So they fought to the death around that benched beaked ship as Patroclus reached Achilles, his great commander, and wept warm tears like a dark spring running down some desolate rock face, its shaded currents flowing. And the brilliant runner Achilles saw him coming, filled with pity and spoke out, winning words:

"Why in tears, Patroclus? Like a girl, a baby running after her mother, begging to be picked up, and she tugs her skirts, holding her back as she tries to hurry off—all tears, fawning up at her, till she takes her in her arms... That's how you look, Patroclus, streaming live tears. But why? Some news for the Myrmidons, news for me? Some message from Phthia that you alone have heard? They tell me Menoetius, Actor's son, is still alive, and Peleus, Aeacus' son, lives on among his Myrmidons—if both our fathers had died, we'd have some cause for grief. Or weeping over the Argives, are you? Seeing them die against the hollow ships, repaid for their offenses? Out with it now! Don't harbor it deep inside you. We must share it all."

With a wrenching groan you answered your friend, Patroclus O my rider: "Achilles, son of Peleus, greatest of the Achaeans, spare me your anger, please—such heavy blows have overwhelmed the troops. Our former champions, all laid up in the ships, all are hit by arrows or run through by spears. There's powerful Diomedes brought down by an archer, Odysseus wounded, and Agamemnon too, the famous spearman, and Eurypylus took an arrow-shot in the thigh... Healers are working over them, using all their drugs, trying to bind the wounds—

But you are intractable, Achilles! Pray god such anger never seizes me, such rage you nurse. Cursed in your own courage! What good will a man, even one in the next generation, get from you unless you defend the Argives from disaster? You heart of iron! He was not your father, the horseman Peleus—Thetis was not your mother. Never. The salt gray sunless ocean gave you birth and the towering blank rocks—your temper's so relentless. But still, if down deep some prophecy makes you balk, some doom your noble mother revealed to you from Zeus, well and good: at least send me into battle, quickly. Let the whole Myrmidon army follow my command—I might bring some light of victory to our Argives! And give me your own fine armor to buckle on my back, so the Trojans might take me for you, Achilles, yes, hold off from attack, and Achaea's fighting sons get second wind, exhausted as they are... Breathing room in war is all too brief. We're fresh, unbroken. The enemy's battle-weary—
we could roll those broken Trojans back to Troy, clear of the ships and shelters!"

So he pleaded,

lost in his own great innocence . . .
condemned to beg for his own death and brutal doom.
And moved now to his depths, the famous runner cried.

“No, no, my prince, Patroclus, what are you saying?
Prophecies? None that touch me. None I know of.
No doom my noble mother revealed to me from Zeus,
just this terrible pain that wounds me to the quick—
when one man attempts to plunder a man his equal,
to commandeer a prize, exulting so in his own power.
That’s the pain that wounds me, suffering such humiliation.
That girl—the sons of Achaea picked her as my prize,
but right from my grasp he tears her, mighty Agamemnon,
that son of Atreus! Treating me like some vagabond,
some outcast stripped of all my rights . . .

Enough.

Let bygones be bygones now. Done is done.
How on earth can a man rage on forever?
Still, by god, I said I would not relax my anger,
not till the cries and carnage reached my own ships.
So you, you strap my splendid armor on your back,
you lead our battle-hungry Myrmidons into action!—
if now, in fact, the black cloud of the Trojans
blasts down on the ships with full gale force,
our backs to the breaking surf but clinging still
to a cramped strip of land—the Argives, lost.
The whole city of Troy comes trampling down on us,
daring, wild—why? They cannot see the brow of my helmet
flash before their eyes—Oh they’d soon run for their lives
and choke the torrent-beds of the field with all their corpses
if only the mighty Agamemnon met me with respect:
now, as it is, they’re fighting round our camp!
No spear rages now in the hand of Diomedes,
keen to save the Argives from disaster . . .
I can’t even hear the battle cry of Agamemnon

break from his hated skull. But it’s man-killing Hector
calling his Trojans on, his war cries crashing round me,
savage cries of his Trojans sweeping the whole plain,
victors bringing the Argive armies to their knees.
Even so, Patroclus, fight disaster off the ships,
fling yourself at the Trojans full force—
before they gut our hulls with leaping fire
and tear away the beloved day of our return.
But take this command to heart—obey it to the end.
So you can win great honor, great glory for me
in the eyes of all the Argive ranks, and they,
they’ll send her back, my lithe and lovely girl,
and top it off with troves of glittering gifts.
Once you have whipped the enemy from the fleet
you must come back, Patroclus. Even if Zeus
the thundering lord of Hera lets you seize your glory,
you must not burn for war against these Trojans,
madmen lusting for battle—not without me—
you will only make my glory that much less . . .
You must not, lost in the flush and fire of triumph,
slaughtering Trojans outright, drive your troops to Troy—
what if one of the gods who never die comes down
from Olympus heights to intervene in battle?
The deadly Archer loves his Trojans dearly.
No, you must turn back—
soon as you bring the light of victory to the ships
Let the rest of them cut themselves to pieces on the plain!
Oh would to god—Father Zeus, Athena and lord Apollo—
not one of all these Trojans could flee his death, not one,
no Argive either, but we could stride from the slaughter
so we could bring Troy’s hallowed crown of towers
toppling down around us—you and I alone!”

