

at the House of Death with the all-embracing gates.  
 Oh give me your hand—I beg you with my tears!  
 Never, never again shall I return from Hades  
 once you have given me the soothing rites of fire.  
 Never again will you and I, alive and breathing,  
 huddle side-by-side, apart from loyal comrades,  
 making plans together—never . . . Grim death,  
 that death assigned from the day that I was born  
 has spread its hateful jaws to take me down.

And you too,

your fate awaits you too, godlike as you are, Achilles—  
 to die in battle beneath the proud rich Trojans' walls!  
 But one thing more. A last request—grant it, please.  
 Never bury my bones apart from yours, Achilles,  
 let them lie together . . .  
 just as we grew up together in your house,  
 after Menoetius brought me there from Opois,  
 and only a boy, but banished for bloody murder  
 the day I killed Amphidamas' son. I was a fool—  
 I never meant to kill him—quarreling over a dice game.  
 Then the famous horseman Peleus took me into his halls,  
 he reared me with kindness, appointed me your aide.  
 So now let a single urn, the gold two-handed urn  
 your noble mother gave you, hold our bones—together!"

And the swift runner Achilles reassured him warmly:  
 "Why have you returned to me here, dear brother, friend?  
 Why tell me of all that I must do? I'll do it all.  
 I will obey you, your demands. Oh come closer!  
 Throw our arms around each other, just for a moment—  
 take some joy in the tears that numb the heart!"

In the same breath he stretched his loving arms  
 but could not seize him, no, the ghost slipped underground  
 like a wisp of smoke . . . with a high thin cry.  
 And Achilles sprang up with a start and staring wide,  
 drove his fists together and cried in desolation, "Ah god!  
 So even in Death's strong house there is something left,

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a ghost, a phantom—true, but no real breath of life.  
 All night long the ghost of stricken Patroclus  
 hovered over me, grieving, sharing warm tears,  
 telling me, point by point, what I must do.  
 Marvelous—like the man to the life!"

So he cried

and his outcry stirred in them all a deep desire to grieve,  
 and Dawn with her rose-red fingers shone upon them weeping  
 round the wretched corpse. At daybreak King Agamemnon  
 ordered parties of men and mules to haul in timber,  
 pouring from the tents with a good man in charge,  
 the lordly Idomeneus' aide-in-arms Meriones.  
 The troops moved out with loggers' axes in hand  
 and sturdy cabled ropes as mules trudged on ahead.  
 Uphill, downhill, crisscross, zigzag on they tramped  
 and once they reached the slopes of Ida with all her springs,  
 quickly pitching themselves at towering, leaf-crowned oaks,  
 they put their backs into strokes of the whetted bronze axes  
 and huge trunks came crashing down. They split them apart,  
 lashed the logs to the mules and their hoofs tore up the earth,  
 dragging them down to level ground through dense brush.  
 And all the woodcutters hoisted logs themselves—  
 by command of Idomeneus' good aide Meriones—  
 and they heaved them down in rows along the beach  
 at the site Achilles chose to build an immense mound  
 for Patroclus and himself.

With boundless timber piled

on all sides of the place, down they sat, waiting, massed.  
 And at once Achilles called his Myrmidons keen for battle:  
 "Belt yourselves in bronze! Each driver yoke his team!  
 Chariots harnessed!" Up they rose and strapped on armor  
 and swung aboard the war-cars, drivers, fighters beside them—  
 and the horse moved out in front, behind came clouds of infantry,  
 men by thousands, and in their midst his comrades bore Patroclus.  
 They covered his whole body deep with locks of hair they cut  
 and cast upon him, and just behind them brilliant Achilles  
 held the head, in tears—this was his steadfast friend  
 whom he escorted down to the House of Death.

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When they reached the site Achilles had pointed out  
 they laid Patroclus down and swiftly built his body  
 a fitting height of timber.  
 And now the great runner remembered one more duty.  
 Stepping back from the pyre he cut the red-gold lock  
 he'd let grow long as a gift to the river god Spercheus—  
 scanning the wine-dark sea he prayed in anguish, "Spercheus!  
 All in vain my father Peleus vowed to you that there,  
 once I had journeyed home to my own dear fatherland,  
 I'd cut this lock for you and offer splendid victims,  
 dedicate fifty young ungelded rams to your springs,  
 there at the spot where your grove and smoking altar stand!  
 So the old king vowed—but you've destroyed his hopes.  
 Now, since I shall not return to my fatherland,  
 I'd give my friend this lock . . .  
 and let the hero Patroclus bear it on his way."

With that,

Achilles placed the lock in his dear comrade's hands  
 and stirred in the men again a deep desire to grieve.  
 And now the sunlight would have set upon their tears  
 if Achilles had not turned to Agamemnon quickly:  
 "Atrides—you are the first the armies will obey.  
 Even of sorrow men can have their fill. So now  
 dismiss them from the pyre, have them prepare  
 an evening meal. We are the closest to the dead,  
 we'll see to all things here.  
 But I'd like the leading captains to remain."

Hearing his wish, the lord of men Agamemnon  
 dismissed the troops at once to the balanced ships.  
 But the chief mourners stayed in place, piled timber  
 and built a pyre a hundred feet in length and breadth  
 and aloft it laid the corpse with heavy, aching hearts.  
 And droves of fat sheep and shambling crook-horned cattle  
 they led before the pyre, skinned and dressed them well.  
 And the greathearted Achilles, flensing fat from all,  
 wrapped the corpse with folds of it, head to foot,  
 then heaped the flayed carcasses round Patroclus.

