

Troilus and Cressida

by William Shakespeare

Presented by Paul W. Collins

© *Copyright 2012 by Paul W. Collins*

Troilus and Cressida

By William Shakespeare

Presented by Paul W. Collins

All rights reserved under the International and Pan-American Copyright Conventions. Except as permitted under the U.S. Copyright Act of 1976, no part of this work may be reproduced, distributed, or transmitted in any form or by any means, or stored in a database or retrieval system, electronic, mechanical, photocopying, audio or video recording, or other, without the prior written permission of the copyright owner.

Contact: paul@wsrightnow.com

Note: Spoken lines from Shakespeare's drama are in the public domain, as is the Globe edition (1864) of his plays, which provided the basic text of the speeches in this new version of *Troilus and Cressida*. But *Troilus and Cressida, by William Shakespeare: Presented by Paul W. Collins* is a copyrighted work, and is made available *for your personal use only*, in reading and study.

Student, beware: This is a *presentation*, not a scholarly work, so you should be sure your teacher, instructor or professor considers it acceptable as a reference before quoting characters' comments or thoughts from it in your report or term paper.

Prologue

From out of the lingering mists of three millennia gone by, a sturdy soldier emerges, his helmet and oaken shield bearing proud emblems of gallantry and glory. But the graybeard, his face leathered by the sun, walks with a limp, and scars bespeak the experience of warfare as men feel it, fighting one against another.

He has memories to relate—small, overheard stories underlying an epic tale bequeathed by conquerors to their nation’s poets. Their songs, with *honor* ever the theme, proclaim—laud in terms growing stronger with each iteration—as *valiant* the deeds of noblemen said to be devoted to great causes—and as *inviolable* the pledges exchanged by high-born lovers to be faithful and true.

However halting his gait, the soldier can well recall what he saw and heard long ago. The man’s gray eyes gaze out, as inwardly he still struggles to accept what time can teach one about life, about war, and about love.

“In *Troy*,” he begins, as if he can see it yet, “there lies the scene.

“From isles of Greece the proud princes, chafed in high blood, to the port have sent their ships, fraught with the ministers and instruments of cruel war!

“Sixty and nine who wear their crowns regal, from the Athenians’ bay put forth toward Phrygia—and their vow is made to ransack Troy, within whose strong immures the ravished Helen, Menelaus’ queen, with wanton Paris sleeps.” The Trojan prince abducted the lovely lady who is now his lover.

“And that’s the quarrel,” the soldier adds—dryly; *ransack* is what most stirs sixty and eight of the sovereigns.

“To Tenedos they come, and the deep-drawing barks do there disgorge their warlike fraughtage.

“Now on Dardan plains, the fresh and yet unbruised Greeks do pitch their brave pavilions before Priam’s six-gated city. Dardan and Tymbria, Helias, Chetas, Troien and Antenorides, with massive staples, and corresponding bolts fulfilling, secure the sons of Troy.

“Now, expectation spurring skittish spirits on, one and other side, Trojan and Greek, set all at hazard!

“And hither am I come, a Prologue *armèd*—not as confirmation of poet’s pen or actor’s voice, but suited in like conditions as our *argument*—to tell you, fair beholder, that our story leaps o’er the vaunt and firstlings of those broils to begin *in the middle*, starting thence away to what may be condensed in a tale.

“Like, or find fault—do as your pleasure is.” His smile is cynical. “Now, good or bad, ’tis but ‘the chance of war!’”

Sad eyes belie the disclaimer.

Chapter One Lovers’ Patience

“Call my varlet,” Prince Troilus tells portly Lord Pandarus. “I’ll unarm again. Why should I war without the walls of Troy, who find such cruel battle here *within*? Each Trojan who is master of his *heart*, let *him* to field; Troilus, alas, *hath* none!”

In the city, soldiers of the many Phrygian forces, combined under the Trojans’ King Priam, head toward the barred main gate in anticipation of today’s round of combat; beyond the high walls bounding Troy, the Greek troops commanded under Agamemnon, King of Mycenae, once again leave their metropolis of tents and prepare to fight.

Among the defenders this morning is the prince, youngest son of Troy’s elderly king and queen, Priam and Hecuba. He stands just inside the gate clad in full armor and grasping bright,

sharp weapons of warfare. But the handsome young man's troubled thoughts are not on the Greek threat.

Pandarus is annoyed by the promising, lovelorn youth's failure to proceed. "Will this gear ne'er be *mended*?"

"The Greeks are *strong*—*skilful* in their strength, *fierce* in their skill, and in their fierceness *valiant*! But I am weaker than a woman's tear," moans Troilus, "tamer than sleep, slower than ignorance, less valiant than the virgin in the night, and skillless as unpractised infancy!"

Pandarus has been talking—again—about his beautiful young niece. The old man smooths his beard. "Well, I have told you enough of this. As for my part, I'll not meddle, nor make any further. He that will have a *cake* out of the wheat must needs tarry the grinding."

"Have I not tarried?"

"Aye, the grinding—but you must tarry the *sifting*."

"Have I not *tarried*?"

"Aye, the sifting—but you must tarry the *leavening*."

"*Still* have I tarried!"

"Aye, *to* the leavening—but there's yet, in that word, *hereafter*: the kneading, the making of the cake, the heating of the oven, and the baking—nay, you must await the *cooling*, too, or you may chance to burn your lips!"

The yet-beardless prince's hunger is urgent. "Whatever lesser goddess she be, *Patience herself* doth blench more at sufferance than I do! At Priam's royal table do I sup; and when fair Cressid comes into my thoughts—such *traitors*!" he cries, chastising himself. "When she *comes*!—when is she *thence*?"

"Well, yesternight she looked fairer than ever I saw her look, or *any woman else*!"

"As I was *about to tell thee*: when my heart, wedgèd with a sigh, would *rive in twain* lest Hector"—his eldest brother—"or my *father* should perceive me, I have *buried* that sigh in the wrinkle of a *smile*—for when doth a son like *scorn*?"

"But sorrow couched in *seeming* gladness is like mirth that Fate turns to sudden *sadness*!"

Pandarus is musing: "If her hair were not somewhat *darker* than Helen's... well, *go to*, there were no *greater* comparison between the women." The blonde Greek lady living with Prince Paris has long been accepted as the epitome of beauty. "For my own part, as Cressid is my kinswoman, I should not, as they term it, *praise* her. But I would that *somebody*"—he means Troilus—"had *heard her talk* yesterday, as I did! I will not dispraise your sister Cassandra's *wit*, but—"

"*Oh, Pandarus!*" Troilus is again stricken. "Pandarus, when I do tell thee where my *hopes* lie *drownèd*, reply not in how many *fathoms* deep they lie endrenched!

"I tell thee I am *mad* for Cressid's love; thou answer'st 'She is *fair*!'—pour'st into the open ulcer of my heart 'her *eyes*, her *hair*, her *cheek*, her *gait*, her *voice*!'—handiest in thy *discourse*!" He sighs. "Oh, that, her *hand*!—in whose comparison all whites are *ink*, writing their own reproach!—in whose soft caress a cygnet's *down* feels harsh!—a sensèd *spirit* hard as palm of ploughman!

"This thou tell'st me—and *true* thou tell'st me!—when I say I love her; but, saying thus, instead of oil and balm thou lay'st in every gash that love hath given me the *knife that made it*!"

"I speak no more than truth...."

"Then do not speak so *much* of it!"

"Faith, I'll not *meddle*," claims Pandarus peevishly. "Let her be as she is!—if she be fair, 'tis the better for her; an she be not, she has the mends in her own hands." He turns to leave.

"Good Pandarus!—*how now*, Pandarus?"

The old lord is exasperated with the diffident prince. "I have had but my *labour* as reward for my travail: ill thought of by *her* and ill thought of by *you*; having gone *between* and *between*, with small *thanks*!"

"What?—art thou angry, Pandarus? What, with *me*?"

“Because she’s *kin* to me, she’s not so fair as *Helen*,” says Pandarus sourly; he resents the somewhat older Greek lady’s general adoration. “But if she were *not* kin to me, she would be as fair on *Friday* as Helen is on *Sunday*!

“But what care *I*? I care not if she were a *scullery maid*; ’tis all one to me!”

“Say *I* she is not fair?” demands Troilus; he never tires of the topic.

But the old man seems to resist being drawn again into fruitless discussion. “I do not care whether you do or no!