And so the comrades roused each other now.

But Ajax could hold his post on the decks no longer.
He was overwhelmed by the latest salvos, driven back
by the will of Zeus and the fearless Trojan spearmen
hurling blows nonstop—a terrific din at his temples,
his shining helmet clashing under repeated blows, relentless blows beating his forged cheek-irons. And the joint of his left shoulder ached with labor, forever bracing his huge burnished shield rock-steady, but they could not wrench it loose from round his body for all their pelting weapons. Again and again he fought for breath, gasping, bathed in sweat rivering down his body, his limbs soaked and sleek... where could he find some breathing room in battle? Wherever he looked, pains heaped on pains.

Sing to me now,
you Muses, you who hold Olympus' vaulting halls, how fire was first pitched on Achaea's ships!

Hector lunged at Ajax toe-to-toe, hacked his ash-wood pike with a heavy sword and striking the socket just behind the point he slashed the head clean off, leaving the shaft, the lopped stump dangling in Ajax' fist, useless, bronze head bounding away, clanging along the ground. And deep in his heart brave Ajax knew and shuddered—here was work of the gods, thundering Zeus on high, cutting him off from battle, dashing all his plans. Zeus, determined to grant the Trojans triumph now. So Ajax drew back, out of range, and then—they flung their tireless fire at a fast trim ship. She was up in flames at once, engulfed in quenchless fire, in a flash the blaze went swirling round the stern and Achilles slapped his thighs and urged Patroclus, "To arms—Patroclus, prince and master horseman! I can see the blaze go roaring up the ships. They must not destroy them. No escape-route then. Quick, strap on my gear—I'll rouse the troops."

That was all, and Patroclus armed himself in Achilles' gleaming bronze. First he wrapped his legs with the well-made greaves, fastened behind the heels with silver ankle-clasps, next he strapped the breastplate round his chest.

blazoned with stars—swift Achilles' own—then over his shoulder Patroclus slung the sword, the fine bronze blade with its silver-studded hilt, and then the shield-strap and the sturdy, massive shield and over his powerful head he set the well-forged helmet, the horsehair crest atop it tossing, bristling terror, and he took two rugged spears that fit his grip. And Achilles' only weapon Patroclus did not take was the great man's spear, weighted, heavy, tough. No other Achaean fighter could heft that shaft, only Achilles had the skill to wield it well: Pelian ash it was, a gift to his father Peleus presented by Chiron once, hewn on Pelion's crest to be the death of heroes.

Now the war-team. Patroclus ordered Automedon to yoke them quickly—a man he honored next to Achilles breaker of men, always firmest in battle, nerced to wait the call. So at his command Automedon yoked the horses, the rapid stallions Roan Beauty and Dapple, the team that raced the gales, magnificent team the storm-wind filly Lightfoot foaled for the West Wind, grazing the lush green grass along the Ocean's tides. And into the traces he ran the purebred Bold Dancer—Achilles seized him once when he stormed Eetion's city, a mortal war-horse pacing immortal horses now.

Prince Achilles, ranging his ranks of Myrmidons arrayed them along the shelters, all in armor. Hungry as wolves that rend and bolt raw flesh, hearts filled with battle-frenzy that never dies—off on the cliffs, ripping apart some big antlered stag they gorge on the kill till all their jaws drip red with blood, then down in a pack they lope to a pooling, dark spring, their lean sharp tongues lapping the water's surface, belching bloody meat, but the fury, never shaken, builds inside their chests though their glutted bellies burst—so wild the Myrmidon captains. Myrmidon field commanders
nor would Achilles pour the wine to any other god, none but Father Zeus. Lifting it from the chest he purified it with sulphur crystals first then rinsed it out with water running clear, washed his hands and filled it bright with wine. And then, taking a stand before his lodge, he prayed, pouring the wine to earth and scanning the high skies and the god who loves the lightning never missed a word: "King Zeus—Pelasgian Zeus, lord of Dodona's holy shrine, dwelling far away, brooding over Dodona's bitter winters! Your prophets dwelling round you, Zeus, the Selli sleeping along the ground with unwashed feet... If you honored me last time and heard my prayer and rained destruction down on all Achaean ranks, now, once more, I beg you, bring my prayer to pass! I myself hold out on shore with the beached ships here but I send my comrade forth to war with troops of Myrmidons—Launch glory along with him, high lord of thunder, Zeus! Fill his heart with courage—so even Hector learns if Patroclus has the skill to fight his wars alone, my friend-in-arms, or his hands can rage unvanquished only when I go wading in and face the grind of battle. But once he repels the roaring onslaught from the ships let him come back to me and our fast fleet—unharmed—with all my armor round him, all our comrades fighting round my friend!"

