside him she addressed him with winged words:
“Up with you, son of Pēleus, of all men the most fearsome, 170
and rescue Patroklos, on whose account grim fighting
is going on before the ships: men are slaughtering one another,
some striving to defend the fallen warrior's corpse,
while others, the Trojans, are determined to haul him away
from the fighting to windy Ilion. Of them all, illustrious Hektōr 175
is most set on dragging him off, for his heart's bidding him
cut the head from that tender neck, stick it up on a sharp stake!
Up, then, lie here no longer: shame should possess your heart
that Patroklos may become sport for the dogs of Troy—
yours the disgrace, if his body should reach us at all disfigured.” 180

Swift-footed noble Achilles responded to her: “Iris,
goddess, which god was it sent you as messenger to me?”

Swift Iris, wind-footed, made him this reply:
“It was Hērē who sent me, Zeus's far-famed bedfellow—
The high-throned son of Kronos knows nothing about it, nor 185
any other immortal that dwells upon snow-clad Olympos.”

In answer to her then swift-footed Achilles said:
 “But how can I enter the struggle? They have my armor,
 and my mother told me not to arm myself for the fray
 until with my own eyes I see her come back here, since 190
 she promised to bring me fine new armor from Hēphaistos.
 No other man do I know whose famed battle gear I might use,
 except for the shield of Aias, the son of Telamōn—
 but he, I think, will be out himself with the front-line fighters,
 dealing death with his spear in defense of dead Patroklos.” 195

To him again spoke swift Iris, the wind-footed: “We too
 are well aware that the Trojans now have your famous armor!
 Go just as you are to the ditch, show yourself to these Trojans,
 see if they fear you enough to back off from the fighting!
 Let the warlike Achaians’ sons, now worn out, catch their breath 200
 for a little: too brief is the breathing space from battle.”

This said, swift-footed Iris went on her way,
 but Achilles, beloved of Zeus, now stood up, and Athēnē
 around his powerful shoulders arranged the tasseled aegis,
 and about his head she, bright among goddesses, set 205
 a golden cloud, and from him made blaze a shining flame.
 As when smoke rises up to heaven from a city
 on some distant island that enemies are besieging,
 and all day long men contend in hateful warfare
 from the city’s walls, and then when the sun goes down 210
 the beacon fires are lit one after another, their flames
 blazing high for those dwelling round about to observe,
 in the hope that they’ll come in their ships, help fix the trouble,
 so from Achilles’ head the gleam went up to heaven.
 From wall to ditch he went, and stood there, but did not mingle 215
 with the Achaians, respecting his mother’s wise advice.
 There he stood, and shouted—and Athēnē, standing apart,
 gave voice too—arousing vast panic among the Trojans.
 As clear as the trumpet’s note sounds out when a township’s
 encircled by enemies with destruction on their minds, 220
 so clear was the war cry uttered by Aiakos’s grandson: when
 the Trojans heard that brazen voice, and knew its author,
 the spirits of all were confounded. The fine-maned horses
 turned their chariots backwards, sensing trouble ahead;
 their charioteers were in panic when they saw the tireless fire 225

blaze marvelously over the head of Pēleus’s great-hearted son—
 a fire lit and kept shining by the goddess, grey-eyed Athēnē.
 Three great shouts over the ditch did noble Achilles give,
 and three times the Trojans and their far-famed allies panicked:
 twelve of their finest fighters perished there and then, 230
 among their own spears and chariots.¹ But the Achaians
 happily dragged Patroklos out of range of the missiles,
 laid him down on a litter. His comrades gathered around him,
 weeping: swift-footed Achilles accompanied them,
 shedding warm tears, on seeing his loyal comrade 235
 stretched out on the bier, cut about by the sharp bronze:
 he’d sent him out, along with his chariot and horses,
 to war, but never was he to welcome him back again.

The ox-eyed lady Hērē now forced the unwearying sun
 to make its unwilling return to the streams of Ocean: so 240
 the sun set, and the noble Achaians had some respite
 from the powerful turmoil and warfare’s uncertain outcome.

The Trojans, for their part, when back from the grind of battle,
 unyoked the swift horses from their chariots, and gathered
 in assembly, before any thought of supper. They stayed 245
 on their feet right through the meeting: not one man dared
 to sit down, scared to trembling as they all were
 by Achilles’ appearance, so very long he’d been gone
 from injurious battle. Shrewd Poulydamas spoke first,
 Pánthoös’s son, who alone looked both forward and back:² 250
 Hektōr’s comrade he was, and born on the same night,
 though the one excelled with words, with a spear the other.
 He with friendly intent now spoke before the assembly:
 “Think hard on both sides, my friends. For myself, I urge you
 to go back now to the city, not to wait for the bright dawn 255
 out on the plain by the ships: we’re far from our walls here.