“She’s a fool to stay behind her *father*! Let *her* go to the Greeks!—and *so I’ll tell her* the next time I see her!” Cressida’s father, Lord Calchas, well known as a seer, has forsaken Troy, and now lives among the invaders.

The old nobleman regards the youth. “For my part, I’ll *meddle nor make* i’ the matter any longer!” he says gruffly.

“Pandarus—”

“Not I!”

“Sweet Pandarus—”

“Pray you, speak no more to me! I will leave all as I found it, and there an end!” He stalks off, heading back toward the palace, farther within the city walls.

Trumpets blare out a warlike summons from a tower.

“*Peace*, you ungracious clamours!” mutters Troilus. *Peace, rude sounds!* he thinks. *Fools on both sides, Helen must needs be fair, when with your blood you daily paint her thus! I cannot fight upon this argument; it is too starvèd a subject for my sword!*

But Pandarus— O gods, how you do plague me! I cannot come to Cressid but by Pandarus—and he’s as eager to be wooed to woo as she is stubbornly chaste against all suit!

Tell me, Apollo, for thy Daphne’s love, what Cressida is, what Pandarus—and what we?

But the longing youth himself answers: *Her bed is India!*—thought a source of inestimable wealth. *There she lies, a pearl! Between my Ilium and where she resides, let that be called the wild and wandering flood!—ourselves a merchant, and this sailing ‘Pandarus’ my ship—my conveyance and my doubtful hope!*

As the trumpets call again for battle, a Trojan-army commander approaches, coming from the castle and heading toward the gate that faces their Greek enemies. “How now, Prince Troilus! Wherefore not afield?”

“Because not there,” the young man replies petulantly; but he immediately repents. “This *woman’s* answer sorts, for womanish it is to be *from* thence. What news, Aeneas, from the field today?”

“That *Paris* is returnèd home, and *hurt!*”

“By whom, Aeneas?”

“By *Menelaus*”—Helen’s Greek husband.

Troilus is disgusted with his brother, a Trojan prince who holds another man’s wife. “Let Paris bleed; ’tis but a *scar* to scorn; Paris is gorèd”—harmed more—“by Menelaus’s *horn!*”—emblem of the cuckold.

The alarum is now shrill. Aeneas, a skillful warrior who relishes combat, smiles. “Hark, what good *sport* is out of town today!”

Troilus sighs, longing for other trials. “Better at *home*, if ‘*would I might*’ were ‘*may*.’ But as for the sport abroad, are you bound thither?”

“In all swift haste!”

The prince decides he might do better than mope. His spirits rising, Troilus starts toward the fray. “Come, go we then together!”

Just outside King Priam’s palace, but well within the surrounding stone walls of Troy, Lady Cressida and a servant, a lad of sixteen, again come to watch the warriors go out to fight. He is aroused by the busy day’s happenings—thrilled that the colorful, manly contests are taking

place so near.

“Who were those went by?” she asks.

“Queen Hecuba and *Helen!*”

“And whither go they?”

“Up to the eastern tower, whose height commands as subject all the vale, to see the battle!”

Young Alexander has some news. “*Hector*, whose patience is as fixed as a virtue, today was *vexed!* He chid Andromache”—his wife, “and *struck* his armourer! Then; as if there were *husbandry* in war”—a need to avoid waste, “before the sun rose he was harnessèd tight”—strapped into armor, “and *to the field* goes he!—where every flower did *weep* as a prophet for what it foresaw in *Hector’s wrath!*”

Hector is the Trojans’ chief warrior; but the dew is usually gone long before he is seen.

“What was his cause of anger?”

“The noise goes thus: there is among the Greeks a lord of *Trojan* blood, *nephew* to Hector; they call him *Ajax.*”

“Good; and what of him?”

As have many residents of Troy during its years under siege, the boy has come to regard the warring lords of both sides as celebrities. “They say he is very *much* a man *per se*, and stands alone!”

“So can *all* men, unless they are drunk, sick, or have no legs.”