So Achilles prayed and Zeus in all his wisdom heard those prayers. One prayer the Father granted, the other he denied: Patroclus would drive the onslaught off the ships—that much Zeus granted, true, but denied him safe and sound return from battle. Once Achilles had poured the wine and prayed to Zeus, he returned to his shelter, stowed the cup in the chest then took his stand outside, his spirit yearning still to watch Achaeans and Trojans struggle to the death.

Myrmidons, battalions ranged in armor with greathearted Patroclus, moving out now, the fury bursting inside them, suddenly charged the Trojans— they swarmed forth like wasps from a roadside nest when boys have made it their sport to set them seething, day after day tormenting them round their wayside hive—idiot boys! they make a menace for every man in sight. Any innocent traveler passing them on that road can stir them accidentally—up in arms in a flash, all in a swarm come pouring, each one raging down to fight for home and children— Such frenzy seized their hearts. Myrmidons pouring out of the ships, ceaseless shouts rising and over them all Patroclus' war cries rousing comrades: "Myrmidons! Brothers-in-arms of Peleus' son Achilles! Fight like men, my friends, call up your battle-fury! Now we must win high honor for Peleus' royal son, far the greatest fighter among the Argive fleet, and we who fight beside him the bravest troops—so even mighty Atrides can see how mad he was to disgrace Achilles, the best of the Achaean!"

He closed with a shout and fired each fighter's heart and down in a mass they launched against the Trojans, ships around them echoing back their shattering cries.

The Trojans, soon as they saw Menoetius' gallant son, himself and his loyal driver flare in brazen gear—all their courage quaked, their columns buckled, thinking swift Achilles had tossed to the winds his hard rage that held him back by the ships and chosen friendship toward the Argives now. Each Trojan soldier glancing left and right—how could he run from sudden, plunging death?

Patroclus was first to hurl his glinting spear, right at the center mass—the fighters milling round the stern of Protesilaus' blazing ship—and hit Pyraechmes, firebrand who led the Paeonians,
the master riders from Amydon, from Axius' broad currents. Patroclus slashed his right shoulder and down he went, his back slamming the dust with a jolting groan as companions panicked round him—brave Paecionians—Patroclus whipped the terror in all their hearts when he killed the chief who toppled them all in battle. He rode them off the ships, he quenched the leaping fire, leaving Protalexus' hulk half-burnt but upright still and the Trojans scattered back with high, shrill cries. The Argives poured against them, back by the hollow hulls, the din of battle incessant—an Argive breakthrough—bright as the moment Zeus the lord of lightning moves from a craggy mountain ridge a storm cloud massing dense and all the lookout peaks stand out and the jutting cliffs and the steep ravines and down from the high heavens bursts the boundless bright air... So now the Argives drove the ravening fire clear of the warships, winning a little breathing room, not much, no real halt to the buck-and-rush of battle. For despite the surge of the Argives primed for war the Trojans were still not wheeling round in headlong rout away from the black hulls. Forced back from them, true, they braced for battle still and made a stand. Deadlock:

there man killed man in the pell-mell clash of battle, captains going at captains. Brave Patroclus first—just as Areipecus swerved in sudden flight he gored him in the hip with a slashing spear and the bronze lancehead hammered through his flesh, the shaft splintering bone as he pitched face-first, pounding the ground—

And veteran Menelaus wounded Thoas, raking his chest where the shield-rim left it bare, and loosed his limbs—

And Amphiclus went for Meges but Meges saw him coming and got in first by far, spearing him up the thigh where it joins the body,

the spot where a man's muscle bunches thickest: the tough sinews shredded around the weapon's point as the dark swirled down his eyes—Nestor's sons on attack! Antilochus struck Atymnus hard with a whetted spear, the bronze ripping into his flank and clean through—he crashed at his feet—But Maris charged Antilochus, sweeping in with his lance, enraged for his brother, planted himself before his corpse but Thrasymedes, quick as a god, beat him to it—he stabbed before Maris stabbed—no miss! right in the shoulder, the Argive's spearpoint cracked through the bony socket, shearing away the tendons, wrenched the whole arm out and down he thundered, darkness blanked his eyes. So these two brothers, laid low by the two brothers, dropped to the world of night: Sarpedon's stalwart cohorts, spearmen sons of Amisodarus—he who bred the Chimaera, the grim monster that sent so many men to death. There—quick Oilean Ajax rushed Cleobulus, took him alive, stumbling blind in the rout but took his life at once, snapped his strength with a sword that hewed his neckbone—up to the hilt so the whole blade ran hot with blood, and red death came flooding down his eyes, and the strong force of fate. And now in a breakneck charge Peneleos closed with Lycon—they'd missed each other with spears, two wasted casts, so now both clashed with swords. Lycon, flailing, chopped the horn of Peneleos' horsehair-crested helmet but round the socket the sword-blade smashed to bits—just as Peneleos hacked his neck below the ear and the blade sank clean through, nothing held but a flap of skin. the head swung loose to the side as Lycon slumped down to the ground... There—at a dead run Meriones ran down Acamas, Acamas mounting behind his team, and gouged his right shoulder—he pitched from the car and the mist whirled down his eyes. Idomeneus skewered Erymas straight through the mouth,
the merciless brazen spearpoint raking through,
up under the brain to split his glistening skull—
teeth shattered out, both eyes brimmed to the lids
with a gush of blood and both nostrils spurtine.
mouth gaping, blowing convulsive sprays of blood
and death's dark cloud closed down around his corpse.

So in a rush each Argive captain killed his man.
As ravenous wolves come swooping down on lambs or kids
to snatch them away from right amidst their flock—all lost
when a careless shepherd leaves them straggling down the hills
and quickly spotting a chance the wolf pack picks them off.

Great Ajax now—forever aiming at Hector,
trying to strike his helmet flashing bronze
but Hector was far too seasoned, combat-tested.
broad shoulders hunching under his bull's-hide shield.
his eyes peeled for a whistling shaft or thudding spear.
Hector knew full well the tide of battle had turned
but still stood firm, defending die-hard comrades.

Wild as a storm cloud moving off Olympus into heaven
out of a clear blue sky when Zeus brings cyclones on—
so wild the rout, the cries that came from the ships
as back through the trench they ran, formations wrecked.
And Hector? Hector's speedig horses swept him away,
armor and all, leaving his men to face their fate.
Trojans trappéd but struggling on in the deep trench.
Hundreds of plunging war-teams dragging chariots down,
snapping the yoke-poles, ditched their masters' cars
and Patroclus charged them, heart afire for the kill,
shouting his Argives forward—"Slaughter Trojans!"
Cries of terror breaking as Trojans choked all roads,
their lines ripped to pieces, up from under the hoofs
a dust storm swirling into the clouds as rearing horses

broke into stride again and galloped back to Troy,
leaving ships and shelters in their wake. Patroclus—
wherever he saw the biggest masses dashing before him,
there he steered, plowing ahead with savage cries
and fighters tumbled out of their chariots headfirst,
crushed under their axles, war-cars crashing over, yes.
but straight across the trench went his own careering team
at a superhuman bound. Magnificent racing stallions,
gifts of the gods to Peleus, shining immortal gifts,
straining breakneck on as Patroclus' high courage
urged him against Prince Hector, keen for the kill
but Hector's veering horses swept him clear.
And all in an onrush dark as autumn days
when the whole earth flattens black beneath a gale,
when Zeus flings down his petting, punishing rains—
up in arms, furious, storming against those men
who brawl in the courts and render crooked judgments,
men who throw all rights to the winds with no regard
for the vengeful eyes of the gods—so all their rivers
crest into flood spate, ravines overflowing cut the hilltops
off into lonely islands, the roaring flood tide rolling down
to the storm-torn sea, headlong down from the foothills
washes away the good plowed work of men—
the gasping Trojan war-teams hurtled on.

soon as the fighter cut their front battalions off
he swerved back to pin them against the warships,
ever letting the Trojans stream back up to Troy
as they struggled madly on—but there mid-field
between the ships, the river and beetling wall
Patroclus kept on sweeping in, hacking them down,
making them pay the price for Argives slaughtered.
There, Pronous first to fall—a glint of the spear
and Patroclus tore his chest left bare by the shield-rim.
loosed his knees and the man went crashing down.
And next he went for Thestor the son of Enops
cowering, crouched in his fine polished chariot,
crazed with fear, and the reins flew from his grip—
Patroclus rising beside him stabbed his right jawbone,
ramming the spearhead square between his teeth so hard
he hooked him by that spearhead over the chariot-rail,
hoisted, dragged the Trojan out as an angler perched
on a jutting rock ledge drags some fish from the sea,
some noble catch, with line and glittering bronze hook.
So with the spear Patroclus gaffed him off his car,
his mouth gaping round the glittering point
and flipped him down facefirst,
dead as he fell, his life breath blown away.
And next he caught Erylaus closing, lunging in—
he flung a rock and it struck between his eyes
and the man's whole skull split in his heavy helmet,
down the Trojan slammed on the ground, head-down
and courage-shattering Death engulfed his corpse.
Then in a blur of kills, Amphioten, Erymas, Epaltes,
Tlepolemus son of Damastor, and Echius and Pyris,
Iphesus and Euippus and Polymelus the son of Argeas—
he crowded corpse on corpse on the earth that rears us all.

But now Sarpedon, watching his comrades drop and die,
war-shirts billowing free as Patroclus killed them,
dressed his godlike Lycians down with a harsh shout:
"Lycians, where's your pride? Where are you running?
Now be fast to attack! I'll take him on myself,
see who he is who routs us, wreaking havoc against us—
cutting the legs from under squads of good brave men."

With that he leapt from his chariot fully armed
and hit the ground and Patroclus straight across,
as soon as he saw him, leapt from his car too.
As a pair of crook-clawed, hook-beaked vultures
swoop to fight, screaming above some jagged rock—
so with their battle cries they rushed each other there.
And Zeus the son of Cronus with Cronus' twisting ways,
filling with pity now to see the two great fighters.
Now as the two came closing on each other
Patroclus suddenly picked off Thrasymelus
the famous driver, the aide who flanked Sarpedon—
he speared him down the guts and loosed his limbs.  
But Sarpedon hurled next with a flashing lance
and missed his man but he hit the horse Bold Dancer,
stabbing his right shoulder and down the stallion went,
screaming his life out, shrieking down in the dust
as his life breath winged away. And the paired horses
reared apart—a raspy creak of the yoke, the reins flying,
fouled as the trace horse thrashed the dust in death-throes.  
But the fine spearman Automedon found a cure for that—
drawing his long sharp sword from his sturdy thigh
he leapt with a stroke to cut the trace horse free—it worked. The team righted, pulled at the reins
and again both fighters closed with savage frenzy,
dueling now to the death.

Again Sarpedon missed—
over Patroclus’ left shoulder his spearhead streaked,
it never touched his body. Patroclus hurled next,
the bronze launched from his hand—no miss, a mortal hit.  
He struck him right where the midriff packs the pounding heart
and down Sarpedon fell as an oak or white poplar falls
or towering pine that shipwrights up on a mountain
hew down with whetted axes for sturdy ship timber—
so he stretched in front of his team and chariot,
sprawled and roaring, clawing the bloody dust.
As the bull a marauding lion cuts from the herd,
tawny and greathearted among the shambled cattle,
dies bellowing under the lion’s killing jaws—
so now Sarpedon, captain of Lycia’s shieldsmen,
died at Patroclus’ hands and died raging still,
crying out his beloved comrade’s name: “Glaucus—
oh dear friend, dear fighter, soldier’s soldier!
Now is the time to prove yourself a spearman,
a daring man of war—now, if you are brave,
make grueling battle your one consuming passion.

First find Lycia’s captains, range the ranks,
spur them to fight and shield Sarpedon’s body.
Then you, Glaucus, you fight for me with bronze!
You’ll hang your head in shame—every day of your life—
if the Argives strip my armor here at the anchored ships
where I have gone down fighting. Hold on, full force—
spur all our men to battle!”

Death cut him short.
The end closed in around him, swirling down his eyes,
chocking off his breath. Patroclus planted a heel
against his chest, wrenched the spear from his wound
and the midriff came out with it—so he dragged out both
the man’s life breath and the weapon’s point together.
Close by, the Myrmidons clung to the panting stallions
straining to bolt away, free of their masters’ chariot.

But grief came over Glaucus, hearing his comrade’s call.
His heart was racing—what could he do to help him?
Wounded himself, he gripped his right arm hard,
aching where Teucer’s arrow had hit him squarely,
assaulting the Argive wall, when Teucer saved his men.
Glaucus cried a prayer to the distant deadly Archer:
“Hear me, Lord Apollo! Wherever you are now—
in Lycia’s rich green country or here in Troy,
wherever on earth, you can hear a man in pain,
you have that power, and pain comes on me now.
Look at this ugly wound—
my whole arm rings with the stabbing pangs,
the blood won’t clot, my shoulder’s a dead weight.
I can’t take up my spear, can’t hold it steady—
no wading into enemy ranks to fight it out...
and our bravest man is dead, Sarpedon, Zeus’s son—
did Zeus stand by him? Not even his own son!
I beg you, Apollo, heal this throbbing wound,
lull the pain now, lend me power in battle—
so I can rally our Lycians, drive them into war
and fight to save my comrade’s corpse myself.”
So Glaucus prayed and Apollo heard his prayer. He stopped the pains at once, stanch his dark blood in his throbbing wound and filled his heart with courage. And Glaucus sensed it all and the man glowed with joy that the mighty god had heard his prayer so quickly. First he hurried to spur his Lycian captains on, ranging his own ranks, to fight around Sarpedon, then he ran for the Trojan lines with long strides. He found Polydamas, Panthous' son, and Prince Agenor and reaching Aeneas and Hector helmed in bronze, shoulder-to-shoulder let his challenge fly:

"Hector, you've wiped your allies from your mind! And all for you, Hector, far from their loved ones, far from native land they bleed their lives away. But you won't lift a hand to fight beside them. There lies Sarpedon, lord of Lycia's shieldsmen, who defended his realm with just decrees and power—Ares has cut him down with Patroclus' brazen spear. Quick, my friends, stand by him! Cringe with shame at the thought they'll strip his gear and maim his corpse—these Myrmidons, seething for all the Argive troops we killed, we speared to death against their fast trim ships!"

Hard grief came sweeping over the Trojans' heads—unbearable, irrepresible. He was their city's bastion, always, even though he came from foreign parts, and a mass of allies marched at his command but he excelled them all in battle, always. So now they went at the Argives, out for blood, and furious for Sarpedon Hector swung them round. But the Argives surged to Patroclus' savage spirit—he spurred the Acentes first, both ablaze for battle:

"Ajax, Ajax! Come—now thrill to fight as before, brave among the brave, but now be braver still! Their captain's down, the first to storm our wall, the great Sarpedon. If only we could seize his body, mutilate him, shame him, tear his gear from his back and any comrade of his who tries to shield his corpse—bring that enemy down with ruthless bronze!"

Urging so but his men already burned to drive the Trojans off. And both armies now, pulling their lines tighter, Trojans and Lycians, Myrmidons and Achaeans closed around the corpse to lunge in battle—terrible war cries, stark clashing of armored men. And across the onslaught Zeus swept murderous night to make the pitched battle over his own dear son a brutal, blinding struggle.

Here at the first assault the Trojans shouldered back the fiery-eyed Achaeans—a Myrmidon had been hit, and not their least man, dauntless Agacles' son, renowned Epigeus... He ruled Budion's fortress town in the old days but then, having killed some highborn cousin, fled to Peleus and glistening Thetis, begged for his own life and they sent him off with Achilles, breaker of men, east to stallion-country to fight and die in Troy. He had just grasped the corpse when shining Hector smashed his head with a rock and his whole skull split in his massive helmet—down he slammed on Sarpedon's body, facefirst and courage-shattering Death engulfed his corpse. Grief for his dead companion seized Patroclus now, he tore through frontline fighters swift as a hawk diving to scatter crows and fear-struck starlings—straight at the Lycians, Patroclus O my rider, straight at the pressing Trojan ranks you swooped, enraged at your comrade's death! and struck Sthenelaus, Ithaemenes' favorite son—a big rock to the neck snapped the tendons strung to the skull's base. So the front gave ground and flashing Hector too, though only as far as a long slim spear can fly when a man tests his hurling strength in the games or in war when enemy fighters close to crush his life—so far the Trojans gave as the Argives drove them back. But Glaucus was first, lord of Lycia's shieldsmen now,
the first to turn and he killed the gallant Bathycles, Chalcon’s prize son who had made his home in Hellas, excelling the Myrmidons all in wealth and fortune. Now, just as the man was about to catch Glaucus Glaucus suddenly spun and struck, he stabbed his chest, ripped him down with a crash. A heavy blow to the Argives, one of the brave ones down. A great joy to the Trojans, massing packs of them swarming round the corpse but Achaean forces never slackened their drive, their juggernaut fury bore them breakneck on. And there—Meriones killed a Trojan captain, Laogonus, daring son of Onetor, priest of Zeus, Idaean Zeus, and his land revered him like a god—Meriones gouged him under the jaw and ear, his spirit flew from his limbs and the hateful darkness gripped him. Just then Aeneas hurled his brazen spear at Meriones, hoping to hit the man as he charged behind his shield But he eyed Aeneas straight on, he dodged the bronze, ducking down with a quick lunge, and behind his back the heavy spearshaft plunged and stuck in the earth, the butt end quivering into the air till suddenly rugged Ares snuffed its fury out, dead still. The weapon shaking, planted fast in the ground, his whole arm’s power poured in a wasted shot, Aeneas flared in anger, shouting out, “Meriones—great dancer as you are, my spear would have stopped your dancing days for good if only I had hit you!”

The hardy spearman Meriones shot back, “Aeneas—great man of war as you are, you’ll find it hard to quench the fire of every man who fights you. You too are made of mortal stuff, I’d say. And I, if I’d lanced your guts with bronze—strong as you are and cocksure of your hands—you’d give me glory now, you’d give your life to the famous horseman Death!”

But Patroclus nerved for battle dressed him down: “Meriones, brave as you are, why bluster on this way?

Trust me, my friend, you’ll never force the Trojans back from this corpse with a few stinging taunts—Earth will bury many a man before that. Come—the proof of battle is action, proof of words, debate. No time for speeches now, it’s time to fight.”

Breaking off, he led the way as Meriones followed, staunch as a god. And loud as the roar goes up when men cut timber deep in the mountain glades and the pounding din of axes echoes miles away—so the pound and thud of blows came rising up from the broad earth, from the trampled paths of war and the bronze shields and tough plied hides struck hard as the swords and two-edged spears stabbed against them. Not even a hawk-eyed scout could still make out Sarpedon, the man’s magnificent body covered over head to toe, buried under a mass of weapons, blood and dust. But they still kept swarming round and round the corpse like flies in a sheepfold buzzing over the brimming pails in the first spring days when the buckets flood with milk. So veteran troops kept swarming round that corpse, never pausing—nor did mighty Zeus for a moment turn his shining eyes from the clash of battle. He kept them fixed on the struggling mass forever, the Father’s spirit churning, thrashing out the ways, the numberless ways to cause Patroclus’ slaughter . . . To kill him too in this present bloody rampage over Sarpedon’s splendid body? Hector in glory cutting Patroclus down with hacking bronze then tearing the handsome war-gear off his back? Or let him take still more, piling up his kills? As Zeus turned things over, that way seemed the best: the valiant friend-in-arms of Peleus’ son Achilles would drive the Trojans and Hector helmed in bronze back to Troy once more, killing them by platoons—and Zeus began with Hector, he made the man a coward. Hector leaping back in his chariot, swerving to fly, shouted out fresh orders—“Retreat, Trojans, now!”
He knew that Zeus had tipped the scales against him.
A rout—not even the die-hard Lyceans stood their ground, they all scattered in panic, down to the last man when they saw their royal king speared in the heart, Sarpedon sprawled there in the muster of the dead, for men by the squad had dropped across his corpse once Zeus stretched tight the lethal line of battle. So then the Achaeans ripped the armor off his back, Sarpedon's gleaming bronze that Menoetius' son the brave Patroclus flung in the arms of cohorts poised to speed those trophies back to the beaked ships. And storming Zeus was stirring up Apollo: “On with it now—sweep Sarpedon clear of the weapons, Phoebus my friend, and once you wipe the dark blood from his body, bear him far from the fighting, off and away, and bathe him well in a river's running tides and anoint him with deathless oils . . .
dress his body in deathless, ambrosial robes. Then send him on his way with the wind-swift escorts, twin brothers Sleep and Death, who with all good speed will set him down in the broad green land of Lycia. There his brothers and countrymen will bury the prince with full royal rites, with mounded tomb and pillar. These are the solemn honors owed the dead.”

So he decreed and Phoebus did not neglect the Father's strong desires. Down from Ida's slopes he dove to the bloody field and lifting Prince Sarpedon clear of the weapons, bore him far from the fighting, off and away, and bathed him well in a river's running tides and anointed him with deathless oils . . .
dressed his body in deathless, ambrosial robes then sent him on his way with the wind-swift escorts, twin brothers Sleep and Death, who with all good speed set him down in Lycia's broad green land.

But Patroclus, giving a cry to Automedon whipping on his team, Patroclus went for Troy's and Lycia's lines.
As he turned things over, Apollo stood beside him, taking the shape of that lusty rugged fighter Asius, an uncle of stallion-breaking Hector, a blood brother of Hecuba, son of Dymas who lived in Phrygia near Sangarius' rapids. Like him, Apollo the son of Zeus incited Hector:

'Hector, why stop fighting? Neglecting your duty! If only I outfought you as you can outfight me, I'd soon teach you to shirk your work in war—you'd pay the price, I swear. Up with you—fast! Lash those pounding stallions straight at Patroclus—you might kill him still—Apollo might give you glory!'

And back Apollo strode, a god in the wars of men while glorious Hector ordered skilled Cebriones.

"Flog the team to battle!" Apollo pressed on, wading into the ruck, hurling Argives back in chaos and handing glory to Hector and all the Trojan forces. But Hector ignored the Argive masses, killing none, he lashed his pounding stallions straight at Patroclus. Patroclus, over against him, leapt down from his car and hit the ground, his left hand shaking a spear and seized with his right a jagged, glittering stone his hand could just cover—Patroclus flung it hard, leaning into the heave, not backing away from Hector, no, and no wasted shot. But he hit his driver—a bastard son of famed King Priam, Cebriones yanking the reins back taut—right between the eyes. The sharp stone crushed both brows, the skull caved in and both eyes burst from their sockets, dropping down in the dust before his feet as the reinsman vaulted, plunging off his well-wrought car like a diver—Cebriones' life breath left his bones behind and you taunted his corpse, Patroclus O my rider:

"Look what a springy man, a nimble, flashy tumbler! Just think what he'd do at sea where the fish swarm—why, the man could glut a fleet, diving for oysters! Plunging overboard, even in choppy, heaving seas, just as he dives to ground from his war-car now. Even these Trojans have their tumblers—what a leap!"

And he leapt himself at the fighting driver's corpse with the rushing lunge of a lion struck in the chest as he lays waste pens of cattle—his own lordly courage about to be his death.

So you sprang at Cebriones, full fury. Patroclus, as Hector sprang down from his chariot just across and the two went tussling over the corpse as lions up on the mountain ridges over a fresh-killed stag—both ravenous, proud and savage—fight it out to the death.

So over the driver here and both claw-mad for battle, Patroclus son of Menoetius, Hector ablaze for glory strained to slash each other with ruthless bronze. Hector seized the corpse's head, would not let go—Patroclus clung to a foot and other fighters clashed, Trojans, Argives, all in a grueling, maiming onset.

As the East and South Winds fight in killer-squalls deep in a mountain valley thrashing stands of timber, oak and ash and cornel with bark stretched taut and hard and they whip their long sharp branches against each other, a deafening roar goes up, the splintered timber crashing—so Achaeans and Trojans crashed, hacking into each other, and neither side now had a thought of flight that would have meant disaster. Showers of whetted spears stuck fast around Cebriones, bristling winged arrows whipped from the bowstrings, huge rocks by the salvo battering shields on shields as they struggled round the corpse. And there he lay in the whirling dust, overpowered in all his power and wiped from memory all his horseman's skills.

