

The *Iliad* of Homer

Book 6

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"My father had me learn every word of Homer ... to see me develop into a good man." —Niceratus of Athens

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Book 6

Hector Returns to the City

Diomedes & Glaucus, Hector & Andromache

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This reading comes from the Cave's
The Best of Homer's Iliad.

NOW THAT ALL the gods had returned to Olympus, the Trojans and the Achaeans carried on in dread battle, and the fight raged in every direction over the plain as they hurled their bronze-tipped spears straight at one another, battling between the river Simois and the streams of the Xanthus.

5-66 Telamonian Ajax bursts forward and strikes down Acamas, the best of the Thracians. Other Achaeans make their kills. Diomedes strikes down Axylus and Calesius; Euryalus kills Dresus, Opheltius, Aesepus, Pegasus, and Melanthius; Polypoetes slays Astyalus; Odysseus drops Pidytes; Antilochus lays low Ablerus; Agamemnon and Lei-

tus kill Elatus and Phylacus, respectively. In the distance, Menelaus captures Adrastus, who successfully begs to be spared for a ransom. Agamemnon comes along, however, and refuses to let him to live. The reason is straightforward—harm must be done to those who have done harm. All Trojan males must perish, he declares, even those still in their mother's womb. Homer comments that this was the appropriate counsel. As a result, Menelaus roughly shoves Adrastus to the ground, and Agamemnon slays him. Meanwhile, Nestor shouts out that the Achaeans should kill now and strip the fallen bodies later.

67-72 "My dear friends, Danaan heroes, Ares' help-

ers! May no man drop back and remain behind to collect the armor of all the fallen enemy men so that he can carry off most of the spoils when he returns to the ships. Not now! [70] Now's the time to kill men! Afterward, you can leisurely strip the dead littering the plain."

Nestor's words encouraged the battle might and spirit of each man.

73-118 *With Nestor's inspiration, the Achaeans nearly drive the Trojans back. But Helenus, the son of Priam and the best reader of birds, admonishes Aeneas and Hector to fire up the Trojans before they fearfully flee and weakly retreat behind Troy's walls into the arms of their women. The responsibility is theirs, he asserts, because Aeneas and Hector are the best in battle and deliberation.*

After they rouse the men, Helenus advises Hector to return to Troy in order to have the women appease Athena in her temple with the gift of a fine robe. The hope is that Athena will hold back Diomedes, who has become a greater source of trouble than Achilles ever was.

Hector goes out to the men and shouts, "Be men, friends! Put in mind your courageous strength to serve as a shield rushing into battle! I'm going to Ilium to tell the old men and our wives to pray to the gods and vow hecatombs in their honor." Upon saying this, Hector turns toward Troy.

119-129 Then Glaucus, the son of Hippolochus, and Diomedes, the son of Tydeus, [120] went into the open space between the two armies, eager to fight. When they were close to each other, Diomedes, good at the battle cry, was the first to speak. "Who are you, brave one, among mortal men? I have never seen you in battle, where men win glory, until now. But now you step out from the battle lines and courageously face my spear. Unhappy are those children of men who encounter my battle might! If, however, you are one of the immortals and have come down from heaven, I will not fight you."

130-140 *To justify his position, Diomedes tells Glaucus the story of Lycurgus, the son of Dryas, who engaged in strife with the gods by abusing the nurses who were caring*

for the young god Dionysus. The gods "who live at their ease" were angry with him for this and struck him blind. Consequently, Lycurgus ended up dying early because of all the divine hatred for him.

141-151 "Therefore, I will not fight with the blessed gods. But if you are of mortal men, and you eat the fruit of the earth, then come and try to kill me and so meet with a swift destruction."

The glorious son of Hippolochus answered him, "Great-spirited son of Tydeus, why do you ask me about my lineage? Men come and go as the leaves do year after year upon the trees. The wind sheds the autumn leaves upon the ground, but when the spring returns, the forest buds again with fresh ones. The generations of mankind are like this. The new generation springs up as the old is passing away. [150] If, then, you wish to learn of my descent, it is known by many."

152-206 *Glaucus offers a detailed report of his lineage, telling his family's story from Sisyphus, the craftiest of all men, to beautiful Bellerophon, Glaucus' own grandfather—who, thanks to Proteus' wife, Anteia, was made by Proteus (through the king of Lycia) to accomplish several dangerous labors meant to kill him—down to Hippolochus, his own father. He finishes by mentioning the directive his father gave him upon going to Troy.*

207-233 "He sent me to Troy and insistently ordered me to always be the best and to stand out among other men and not to dishonor or shame the family of my fathers, who were the best [210] in Ephyre and in wide Lycia. I boast, then, of this family and bloodline that is mine."

That's what Glaucus said. And Diomedes, good at the battle cry, rejoiced. He planted his spear in the ground and spoke to the shepherd of men with gentle and friendly words. "If this is so," he said, "then you are an old guest-friend in my father's house. Great Oeneus once entertained Bellerophon for twenty days. At the end, the two exchanged fair gifts of friendship. Oeneus gave a belt rich with purple, [220] and Bellerophon a double cup, which I left at home

when I set out for Troy. I don't remember Tydeus since he was taken from us while I was yet a child, when the army of the Achaeans was utterly destroyed before Thebes. From this moment on, however, I must be your dear host when you are in middle Argos, and you must be mine if I should ever go to Lycia. Let us consequently avoid each other's spears when the men come together. There are many Trojans and glorious allies I can kill if I overtake them and if the gods deliver them into my hands. Same with you—there are many Achaeans whose lives you may take if you can. [230] Let us exchange armor so that the men may know that we boast of guest-friendship handed down from our fathers."

With these words, they sprang from their chariots, grasped each other's hands, and bound each other together by oath.

234-403 *Diomedes and Glaucus exchange armor—but Diomedes gets the better part of the trade, obtaining gold for bronze armor.*

While they talk, Hector ventures into Troy through the Scaean gates and calls on the women to pray to the gods. He goes to Priam's house where he finds his mother, Hecuba. She offers him wine and other refreshment, but he declines, citing the ongoing battle. He commands her to go to Athena's temple to propitiate the goddess. She does. Accompanied by many older women, Hecuba lays a fine Sidonian robe on Athena's lap and prays that Diomedes' spear would be broken. Athena doesn't listen.

As they are attempting to appease the goddess, Hector runs off to discover the whereabouts of Paris. When he finds him with Helen, Hector rebukes him. Get up and fight for the people who are fighting and dying for you! he orders. Paris consents. As for Helen, she tells Hector that she wishes she had never been born—or if born, she wishes she had been the wife of a better man who knew how to feel shame in his heart. She invites Hector to sit with her while Paris dresses for battle. He turns her down, saying he must go and see his wife, son, and servants. He doesn't know if he'll return from battle or if the gods will subdue him by means of the Achaeans.

Hector rushes off to look for his wife in his own house. But Andromache is not there. Rather, a female slave re-

ports that she is up on the wall because she had heard that the Trojans were being pushed back by the Achaeans. Learning this, Hector rushes off, making his way through the city to the Scaean gates, where he meets his wife, one of her handmaidens, and his "well-loved" son Astyanax (whom Hector calls Scamandrius).

404-493 Hector smiled as he looked upon the boy, but he did not speak. Andromache stood by him weeping.

And taking Hector's hand in her own, she said, "God-driven man, your battle might will destroy you. You have no pity for your infant son or for me, the unfortunate one who has no portion of anything at all. I will be your widow when [410] all the Achaeans rise up and kill you. And if I lose you, I'd much rather be dead and buried—I will have nothing to comfort me when you have met your destined end, except for pain and distress alone.