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He set two-handled jars of honey and oil beside him,  
 leaned them against the bier—and then with wild zeal  
 slung the bodies of four massive stallions onto the pyre  
 and gave a wrenching groan. And the dead lord Patroclus  
 had fed nine dogs at table—he slit the throats of two,  
 threw them onto the pyre and then a dozen brave sons  
 of the proud Trojans he hacked to pieces with his bronze . . .  
 Achilles' mighty heart was erupting now with slaughter—  
 he loosed the iron rage of fire to consume them all  
 and cried out, calling his dear friend by name,  
 "Farewell, Patroclus, even there in the House of Death!  
 All that I promised once I have performed at last.  
 Here are twelve brave sons of the proud Trojans—  
 all, the fire that feeds on you devours them all  
 but not Hector the royal son of Priam, Hector  
 I will never give to the hungry flames—  
 wild dogs will bolt his flesh!"

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So he threatened

but the dogs were not about to feed on Hector.  
 Aphrodite daughter of Zeus beat off the packs,  
 day and night, anointing Hector's body with oil,  
 ambrosial oil of roses, so Achilles could not rip  
 the prince's skin as he dragged him back and forth.  
 And round him Phoebus Apollo brought a dark cloud down  
 from high sky to the plain to shroud the entire space  
 where Hector's body lay, before the sun's white fury  
 could sear away his flesh, his limbs and sinews.

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But the pyre of dead Patroclus was not burning—  
 and the swift runner Achilles thought of what to do.  
 Stepping back from the pyre he prayed to the two winds—  
 Zephyr and Boreas, West and North—promised splendid victims  
 and pouring generous, brimming cups from a golden goblet,  
 begged them to come, so the wood might burst in flame  
 and the dead burn down to ash with all good speed.  
 And Iris, hearing his prayers, rushed the message on  
 to the winds that gathered now in stormy Zephyr's halls  
 to share his brawling banquet. Iris swept to a stop

230

and once they saw her poised at the stone threshold  
 all sprang up, each urged her to sit beside him  
 but she refused, pressing on with her message:  
 "No time for sitting now. No, I must return  
 to the Ocean's running stream, the Aethiopians' land.  
 They are making a splendid sacrifice to the gods—  
 I must not miss my share of the sacred feast.  
 But I bring Achilles' prayers!  
 He begs you to come at once, Boreas, blustering Zephyr,  
 he promises splendid victims—come with a strong blast  
 and light the pyre where Patroclus lies in state  
 and all the Argive armies mourn around him!"

Message delivered, off she sped as the winds rose  
 with a superhuman roar, stampeding clouds before them.  
 Suddenly reaching the open sea in gale force,  
 whipping whitecaps under a shrilling killer-squall  
 they raised the good rich soil of Troy and struck the pyre  
 and a huge inhuman blaze went howling up the skies.  
 All night long they hurled the flames—massed on the pyre,  
 blast on screaming blast—and all night long the swift Achilles,  
 lifting a two-handled cup, dipped wine from a golden bowl  
 and poured it down on the ground and drenched the earth,  
 calling out to the ghost of stricken, gaunt Patroclus.  
 As a father weeps when he burns his son's bones,  
 dead on his wedding day,  
 and his death has plunged his parents in despair . . .  
 so Achilles wept as he burned his dear friend's bones,  
 dragging himself around the pyre, choked with sobs.

At that hour the morning star comes rising up  
 to herald a new day on earth, and riding in its wake  
 the Dawn flings out her golden robe across the sea,  
 the funeral fires sank low, the flames died down.  
 And the winds swung round and headed home again,  
 over the Thracian Sea, and the heaving swells moaned.  
 And at last Achilles, turning away from the corpse-fire,  
 sank down, exhausted. Sweet sleep overwhelmed him.

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But Agamemnon's followers grouped together now  
 and as they approached Achilles  
 the din and trampling of their feet awoke him.  
 He sat up with a start and made his wishes known:  
 "Atrides—chiefs of Achaea's united forces—  
 first put out the fires with glistening wine,  
 wherever the flames still burn in all their fury.  
 Then let us collect the bones of Menoetius' son Patroclus,  
 pick them out with care—but they cannot be mistaken:  
 he lay amidst the pyre, apart from all the others  
 burned at the edge, the ruck of men and horses.  
 Then let us place his bones in a golden urn,  
 sealed tight and dry with a double fold of fat,  
 till I myself lie hid in the strong House of Death.  
 For his barrow, build him nothing large, I ask you,  
 something right for the moment. And then, later,  
 Achaeans can work to make it broad and lofty,  
 all who survive me here,  
 alive in the benched ships when I am gone."

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And the men obeyed the swift runner's orders.  
 They first put out the fires with glistening wine,  
 far as the flames had spread and the ashes bedded deep.  
 In tears they gathered their gentle comrade's white bones,  
 all in a golden urn, sealed with a double fold of fat,  
 and stowed the urn in his shelter, covered well  
 with a light linen shroud, then laid his barrow out.  
 Around the pyre they planted a ring of stone revetments,  
 piled the loose earth high in a mound above the ring  
 and once they'd heaped the barrow turned to leave.  
 But Achilles held the armies on the spot.  
 He had them sit in a great and growing circle—  
 now for funeral games—and brought from his ships  
 the trophies for the contests: cauldrons and tripods,  
 stallions, mules and cattle with massive heads,  
 women sashed and lovely, and gleaming gray iron.

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First,  
 for the fastest charioteers he set out glittering prizes: