Book 22

Bk XXII:1-89 **Priam and Hecabe fail to dissuade Hector**

The Trojans, having fled like a herd of frightened deer, now leant on the battlements around the city, drying the sweat from their bodies, and quenching their thirst, as the Greeks approached the wall, their shields at the slope. But deadly Fate enticed [Hector](http://www.poetryintranslation.com/PITBR/Greek/IlindexFGHILMN.htm#Hector) to halt by the [Scaean](http://www.poetryintranslation.com/PITBR/Greek/IlindexRSTUWXZ.htm#ScaeanGates) Gate, in front of the city.

          Meanwhile Phoebus [Apollo](http://www.poetryintranslation.com/PITBR/Greek/IlindexA.htm#Apollo) revealed himself to [Achilles](http://www.poetryintranslation.com/PITBR/Greek/IlindexA.htm#Achilles): ‘Why, son of Peleus, being only mortal, do you run after me, a deathless god? Only now it seems do you know me, so great your fury! Have you forgotten the Trojans you routed? They have found refuge in the city, while you linger here, trying to kill one who cannot die.’

          Then swift-footed Achilles replied, in consternation: ‘Far-Striker, you are the cruellest of gods. You’ve lured me here, far from the wall, while many who should have bitten the dust reach Ilium. You rob me of my glory, to save them, an easy task for one safe himself from vengeance, for I would indeed revenge myself on you if I had the power.’ So saying, Achilles ran eagerly towards the city, his legs pounding away like a winning thoroughbred coursing over the plain in the chariot traces.

          Old [Priam](http://www.poetryintranslation.com/PITBR/Greek/IlindexOP.htm#Priam) was first to see him, racing over the plain, his bronze breastplate gleaming like Sirius, the star of harvest, brightest of stars in the dark of night. [Orion](http://www.poetryintranslation.com/PITBR/Greek/IlindexOP.htm#Orion)’s Dog, men call it, glittering brightly yet boding ill, bringing fever to wretched mortals. The old man groaned aloud, and raising his arms, beat his head with his hands, shouting entreaties to his dear son, who stood before the Gate, ready to turn his fury on Achilles.

          Stretching out his arms, he called to him sadly: ‘Hector, dear child, I beg you, don’t face that man alone. Seek help, lest you meet your doom at the hands of Achilles, a stronger and tougher warrior than you. If the gods loved him as little as I do, the dogs and vultures would soon feed on his corpse, and my heart would be eased of a burden of sorrow, for he has robbed me of many fine sons, killing them or selling them in some far off isle. This very day I miss my two sons, [Lycaon](http://www.poetryintranslation.com/PITBR/Greek/IlindexFGHILMN.htm#LycaonPriam) and [Polydorus](http://www.poetryintranslation.com/PITBR/Greek/IlindexOP.htm#PolydorusPriam), whom [Laothoe](http://www.poetryintranslation.com/PITBR/Greek/IlindexFGHILMN.htm#Laothoe), princess among women, bore me. I failed to see them among the troops taking refuge in the city. If they are living, and held captive, we’ll ransom them with gold and bronze, from my great store. [Altes](http://www.poetryintranslation.com/PITBR/Greek/IlindexA.htm#Altes), of glorious name, gave his daughter many gifts. But if they are dead, in [Hades](http://www.poetryintranslation.com/PITBR/Greek/IlindexFGHILMN.htm#Hades)’ Halls, that is one more sorrow for their mother and I, who engendered them. Yet the people’s mourning will be briefer, if Achilles fails to kill you too. So take refuge behind the walls, my child, and be the saviour of the Trojans: stay alive, deny this son of Peleus glory. Have pity on me too while I live, I, poor wretch, for whom it seems Father [Zeus](http://www.poetryintranslation.com/PITBR/Greek/IlindexRSTUWXZ.htm#Zeus) reserves a dreadful fate, here after much sorrowful experience, on the threshold of old age, to see my sons slaughtered, my daughters dishonoured, their children hurled aside in anger, my son’s wives dragged away, my treasures fallen into savage Achaean hands. In the end, I shall be slain by a thrust from some sharp spear, and the flesh-eating dogs before my door will tear my corpse apart, the very dogs I fed from my table, reared to guard these same doors, dogs that will lie there in the gateway when in their savagery they’ve lapped my blood. It is fine for a young man, killed in battle, to lie there with his wounds on display: dead though he is, it’s an honourable sight. But an old man’s naked corpse, his grey hairs soiled by the dogs, is a pitiful matter for us wretched mortals.’

          With this, the old man tore and plucked the grey hairs from his head, but failed to move Hector’s heart. Even though his [mother](http://www.poetryintranslation.com/PITBR/Greek/IlindexFGHILMN.htm#Hecabe) in turn began to weep and wail, pushing aside the folds of her robe and baring her breast, imploring him as she wept: ‘Hector, my child, this is the breast that fed you: respect and pity me. Think of us, and oppose the foe from inside the wall, don’t stand and face that harsh warrior, for if he kills you I’ll not have your corpse to lay on a bier and grieve over, dear child of my body, nor will the wife you richly dowered; but far from us, by the Argive ships, the running dogs will devour you.’

**Bk XXII:188-246 Athena incites Hector to fight**

Meanwhile [Achilles](http://www.poetryintranslation.com/PITBR/Greek/IlindexA.htm#Achilles) chased [Hector](http://www.poetryintranslation.com/PITBR/Greek/IlindexFGHILMN.htm#Hector) relentlessly, and he could no more escape than a fawn, that a hound starts from a mountain covert. Chased through glade and valley it may cower for a while in some thicket, but the dog tracks it down, running strongly till he gains his quarry. So Achilles chased Hector. Every time Hector made a break for the [Dardanian](http://www.poetryintranslation.com/PITBR/Greek/IlindexBCDE.htm#Dardania) Gate hoping to gain the shelter of the solid walls, where the defenders might protect him with their missiles, Achilles would head him off towards the plain, himself keeping the inner track by the walls. Yet, as in a dream where our pursuer cannot catch us nor we escape, Achilles could not overtake Hector, nor could Hector shake him off. Still, could Hector have eluded fate so long, had not [Apollo](http://www.poetryintranslation.com/PITBR/Greek/IlindexA.htm#Apollo), for the last and final time, come to strengthen him and speed him, and had not Achilles signalled to his men not to loose their deadly missiles at the man, lest he himself might be cheated of the glory? Yet when they reached The Springs for the fourth time, the [Father](http://www.poetryintranslation.com/PITBR/Greek/IlindexRSTUWXZ.htm#Zeus) raised his golden scales, and set the deaths of Achilles and horse-taming Hector in the balance, and lifted it on high. Down sank Hector’s lot towards [Hades](http://www.poetryintranslation.com/PITBR/Greek/IlindexFGHILMN.htm#Hades), and Phoebus Apollo left his side, while bright-eyed Athene came to Achilles and standing close, spoke winged words: ‘Glorious Achilles, beloved of Zeus, now you and I will kill Hector, and bring the Greeks great glory. Warlike he may be, but he’ll not escape us, even if Apollo, the Far-Striker, grovels before aegis-bearing Father Zeus. Stop now and catch your breath. I will go and incite him to fight you face to face.’

          He, delighted, at once obeyed her words, halted and stood there leaning on his bronze-tipped ash spear, while she appeared to noble Hector in the form of [Deiphobus](http://www.poetryintranslation.com/PITBR/Greek/IlindexBCDE.htm#Deiphobus), that tireless speaker: ‘Dear brother, swift Achilles pressed you hard there, chasing you round the city at a pace, but here let us make a stand together, and defend ourselves.’

          Great Hector of the gleaming helm, replied: ‘Deiphobus, of all my brothers born to [Hecabe](http://www.poetryintranslation.com/PITBR/Greek/IlindexFGHILMN.htm#Hecabe) and [Priam](http://www.poetryintranslation.com/PITBR/Greek/IlindexOP.htm#Priam), you are by far the dearest, and now I’ll honour you in my mind even more, since you, while the others stay within and watch, have come to find me outside the wall.’

          ‘Dear brother,’ said bright-eyed Athene, in disguise, ‘our parents and friends in turn begged me not to come here, so terrified are they of Achilles, but I was tormented by anxiety. Let’s attack him head on, not spare our spears, and find out if he’ll kill us and carry our blood-stained armour to the hollow ships, or be conquered by our blades.’

**Bk XXII:247-366 The Death of Hector**

[Athene](http://www.poetryintranslation.com/PITBR/Greek/IlindexA.htm#Athene) deceived Hector with her words and her disguise, and led him on till he and [Achilles](http://www.poetryintranslation.com/PITBR/Greek/IlindexA.htm#Achilles) met. [Hector](http://www.poetryintranslation.com/PITBR/Greek/IlindexFGHILMN.htm#Hector) of the gleaming helm spoke first: ‘I will not run from you, as before, son of Peleus. My heart failed me as I waited for your attack, and three times round Priam’s city we ran, but now my heart tells me to stand and face you, to kill or be killed. Come let us swear an oath before the gods, for they are the best witnesses of such things. If Zeus lets me kill you and survive, then when I’ve stripped you of your glorious armour I’ll not mistreat your corpse, I’ll return your body to your people, if you will do the same for me.’

          Swift-footed Achilles glared at him in reply: ‘Curse you, Hector, and don’t talk of oaths to me. Lions and men make no compacts, nor are wolves and lambs in sympathy: they are opposed, to the end. You and I are beyond friendship: nor will there be peace between us till one or the other dies and sates Ares, lord of the ox-hide shield, with his blood. Summon up your reserves of courage, be a spearman now and a warrior brave. There is no escape from me, and soon Athene will bring you down with my spear. Now pay the price for all my grief, for all my friends you’ve slaughtered with your blade.’

          So saying he raised his long-shadowed spear and hurled it. But glorious Hector kept an eye on it and, crouching, dodged so the shaft flew above him, and the point buried itself in the ground behind. Yet Pallas Athene snatched it up and returned it to Achilles, too swiftly for Prince Hector to see. And Hector spoke to Peleus’ peerless son: ‘It seems you missed, godlike Achilles, despite your certainty that Zeus has doomed me. It was mere glibness of speech, mere verbal cunning, trying to unnerve me with fright, to make me lose strength and courage. You’ll get no chance to pierce my back as I flee, so, if the gods allow you, drive it through my chest as I attack, dodge my bronze spear if you can. I pray it lodges deep in your flesh! If you were dead, our greatest bane, war would be easy for us Trojans.’

          So saying, he raised and hurled his long-shadowed spear, striking Achilles’ shield square on, though the spear simply rebounded. Hector was angered by his vain attempt with the swift shaft, and stood there in dismay, lacking a second missile. He called aloud to [Deiphobus](http://www.poetryintranslation.com/PITBR/Greek/IlindexBCDE.htm#Deiphobus) of the White Shield, calling for his long spear, but he was nowhere to be found, and Hector realised the deceit: ‘Ah, so the gods have lured me to my death. I thought Deiphobus was by my side, but he is still in the city, Athene fooled me. An evil fate’s upon me, Death is no longer far away, and him there is no escaping. Zeus, and his son, the [Far-Striker](http://www.poetryintranslation.com/PITBR/Greek/IlindexA.htm#Apollo), decided all this long ago, they who were once eager to defend me, and destiny now overtakes me. But let me not die without a fight, without true glory, without some deed that men unborn may hear.’