"You know how it is with me. I have neither a father nor a mother now. Achilles slaughtered my father when he sacked great Thebes. He killed him, but he did not strip him, for his spirit was afraid and ashamed to do so. Instead, he burned him in his wondrous armor and raised a mound over his ashes. And the [420] mountain nymphs, daughters of aegis-bearing Zeus, planted a grove of elms around his tomb. I had seven brothers in my father's house, but on the same day, they all went down to the house of Hades. Achilles killed them while they were tending their sheep and cattle. And my mother, the one who ruled beneath the wooded mountain Placus, she was carried along with all the other Achaean plunder. But when Achilles set her free after receiving a great amount of ransom, she died by Artemis' darts in her father's own house. So it is that I have nothing and no one. No, Hector! *You* are my father and queen mother [430] and brother—and you are my vigorous husband! Come now and pity me! Stay here upon the wall and do not make your child fatherless and your wife a widow! As for the rest of the army, station them near the fig tree where the city walls can best be scaled and overrun. Three times have the best of the Achaeans attacked the wall there under the com-

mand of the two Ajaxes, famous Idomeneus, the sons of Atreus, and the brave son of Tydeus. They did it following their own counsel or because some oracle suggested the attack.”

[440] In return great Hector of the shining helmet answered, “I too have thought about all of this, woman. But I would feel ashamed before the Trojan men and women if I shirked battle like a coward. And besides, my spirit doesn’t order it since I have learned always to be brave and to fight in the front ranks among the Trojans, winning great glory for my father and myself.

“Still. I know well that the day will surely come when sacred Ilium will be destroyed along with Priam and all the people. [450] But hereafter none of these will cause me as much anguish as you—not even Hecuba, nor the ruler Priam, nor my brothers, many and brave, who may fall in the dust before their foes. For none of these do I grieve as I do for you when the day will come that one of the bronze-clad Achaeans will rob you forever of your freedom and haul you away against your will, weeping. Then you’ll have to work the loom of some mistress in Argos, or you’ll be commanded by some woman to fetch water from the springs of Messeis or Hyperaia—all against your will, by the strong force of necessity. At that time, a man who sees you weeping will say, [460] ‘This was Hector’s woman, Hector who was the best at fighting among the horse taming Trojans when men fought around Ilium.’ This is how that man will speak. And all over again you’ll feel pain and distress when you discover that you have no man to defend you against slavery. May I lie dead under a mound before I hear your frantic crying as they carry you off to bondage!”

This is what shining Hector said. And saying this, he stretched his arms and hands out to his child, but the boy cried and nestled back into his nurse’s bosom. He was terrified by his father’s armor—the horsehair crest nodding [470] frightfully upon his helmet. His mother and father laughed to see him so alarmed. Even so, Hector took the helmet from his head and set it gleaming upon the ground. Then he held his dear son, kissed him, and swung him around

by his arms and hands. After playing with him like this, Hector spoke in prayer to Zeus and all the gods. “Zeus and the other gods, grant that this child, my boy, may be as I am. Make him outstanding among all the Trojan men, preeminent in forceful strength and noble bravery, and may he powerfully rule Ilium. And when someday he returns home [480] from battle carrying the gory spoils of the enemy man he has slaughtered—the dead man’s shield and armor—may some man say, ‘He’s even better than his father was!’ And let his mother rejoice and delight in her heart!”

With this, he put the child into the arms of his dear wife, and she took him to her own soft bosom, smiling through her tears. As her husband watched her, he felt pity for Andromache and caressed her. Then, calling her by name, he said, “God-driven woman, do not grieve too much for me in your spirit. For no man has gone down to Hades beyond what Fate had decreed. But I declare that from the moment of his birth, no man has ever been able to run away from his own fate, neither the coward nor the brave man. [490] Go, then, into the house and occupy yourself with your own work, with the loom and the distaff, and order your serving women to do the same. As for war, it is a man’s work—and mine above all others born in Ilium.”

494-525 Hector picks up his helmet and rushes off, leaving Andromache to weep behind him. Returning home, she laments his fate, knowing he will die. She believes he’ll never again return home to Troy.

Meanwhile, Paris readies himself for battle and meets Hector by the gate. When Paris apologizes for being so slow, Hector explains what grieves him most about his brother—that even though Paris is strong, he is a slacker in battle, and so the Trojans speak shameful words about him. Saying that, the two brothers step off to fight.

526-529 “Let’s go! We’ll make amends for your behavior later if Zeus, in assembly with the everlasting heavenly gods, decides to give us the mixing-bowl of freedom to stand in our halls when we drive the well-grieved Achaeans from Troy.”

So ends Book 6. **See you in Book 7, "Hector Fights Telamonian Ajax."**

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