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1. How are we to assume that these twelve fine warriors died? The question has bedeviled everyone from the earliest Hellenistic scholiasts on. Textual emendation has offered no convincing solutions. Was there such panic that they were crushed in the frantic rout of their own troops? One intriguing suggestion (Jasper Griffin, *Homer on Life and Death*, 1980, 39, cited by Edwards 2011, 173) is that they are supposed to have died of fear at the terrible sound of the great hero’s war cry. But I know of no clearly satisfying explanation.
 2. This refers not to any prophetic powers, but simply to “the wisdom of experience” (Edwards 2011, 176).

While this man remained wrathful at noble Agamemnōn,
 it was an easier business to fight against the Achaians:
 I too gladly stayed all night out by the swift ships then
 in the hope of seeing them captured, rounded hulls and all; 260
 but now I'm truly afraid of Pēleus's swift-footed son—
 his spirit's so headstrong, he won't be willing to stay
 here in mid-plain, where both Trojans and Achaians
 share the rage of battle between them on disputed ground:
 it's for our city he'll be fighting, and for our women! 265
 So, back to the city: this, believe me, is how things will be.
 For now night has stilled the swift-footed son of Pēleus,
 ambrosial night; but if tomorrow he comes out armed,
 and finds us still here, there are those who'll get to know him
 too well, and then happy the man who escapes to sacred 270
 Ilion, for many the victims that dogs and vultures will eat—
 Trojans! But may such tidings never reach my ears!
 Now: if we follow my plan—however reluctantly—
 tonight we'll keep our forces in the place of assembly,
 while the ramparts, the high gateways, and the tall polished doors 275
 close-fitted in them, well bolted, will safeguard the city.
 Tomorrow at dawn, then, armed, armored, and ready,
 we'll position ourselves on the ramparts: the worse for him,
 if he wants to come up from the ships and fight us for *our* wall!
 Back he'll go to the ships, after glutting his high-necked horses 280
 with all his to-and-fro dashing, in vain, beneath the city!
 As for getting inside—that he won't, however great his rage,
 nor ever sack Troy: before that swift dogs will devour him.”

Scowling darkly, bright-helmeted Hektōr responded:
 “Poulydamas, what you're proposing no longer pleases me— 285
 telling us to retreat, to stay cooped up in the town!
 Haven't you yet had your fill of being stuck inside the ramparts?
 Time was when Priam's city was talked of by all mankind,
 how rich it was in gold, all its wealth of bronze;
 but its homes have now lost their fine treasures, while many 290
 possessions have gone to Phrygia and to lovely Maiōnia,
 sold for cash, ever since great Zeus turned his wrath against us.
 But now, when the son of devious Kronos has let me
 win renown at the ships, blockade the Achaians by the sea,
 no longer, you fool, promote such ideas as these in public: 295

not one Trojan will support you, I'll not allow it!
So come, then, let us all agree to do as I say:
For now, take your dinner throughout the camp, as usual:
and keep a good lookout, every one of you stay alert;
any Trojan who's overmuch concerned for his possessions 300
should turn them all in for the populace to eat up—
better that they should enjoy them than the Achaians!
Tomorrow at dawn, then, armed, armored, and ready,
let's go to the hollow ships, start some sharp engagements—
and if noble Achilles has really stood up to fight by the ships, 305
so much, if he's that way minded, the worse for him: I for one
won't avoid him or miserable warfare, but face to face
I'll confront him, and see whether he then triumphs, or I do.
Enyalios is impartial: he kills the would-be killer.”

Such was Hektōr's address, and the Trojans cheered him, 310
the fools, for their wits had been stolen by Pallas Athēnē:
on Hektōr, for his bad counsel, they all heaped praise; but none
praised Poulydamas, though he'd offered them excellent advice.
So throughout the camp they ate dinner; but the Achaians
wailed all night long in their mourning for Patroklos. 315
Pēleus's son it was led them in their heartfelt lamentation,
laying his murderous hands upon his comrade's breast,
with quick loud sobs. He was like a bearded lion
whose cubs a deer hunter has stolen away from some
dense thicket: later, the lion returns and ranges, 320
grieving, through many a glen on the hunter's tracks,
hoping to catch him somewhere, possessed by bitter fury.
So, groaning deeply, to the Myrmidons spoke Achilles:
“Ah, me, vain indeed were the words I uttered that day
reassuring the hero Menoitios in our halls— 325
I said I'd bring his son home to Opoeis wreathed in glory
from the sacking of Ilion, with his fair share of the spoils!
But not all their designs does Zeus fulfil for mortals—
we two are both fated to redden the selfsame earth
here in Troy, since I too shall never come back home 330
to be welcomed by the old horseman Pēleus in his halls
or by Thetis my mother: the earth will hold me here for ever.
But now, Patroklos, since the earth will claim me later
than you, I'll not bury you till I've brought here Hektōr's

armor and head—he, the killer of your mighty heart; 335
and in front of your pyre I shall cut the throats of a dozen
noble Trojan youths, so enraged I am at your slaying.
Till then you'll lie as you are alongside my curved ships,
and round you deep-bosomed women, Trojans, Dardanians,
will mourn for you, shedding tears, by day and by night— 340
women we toiled to win by the force of our long spears,
laying waste the wealthy cities of mortal men.”

That said,
noble Achilles now gave the word to his comrades
to set on the fire a great cauldron, so they might quickly
wash Patroklos clean of oozing blood and gore. 345
They stood in the blaze a vessel for heating bathwater
and filled it, and under it gathered and kindled much firewood:
flames licked round the cauldron's belly, the water warmed.
When the water came to a boil in the shining bronze
then indeed they washed him, and rubbed his body with oil, 350
filled his wounds with an ointment nine years old, then laid him
out on a bier, wrapped from head to foot in soft linen,
and over that they dressed him in a white robe.
The whole night through then, round swift-footed Achilles,
the Myrmidons wailed in mourning for their Patroklos. 355

Now Zeus spoke to Hērē, his sister and his wife:
“You've had your way, then, my ox-eyed lady Hērē:
you've aroused swift-footed Achilles! Surely they must be
your very own offspring, all these long-haired Achaians.”

The ox-eyed lady Hērē then responded to him: 360
“Most dread son of Kronos, what is this that you've said?
Even a human, surely, will do things for his fellow-man—
though, being mortal, he doesn't possess all the wisdom
that I do—I who declare I'm the highest of all goddesses,
as the eldest born, and because I'm recognized 365
as your consort—and you're the king of all the immortals!
How, in my rage, could I not cobble trouble for these Trojans?”

Thus they spoke to each other; but meanwhile Thetis,
the silver-footed, came to the house of Hēphaistos—
imperishable, starry, outstanding among gods' homes, 370
made of bronze, and built by the little clubfoot himself.

Him she found sweating as he bustled around his bellows,
 working fast: he was making tripods, twenty in all,
 to stand round the wall of his solidly built dwelling,
 and under the base of each he'd fixed golden wheels, 375
 so that of themselves they could enter the divine assembly
 and come back again to his house, a marvel to behold.
 So far, then, they were finished, but the intricately wrought
 ear-handles had not yet been added: these he was fitting,
 and hammering in the rivets. As he worked with expert skill, 380
 he was approached by Thetis, the silver-footed goddess.
 She was seen by bright-veiled Charis, who now came forward—
 lovely Charis, wed by the far-famed lame-of-both-legs god—
 and clasped her hand, and addressed her in these words:
 "What, long-robed Thetis, brings you now to our house? 385
 Though a dear and respected friend, you've not visited us
 before.
 Do come in, and let me offer you entertainment."

So saying, the bright goddess led her inside the house,
 seated her on a chair, all silver-studded, finely
 and intricately worked, with below it a stool for the feet, 390
 and called to Hēphaistos, famed craftsman, in these words:
 "Hēphaistos, come out here! Thetis has need of you."

The far-famed lame-of-both-legs god answered her:
 "It's an awesome and venerable goddess who's in my house!
 She rescued me, when I was hurting, having fallen so far 395
 because of my bitch of a mother, who had her mind set
 on hiding me and my lameness. I'd have suffered agonies
 had Eurynomē and Thetis not welcomed me warmly—
 that Eurynomē who's the daughter of encircling Ocean. The nine
 years I was with them I made much intricate metalwork: 400
 brooches, spiral earrings, rosettes and necklaces,
 in their hollow cave, and round it the stream of Ocean flowed,
 boiling with foam and boundless; nor was anyone else,
 whether god or mortal man, aware of my presence:
 only Thetis knew, and Eurynomē, they who'd saved me. 405
 Now herself has come to our house, and I have a great need
 to repay fair-tressed Thetis fully for having saved my life.
 So you set before her our best entertainment for a guest,
 while I put away my bellows and all my working tools."

With that, he rose from his anvil, hard-breathing, bulky, 410
 limping: yet under him his stunted legs moved lightly.
 His bellows he put well away from the fire, and all
 his tools that he worked with he stored in a silver chest.
 Then with a sponge he cleaned his face and both his hands,
 and his bull neck and shaggy breast, and put on a tunic, 415
 and chose a thick stick, and took himself to the door,
 limping; and quickly there moved to support their master
 handmaids of gold, in the likeness of young living girls.
 There was mind and intelligence in them, they could speak,
 they had bodily strength, the immortal gods taught them skills. 420
 Now they bustled around their lord, while he limped across
 to where Thetis was, sat down on a shining chair,
 took her hand in his, and greeted her with these words:
 “What, long-robed Thetis, brings you now to our house?
 Though a dear and respected friend, you’ve not visited us before. 425
 Tell me what’s on your mind: my heart bids me fulfill it
 if fulfill it I can, and if it’s fulfillable.”

Thetis then answered him, weeping: “Is there any
 goddess today, Hēphaistos, of all those on Olympos,
 who’s endured so many grievous sorrows in her heart 430
 as the woes that Zeus son of Kronos has given me, far beyond
 all others? Of all marine nymphs only me he made wed a mortal—
 Pēleus, Aiakos’s son: I endured that mortal’s bed
 greatly against my will. Now he lies in his halls, broken up
 by wretched old age; but today there are other woes I endure. 435
 A son indeed he gave me, to bear and to bring up,
 preeminent among heroes: like a sapling he shot up,
 and when, like a tree on an orchard knoll, I’d reared him,
 I sent him out here to Ilion in the curved ships, to fight
 the Trojans; but now I’ll never welcome him back 440
 to his home, he’ll never return to the house of Pēleus!
 Now, while he still lives and sees the sunlight
 he has sorrow, nor can I be of help by going to him.
 That girl given him as a prize by the Achaians’ sons
 has been snatched back out of his hands by the lord Agamemnōn. 445
 In grief for her he was eating his heart out; then the Trojans
 penned the Achaians in by their ships’ sterns, would not
 let them break out. The Argive elders appealed to him for help,

detailed by name the many rich presents they'd offer:
he himself still refused to keep disaster from them, 450
but instead arrayed Patroklos in his own armor,
and sent him to fight the war, with many men besides.
The whole day long they struggled around the Skaian Gates,
and that day they'd have sacked the city, had not Apollo,
after much damage done by Menoitios's brave son, 455
killed him in the front line, giving Hektōr the credit.
This is why I now beg you, clasping your knees, to agree
to make my short-lived son a shield and a helmet,
and a corselet and fine greaves equipped with ankle-pieces;
for the gear he once possessed his trusty comrade lost 460
when slain by the Trojans, and now he lies heartbroken on the ground."

The far-famed lame-of-both-legs god then answered her: "Don't
despair,
and don't let these matters become a burden on your mind!
I just wish that I could conceal him, far away from grievous death,
when his dread fate comes on him, as surely as now 465
he'll get his fine new armor, such gear that in time to come
all mankind will be thunderstruck at the sight of it."

So saying,
he left her there, and went back to where his bellows were,
turned them to face the fire, gave them their working orders;
and the bellows, twenty all told, blew through their nozzles, 470
sending out blasts of air from every angle—
at times to support Hēphaistos's quick actions, or again
to do whatever he needed to make his work complete.
Into the fire he now cast solid bronze and tin,
silver and precious gold; next he set a large anvil 475
to stand on its anvil block, and then grasped in one hand
a weighty hammer, in the other his forging tongs.

First he fashioned a shield, both huge and sturdy, adorned
intricately all over, and around it set a bright rim,
three-layered and glinting, complete with silver baldric. 480
Five were the layers of the shield itself, and on it
with consummate skill he set a number of decorations.