So till the sun bestrode the sky at high noon the weapons hurled side-to-side and men kept falling. But once the sun wheeled past the hour for unyoking oxen, then the Argives mounted a fiercer new attack,
flying beyond their fates...

They dragged the hero Cebriones out from under the pelting shafts and Trojans' piercing cries and they tore the handsome war-gear off his back and Patroclus charged the enemy, fired for the kill.

Three times he charged with the headlong speed of Ares, screaming his savage cry, three times he killed nine men. Then at the fourth assault Patroclus like something superhuman—then, Patroclus, the end of life came blazing up before you, yes, the lord Apollo met you there in the heart of battle, the god, the terror! Patroclus never saw him coming, moving across the deadly rout, shrouded in thick mist and his eyes spun as Apollo knocked the helmet off his head and under his horses' hoofs it tumbled, clattering on with its four forged horns and its hollow blank eyes and its plumes were all smeared in the bloody dust. Forbidden before this to defile its crest in dust, it guarded the head and handsome brow of a god, a man like a god, Achilles. But now the Father gave it over to Hector to guard his head in war since Hector's death was closing on him quickly.

Patroclus though—the spear in his grip was shattered, the whole of its rugged bronze-shod shadow-casting length and his shield with straps and tassels dropped from his shoulders, flung down on the ground—and lord Apollo the son of Zeus wrenched his breastplate off. Disaster seized him—his fine legs buckling—

he stood there, senseless—

right at his back, close-up, a Dardan fighter speared him squarely between the shoulder blades with a sharp lance.

Panthous' son Euphorbus, the best of his own age at spears and a horseman's skill and speed of foot, and even in this, his first attack in chariots—just learning the arts of war—he'd brought down twenty drivers off their cars.

He was the first to launch a spear against you, Patroclus O my rider, but did not bring you down Yanking out his ashen shaft from your body, back he dashed and lost himself in the crowds—the man would not stand up to Patroclus here in mortal combat, stripped, defenseless as he was. Patroclus stunned by the spear and the god's crushing blow was weaving back to his own thronging comrades, trying to escape death...

Hector waiting, watching the greathearted Patroclus trying to stagger free, seeing him wounded there with the sharp bronze came rushing into him right across the lines and rammed his spear shaft home, stabbing deep in the bowels, and the brazen point went jutting straight out through Patroclus' back. Down he crashed—horror gripped the Achaean armies. As when some lion overpowers a tireless wild boar up on a mountain summit, battling in all their fury over a little spring of water, both beasts craving to slake their thirst, but the lion beats him down with sheer brute force as the boar fights for breath—so now with a close thrust Hector the son of Priam tore the life from the fighting son of Menoetius, from Patroclus who had killed so many men in war, and gloried over him, wild winging words: "Patroclus—surely you must have thought you'd storm my city down, you'd wrest from the wives of Troy their day of freedom, drag them off in ships to your own dear fatherland—you fool! Rearing in their defense my war-team, Hector's horses were charging out to battle, galloping, full stretch. And I with my spear, Hector, shining among my combat-loving comrades, I fight away from them the fatal day—but you, the vultures will eat your body raw!

Poor, doomed...
as you went marching out and the hero stayed behind:

‘Now don’t come back to the hollow ships, you hear?—
Patroclus, master horseman—
ot till you’ve slashed the shirt around his chest
and soaked it red in the blood of man-killing Hector! ’
So he must have commanded—you maniac, you obeyed.’

Struggling for breath, you answered, Patroclus O my rider,

‘Hector! Now is your time to glory to the skies . . .
now the victory is yours.
A gift of the son of Cronus, Zeus—Apollo too—
they brought me down with all their deathless ease,
they are the ones who tore the armor off my back.
Even if twenty Hectors had charged against me—
they’d all have died here, laid low by my spear.
No, deadly fate in league with Apollo killed me.
From the ranks of men, Euphorbus. You came third,
and all you could do was finish off my life . . .
One more thing—take it to heart, I urge you—
you too, you won’t live long yourself, I swear.
Already I see them looming up beside you—death
and the strong force of fate, to bring you down
at the hands of Aeacus’ great royal son . . .

Achilles!’

Death cut him short. The end closed in around him.
Flying free of his limbs
his soul went winging down to the House of Death,
wafting his fate, leaving his manhood far behind,
his young and supple strength. But glorious Hector
taunted Patroclus’ body, dead as he was, “Why, Patroclus—
why prophesy my doom, my sudden death? Who knows?—
Achilles the son of sleek-haired Thetis may outtrace me—
struck by my spear first—and gasp away his life!’”

With that he planted a heel against Patroclus’ chest,
wrenched his brazen spear from the wound, kicked him over,
flat on his back, free and clear of the weapon.