          With this, he drew the sharp blade at his side, a powerful long-sword, and gathering his limbs together swooped like a high-soaring eagle that falls to earth from the dark clouds to seize a sick lamb or a cowering hare. So Hector swooped, brandishing his keen blade. Achilles ran to meet him heart filled with savage power, covering his chest with his great, skilfully worked shield, while above his gleaming helm with its four ridges waved the golden plumes [Hephaestus](http://www.poetryintranslation.com/PITBR/Greek/IlindexFGHILMN.htm#Hephaestus) placed thickly at its crest. Bright as the Evening Star that floats among the midnight constellations, set there the loveliest jewel in the sky, gleamed the tip of Achilles sharp spear brandished in his right hand, as he sought to work evil on noble Hector, searching for the likeliest place to land a blow on his fair flesh.

          Now, the fine bronze armour he stripped from mighty [Patroclus](http://www.poetryintranslation.com/PITBR/Greek/IlindexOP.htm#Patroclus) when he killed him covered all Hector’s flesh except for one opening at the throat, where the collarbones knit neck and shoulders, and violent death may come most swiftly. There, as Hector charged at him, noble Achilles aimed his ash spear, and drove its heavy bronze blade clean through the tender neck, though without cutting the windpipe or robbing Hector of the power of speech. Hector fell in the dust and Achilles shouted out in triumph: ‘While you were despoiling Patroclus, no doubt, in your folly, you thought yourself quite safe, Hector, and forgot all about me in my absence. Far from him, by the hollow ships, was a mightier man, who should have been his helper but stayed behind, and that was I, who now have brought you low. The dogs and carrion birds will tear apart your flesh, but him the Achaeans will bury.’

          Then Hector of the gleaming helm replied, in a feeble voice: ‘At your feet I beg, by your parents, by your own life, don’t let the dogs devour my flesh by the hollow ships. Accept the ransom my royal father and mother will offer, stores of gold and bronze, and let them carry my body home, so the Trojans and their wives may grant me in death my portion of fire.’

          But fleet-footed Achilles glared at him in answer: ‘Don’t speak of my parents, dog. I wish the fury and the pain in me could drive me to carve and eat you raw for what you did, as surely as this is true: no living man will keep the dogs from gnawing at your skull, not if men weighed out twenty, thirty times your worth in ransom, and promised even more, not though Dardanian Priam bid them give your weight in gold, not even then will your royal mother lay you on a bier to grieve for you, the son she bore, rather shall dogs, and carrion birds, devour you utterly.’

          Then Hector of the gleaming helm spoke at the point of death: ‘I know you truly now, and see your fate, nor was it mine to sway you. The heart in your breast is iron indeed. But think, lest the gods, remembering me, turn their wrath on you, that day by the [Scaean](http://www.poetryintranslation.com/PITBR/Greek/IlindexRSTUWXZ.htm#ScaeanGates) Gate when, brave as you are, [Paris](http://www.poetryintranslation.com/PITBR/Greek/IlindexOP.htm#Paris) kills you, with [Apollo](http://www.poetryintranslation.com/PITBR/Greek/IlindexA.htm#Apollo)’s help.’

          Death enfolded him, as he uttered these words, and, wailing its lot, his spirit fled from the body down to [Hades](http://www.poetryintranslation.com/PITBR/Greek/IlindexFGHILMN.htm#Hades), leaving youth and manhood behind. A corpse it was that noble Achilles addressed: ‘Lie there then in death, and I will face my own, whenever Zeus and the other deathless gods decide.’

Bk XXII:367-404 **Achilles drags Hector’s corpse in the dust**

With this, [Achilles](http://www.poetryintranslation.com/PITBR/Greek/IlindexA.htm#Achilles) drew his bronze-tipped spear from the corpse and laid it down, and as he began to strip the blood-stained armour from [Hector](http://www.poetryintranslation.com/PITBR/Greek/IlindexFGHILMN.htm#Hector)’s shoulders he was joined by others of the Greeks, who ran to gaze at Hector’s size and wondrous form. Yet all who approached struck the body a blow, and turning to a comrade, one said: ‘See, Hector’s easier to deal with now than when he set the ships ablaze.’ With that, he wounded the corpse.

          When noble Achilles, the great runner, had stripped away the armour, he rose and made a speech to the Achaeans: ‘Friends, leaders, princes of the Argives, now the gods have let us kill this man, who harmed us more than all the rest together, let us make an armed reconnaissance of the city, while we see what the Trojans have in mind, whether they’ll abandon the city now their champion has fallen, or whether they’ll fight on, though Hector is no more. But why think of that? There is another corpse, unwept, unburied lying by the ships, that of [Patroclus](http://www.poetryintranslation.com/PITBR/Greek/IlindexOP.htm#Patroclus), my dear friend, whom I shall not forget as long as I walk the earth among the living. And though in the House of Hades men may forget their dead, even there I shall remember him. So, you sons of Achaea, raise the song of triumph, and drag this corpse back to the ships. We have won great glory, and killed the noble Hector, whom the Trojans prayed to like a god, in Troy.’

           So saying, he found a way to defile the fallen prince. He pierced the tendons of both feet behind from heel to ankle, and through them threaded ox-hide thongs, tying them to his chariot, leaving the corpse’s head to trail along the ground. Then lifting the glorious armour aboard, he mounted and touched the horses with his whip, and they eagerly leapt forward. Dragged behind, Hector’s corpse raised a cloud of dust, while his outspread hair flowed, black, on either side. That head, once so fine, trailed in the dirt, now Zeus allowed his enemies to mutilate his corpse on his own native soil.

Bk XXII:405-515 **The Grief in Troy**

Seeing her son’s hair fouled with dust, [Hecabe](http://www.poetryintranslation.com/PITBR/Greek/IlindexFGHILMN.htm#Hecabe), his mother gave a great cry, plucked the gleaming veil from her head, and tore her hair. His father [Priam](http://www.poetryintranslation.com/PITBR/Greek/IlindexOP.htm#Priam) groaned in anguish, and a wave of grief spread round them through the city, no less than if all of lofty Ilium were on fire. The old man could scarcely be restrained in his frenzy, as he made for the [Dardanian](http://www.poetryintranslation.com/PITBR/Greek/IlindexBCDE.htm#Dardania) Gate. He grovelled in the dust, imploring those around, calling each man by his name: ‘Friends, let me be, despite your care. Let me go out from the city alone, to the Achaean ships. I will see if that man of violence, devoid of shame, respects old age and my weight of years. He has a father, [Peleus](http://www.poetryintranslation.com/PITBR/Greek/IlindexOP.htm#Peleus), as old, I think, as I am, who begot him and raised him to be a bane to Troy, though to me above all others he brings sorrow, killing so many of my sons in their prime. Yet despite my grief for the others, I mourn this one above all, with a bitter sorrow that will send me to [Hades](http://www.poetryintranslation.com/PITBR/Greek/IlindexFGHILMN.htm#Hades)’ Halls, this [Hector](http://www.poetryintranslation.com/PITBR/Greek/IlindexFGHILMN.htm#Hector). If he could but have died in my arms! Then I and his mother, who to her sorrow bore him, could have wept and wailed our fill over his corpse.’

          So he wept, and the people added their tears. Now, among the women, Hecabe raised loud lament: ‘My child, how wretched I am! Why should I live on in suffering now you are dead? You were my pride of Troy, night and day, a saviour, greeted as a god, by every man and women in this city, surely their great glory while you lived. But now death and fate overtake you.’

          Hecabe wept, but [Andromache](http://www.poetryintranslation.com/PITBR/Greek/IlindexA.htm#Andromache), Hector’s wife, as yet knew nothing, no one had even told her that her husband had stayed outside the walls. She was at work in an inner room of the lofty palace, weaving a double-width purple tapestry, with a multicoloured pattern of flowers. In all ignorance she had asked her ladies-in-waiting to set a great cauldron on the fire so that Hector would have hot water for a bath, when he returned, never dreaming that far from all thought of baths, he had been brought low by Achilles and bright-eyed Athene. But now the cries and groans from the wall reached her, she trembled and the shuttle fell from her hand. She called to her ladies-in-waiting: ‘Two of you come with me. I must know what is happening. That was my husband’s noble mother I heard, my heart is in my mouth and my legs are numb. Some evil afflicts the House of Priam. May such news stay far from me, but I fear to my sorrow lest great [Achilles](http://www.poetryintranslation.com/PITBR/Greek/IlindexA.htm#Achilles) has cut brave Hector off from the city, and quenched the fatal courage that possessed him, for he would never stay safely in the ranks, but must always charge ahead, yielding to none in daring.’

          So saying, she ran through the halls, her heart pounding, beside herself, and her ladies followed. When they came to the wall, where the men were thronging, she rushed to the battlements and gazing out saw Hector’s corpse being hauled from the city, the powerful horses dragging it savagely towards the hollow ships. Darkness shrouded her eyes, enfolding her, and she fell backward, senseless. From her head fell the bright headdress, the frontlet and netted cap, the plaited strands, and the veil that golden [Aphrodite](http://www.poetryintranslation.com/PITBR/Greek/IlindexA.htm#Aphrodite) had given her when Hector of the gleaming helm had led her from [Eëtion](http://www.poetryintranslation.com/PITBR/Greek/IlindexBCDE.htm#EetionAndromache)’s house, having paid a princely dowry for his bride. Her husband’s sisters and his brother’s wives crowded round her, and supported her in her dead faint.

When she revived and her senses returned, she lifted her voice in lament, to the women of Troy, crying: ‘Oh, Hector, alas for me! It seems we were born for this, you in Priam’s palace, here in Troy, I in [Thebe](http://www.poetryintranslation.com/PITBR/Greek/IlindexRSTUWXZ.htm#ThebesMysia) below wooded [Placus](http://www.poetryintranslation.com/PITBR/Greek/IlindexOP.htm#Placus), in Eëtion’s house. He it was who reared me from a babe, unlucky father of an ill-fated child. How I wish he’d never engendered me! Now you are gone to the House of Hades under the earth, but I remain cold with grief, a widow in your halls. And your son, the child of doomed parents, our child, a mere babe, can no longer give you joy, dead Hector: nor can you give joy to him.

Even if he survives this dreadful war against the Greeks, toil and suffering will be his fate, bereft of all his lands. An orphaned child is severed from his playmates; He goes about with downcast looks and tear-stained cheeks, plucks his father’s friends by the cloak or tunic, till one, from pity, holds the wine-cup to his lips, but only for a moment, enough to wet his lips but not his palate. And some lad with both parents alive strikes him with his fist and drives him from the feast, jeering at him in reproach: “Away with you, now! You’ve no father here.” So my child will run in tears to his widowed mother, my son [Astyanax](http://www.poetryintranslation.com/PITBR/Greek/IlindexA.htm#Astyanax), who sat on his father’s knee eating the rich fat and the sheep’s marrow, and when he was sleepy and tired of play, slept in his nurse’s arms in a soft bed, his dreams sweet. Now, with his dear father gone, ills will crowd on him. Astyanax, that is Lord of the City, the Trojans call him, since you Hector were the great defender of the gates and the high walls. Now by the beaked ships, far from your kin, the writhing worms will devour your corpse, once the dogs have had their fill, your naked corpse, though in your house are all the fine, finely-woven clothes that women’s hands can fashion. All those I will burn in a great fire, since you will no more wear or profit by them, as a mark of honour shown you by the men and women of Troy.’

So Andromache spoke, in tears, while the women joined in her lament.