On it he fashioned the earth, the sea, and the heavens,
the unwearying sun, the moon on its increase to full,

and every constellation with which the heavens are crowned— 485
the Pleiadēs, the Hyadēs, the majesty of Orīōn,
and the Bear, that’s also known to mankind as the Wain,
that revolves in one place, keeping a watchful eye on Orīōn,
and alone never sinks into the baths of Ocean.

On it he also fashioned two cities of humankind, 490
fine ones: in the first there were marriages and banquets,
with brides being led from their quarters by flaring torchlight
through the city, to the accompaniment of many a wedding song,
and young men awirl in the dance, while for them the pipes
and lyres played on without stopping, and the women stood 495
at their doors, admiring spectators. There was a crowd
of citizens drawn to the meeting place: a dispute had arisen
between two men, at loggerheads over the blood-price
of a man who’d been killed: one claimed, in a public speech,
to have paid it all, but the other swore he’d been given nothing, 500
and both were determined to win the arbitrator’s verdict.
People were backing both sides, cheering one or the other,
while heralds held them back, and the elders were sitting
on polished seats of stone in the sacred circle,
the loud-voiced heralds’ staffs in their hands: holding these 505
they would rise to deliver judgment, each in turn;
and there between them were set two talents³ of gold,
to go to the one who delivered the fairest verdict.

But around the other city there lay two bodies of troops,
agleam in their armor, divided by two competing plans— 510
should they lay the place waste, or share between both sides
all the wealth that this lovely city contained? However,
the besieged would have none of it, were arming for an ambush.
The ramparts were manned by their dear wives and children,
and along with them such men as were crippled by old age; 515
but the rest were out after action, led by Arēs and Athēnē—
both of gold, and golden the raiment in which they were clad,
handsome and tall in their armor, as befits gods, and clearly
visible all around: the men below them were smaller.

3. If Ridgeway (cited by Leaf, 2: 253–54) was right, the Homeric talent equaled the price of one ox, which would seem a fair enough recompense in this context (and elsewhere in Homer, e.g., 23.269, 614). We are certainly not dealing here with the later classical talent of roughly 57 ½ lbs weight, which in gold would represent a sizable fortune.

When they reached the spot where they'd chosen to set their ambush, 520
 in a riverbed, with a watering place for flocks and herds,
 then they settled down, all of them, armored in gleaming bronze,
 and two scouts were posted, some way from the main body,
 to watch out for a glimpse of the sheep and well-fed cattle.
 These very soon arrived, and with them a pair of herdsmen 525
 playing their pipes, unaware of the trap. Then the ambushers,
 when they saw them coming, charged out, and in a trice
 cut off the herded cattle, the splendid flocks
 of white-fleeced sheep, and slaughtered both the herdsmen.
 The besiegers, now hearing loud tumult among the cattle 530
 from the meeting place where they sat, mounted at once behind
 their high-stepping horses, set off, and quickly reached them.
 Then they halted, and fought there beside the river's banks,
 letting fly, each side at the other, with their bronze-tipped spears;
 and Strife and Tumult mixed with them, and the baneful Death-Spirit, 535
 seizing one man alive, but wounded, another without a wound,
 yet another dragged through the turmoil, dead, by the feet;
 and the shift Strife wore round her shoulders was scarlet
 with men's blood; like living mortals they engaged and fought,
 and each of them dragged off bodies that the others had slain. 540

On it he also fashioned a broad field of rich plowland,
 soft-soiled, thrice-plowed from fallow, with many plowmen
 on it, turning their teams, driving them up and down,
 and when, at the turning point, they reached the edge of the field,
 then a man would come up and hand them a cup of wine, 545
 honey-sweet, and the plowmen would speed to the furrow's end,
 eager to reach the turn in the deep soil; and behind them
 the field grew black, as though it had really been plowed,
 though made of gold: here indeed was marvelous artistry.

On it he also fashioned a royal estate, where farmhands 550
 were reaping, sharp sickles in hand. Of the cut swathes
 some were falling in rows, along the line of the furrow,
 while others the sheaf-binders were tying with twists of straw.
 Three binders stood there ready, while behind them boys
 collected the swathes and delivered them, by the armful, 555
 without pause, and all the time the king stood by, in silence,
 at the line of the swathes, staff in hand, and happy at heart.
 Away under an oak tree were heralds, preparing a feast,

dressing a great ox that they'd sacrificed, while women lavishly
sprinkled white barley upon it for the farmhands' dinner.⁴ 560

On it he also fashioned a vineyard, lush with clusters,
fine and golden; black the bunched grapes, while the vines
were propped up throughout on silver poles. Around it
he set a ditch, done in cobalt enamel, and outside that a fence
made of tin, with one path to the vineyard, on which 565
the grape pickers went to and fro when harvesting the vines:
and he had girls and boys, all innocently light-hearted,
carrying the honey-sweet fruit in wicker baskets,
while in the midst of them a boy with a clear-toned lyre
made sweet music, and accompanied his own singing— 570
soft and exquisite—of the Linos Song,⁵ while they,
stamping the beat and shouting, danced along after him.

On it he also set a herd of straight-horned cattle:
the cows were fashioned out of gold and tin, and went
eagerly, lowing, on their way from byre to pasture 575
beside a rushing river, a rippling reed bed.

Of gold were the herdsmen accompanying the cattle—
four of them, together with nine swift-footed dogs.
But among the foremost cattle two fearsome lions
had got hold of a noisy bull, which, bellowing loudly, 580
was being dragged off, with dogs and youths in hot pursuit.
The lions had ripped up the great bull's hide and were
gobbling its innards and black blood, while the herdsmen
tried, in vain, to scare them, urging on their swift dogs;
but these fought shy of biting the lions: instead 585
they ran up close, barking, then swerved aside.

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4. The Greek is ambiguous: was the barley sprinkled as dressing for a general feast or to form a kind of porridge for the workers, while the king and others enjoyed roast meat? At least two modern translations have assumed the latter; but both Leaf (2: 257–58) and Edwards 2011 (224) prefer, rightly I think, the former: Edwards points out that the verb *παλύνω* (*palynō*) can *only* mean “sprinkle” as opposed to “boil in water”, and there is no reason, linguistically or socially, why Homer should not here be describing a general popular feast somewhat like a modern Greek *panēgyri*.
5. Linos was a mythical musician, supposedly the first human divinely endowed with the art of song, but killed out of jealousy by Apollo (Paus. 9.29.3), and mourned by the Muses. The Linos Song, according to Herodotos (2.79) was an eastern dirge; it was popular with singers at feasts and dances (*HE* 2: 478, Edwards 2011, 225), so something more cheerful than a dirge in the modern sense: perhaps autumnal /harvest-related, an ancestor of the John Barleycorn songs?

On it the far-famed lame-of-both-legs god made a pasture
in a charming glen: a large pasture of white-fleeced sheep
along with their sheepfolds and pens and covered shelters.

On it the far-famed lame-of-both-legs god subtly 590
inlaid a dancing floor like the one in spacious Knossos
that long ago Daidalos fashioned for fair-tressed Ariadnē.
Here were young men, with maidens worth many oxen
in bride-price, dancing, hands on each other's wrists,
the girls robed in fine linen, while the men wore 595
fine-woven tunics, softly gleaming from worked-in oil,⁶
and the girls had on sweet garlands, the men
their daggers of gold, suspended from silver baldrics.
Now they would dance in a circle, feet well-skilled,
very lightly, as when a potter sits at a wheel that matches 600
his hands' grasp, and tries it, to see how it will run;
and now they'd approach each other in dancing lines
while a crowd of spectators stood round them, much enjoying
such an elegant dance, [and among them a sacred bard
sang to his lyre,]⁷ and two tumblers whirled among them, 605
taking the lead in all their sport and pleasure.

On it he also set the mighty stream of Ocean
to run round the outermost rim of this strongly fashioned shield.

Then, when he'd finished the shield, both large and solid,
he forged him a corselet more bright than the blaze of fire, 610
and forged him a heavy helmet to fit his temples closely,
a fine piece, cunningly wrought, with a golden crest set on it,
and lastly fashioned him greaves, made out of pliant tin.

The far-famed lame-of-both-legs god, this battle gear all finished,
took it and laid it before Achilles' mother, who then 615
swooped down like a hawk from the high snows of Olympos,
bringing from Hēphaistos the glinting armor he'd made.

6. C. W. Shelmerdine, *The Perfume Industry of Mycenaean Pylos* (1985), 595–96, cited by Janko 175, assures us, surprisingly, that linen thus treated with oil “becomes, not greasy, but supple and shining, and it remains so after washing.”

7. The phrase in brackets was allegedly (Athen. 180c–d) added in antiquity from a similar passage in the *Odyssey* (4.15–19), in all likelihood “to provide the dancers with music” (Edwards 2011, 230); it does not figure in either the MSS or surviving papyri, though some modern editors have included it in the text.