“*This* man, lady, hath robbed many beasts of their particular attributes: he is as valiant as the *lion*, churlish as the *bear*, slow as the *elephant*—a man into whom nature hath so crowded *moods* that his valour is crushed into *folly!*—and his folly unsaucèd with *discretion!*”

“There is no man hath a *virtue* that he hath not a *glimpse* of, nor any man an *attaint* but he carries some *stain* of it. He is melancholy against *the air*, and *merry* without cause! He hath the joints of every *strong* thing, but everything so *out of joint* that he is a *gouty Briareus*: many hands and no *use!*—or a purblind *Argus*: all eyes and no *sight!*”

Cressida enjoys the description of powerful puerility. “But how should this man, who makes me *smile*, make Hector *angry?*”

“They say he yesterday copèd Hector in the battle, and *struck him down!*—the disdain and shame whereof hath ever since kept Hector fasting and waking!”

Cressida, watching traffic toward the city’s open eastern gate, hears someone approaching. “Who comes here?”

“Madam, your uncle, Pandarus.”

She decides to tease the graying courtier. “*Hector’s* a *gallant* man!” she tells Alexander warmly.

“As may *be* in the *world*, lady!”

“What’s that?” asks Pandarus, reaching them, “what’s that?”

“Good morrow, Uncle.”

“Good morrow, cousin *Cressid!* What do you talk of? Good morrow, Alexander!” he says, aware of the boy’s sinewy arms, flat belly. “How do you, cousin? When were you at Ilium?”—with the king.

“This morning, Uncle.”

“What were you talking of when I came? Was Hector armed and gone ere ye came to Ilium? *Helen* was not up, was she?”

“Hector was gone, but Helen was not up.” Palace gossip is often about one or the other.

“Even so. Hector was stirring early...” says Pandarus, inviting comment on the champion’s newest exploits.

“That were we talking of,” says Cressida, “and of his anger.”

Pandarus smiles, pleased. “Was he *angry?*”

“So says *he* here.”

“True!—he *was* so!” cries Pandarus happily. “I know the *cause*, too! He’ll *lay about him*

today, I can tell them that!

“And there’s *Troilus*, who will not come far behind him! Let them *take heed of Troilus!*—I can tell them *that, too!*”

Cressida, amused that Pandarus has already managed to mention his favorite, feigns surprise. “What, is he angry, *too?*”

“Who, Troilus? Troilus is the *better* man of the two.”

She laughs. “Oh, Jupiter!—*there’s* no comparison!”

“*What*, not between Troilus and Hector? Do you know a *man* if you see one?”

She replies as if he means *recognize*. “Aye—if I ever saw him *before* and knew him.”

“Well, I say Troilus is *Troilus!*”

“Then you say as *I* say—for I am sure he is *not Hector.*”

“No, nor is Hector *Troilus*, in some degrees,” Pandarus counters.

She nods. “Tis just unto each of them: he is himself.”

“*Himself?* Alas, poor Troilus,” says Pandarus sadly, “I would he *were!*”

Cressida seems puzzled. “So he *is.*”

Pandarus shakes his head: “As if *I* had *gone barefoot to India!*”

“He is not Hector....”

“*Himself!*—he’s not *himself!* Would he *were* himself!” He frowns; she is not taking the bait. *Well, the gods are above; time must friend or end! Troilus, well I would that my heart were in her body!* He resumes his first tack. “No, Hector is not a better man than *Troilus....*”

“Excuse me?” Hector is Troy’s most renowned hero.

“He is but *elder.*”

Cressida can’t help laughing. “Pardon me, pardon me!”

Pandarus defends the younger prince. “Th’ other’s not yet come to’t!—you shall tell me *another* tale, when th’ other’s come to’t! Hector shall not have *his* wit *this* year!”

“He shall not need it, if he have his *own.*”

“Nor his *qualities.*”

“No matter”—*insubstantial.*

“Nor his beauty.”

“’Twould not *become* him,” she replies. “His *own’s* better.”

“You have no *judgment*, Niece! Helen herself swore th’ other day that *Troilus*, for his brown complexion—for so ’tis, I must confess—yet not *brown* neither—” Lightness is seen as elegance.

“No,” says Cressida, “just brown.”

He is picturing Troilus’s rosy cheeks, full lips. “Faith, to say *truth*, brown and not-brown....”

She chuckles. “To say the truth as true and *not* true!”

Pandarus raises an eyebrow significantly. “She praised his complexion as *above Paris’s!*”

“Why, Paris hath colour enough.”

“So he has.”

“Then Troilus must have *too much!*” laughs Cressida. “If she praised his above Paris’s complexion, ’tis *higher* than his; he having colour enough, then the other, higher, is too *flaming* a praise for a *good* complexion! I had as lief Helen’s golden tongue had commended Troilus for a *copper nose!*”

Pandarus still hopes Helen’s high estimation of Troilus will increase his appeal for Cressida. “I swear to you, I think Helen loves him better than *Paris!*”

“Then he’s a ‘merry Greek’ indeed!” laughs Cressida, as if he’d meant she makes love to both.

But Pandarus is, as usual, engrossed in his own thoughts. “Nay, I am *sure* she does! She came upon him th’ other day in the compassèd window”—the high, round eastern tower, “and, as you know, he has not past three or four hairs on his chin—”

“Indeed, a *tapster’s* arithmetic may soon bring *his* particulars therein to a total!”

“Well, he is very *young*. And yet, within three pounds, he will lift as much as *his brother*

Hector!”

She frowns, pretending to misunderstand. “Is so young a man to lift an *older?*”

“But to prove to you that Helen loves him: she came and put her white hand to his cloven chin—”

“Juno have mercy!” cries Cressida, as if alarmed to hear of an injury. “How came it *cloven?*”

“Why you know ’tis dimpled.” Pandarus sighs. “I think his smiling *becomes* him better than any man in all Phrygia!”

“Oh, he *smiles—valiantly,*” says Cressida, with some annoyance.

Pandarus beams. “Does he not?”

“Oh *yes*, as ’twere a *cloud* in *autumn!*”—constant and unwelcome.

“Well *go to*, then! Now, to prove to you that Helen loves Troilus—”

Cressida grins lasciviously. “Troilus will *stand* to the proof if you’d prove it so!”

“Troilus?—why, he esteems *her* no more than *I* esteem an *addled egg!*”—a scrambled one.

She laughs again. “If you love an addled egg as well as you love an *idle head*, you would eat *chickens* in the *shell!*”

Pandarus persists with his Helen story. “I cannot choose but laugh, to think how she tickled his chin! Indeed, she has a marvellously white hand, I must needs confess—”

“Without the *rack?*” His *confession* required no torture.

“—and she takes it upon her to spy a *white* hair on his chin!”

“Alas, *poor* chin!—many a *wart* is richer!”—in hairs.

“And there was such *laughing!*” says Pandarus. “Queen Hecuba laughed so hard that her eyes ran o’er!”

Cressida mutters, doubtfully, “With millstones”—as in the old saw about the hard-hearted; she has found the aging matriarch to be quite cold.

“Even *Cassandra* laughed!”

The princess, known for dire prognostication, never so much as smiles. “Ah, there is no *temperate* fire under the pot of *her* eyes! Did her eyes run o’er *too?*”

“Then Hector laughed!”

“At what was all this laughing?”

“Marry, at the *white hair* that Helen spied on Troilus’s chin!”

“*Tsk!* An’t had been a *green* hair, *I* should have laughed too.”

“They laughed not so much at the hair as at his pretty *answer!*”

“What was his answer?”

“Quoth *she*, ‘Here’s but two and fifty hairs on your chin—and *one* of them is *white!*’”

“*That* is no *question,*” Cressida points out.

The old man jests: “That’s true; I make no question of ‘*that.*’” He warms to his tale. “‘Two and fifty hairs, and one white,’ quoth *he*. ‘That white hair is my *father*—and all the rest are *his sons!*’” Priam is said to have fifty of them.

“‘*Jupiter!*’ quoth *she*. ‘Which of these hairs is my husband?’” She meant Prince Paris, not King Menelaus.

“‘The *forkèd* one!’ quoth *he*. ‘Pluck ’t out and give it him!’” The gibe includes irony: the husband would be sent the lover who’s cuckolding him.

Cressida is surprised and amused by the young prince’s bold retort.

“But then was such *laughing* that Helen soon blushèd—and *Paris* soon *chafèd!* But all the rest so laughed that it passèd.”

“So let it *now*, for it has been a while going by.”

Pandarus finishes laughing, still tickled by his recital. “Well, cousin, I told you a thing yesterday; *think* on’t!”

“So I do.” She resents his pressing, as he did the day before, his case for the smiling but silent admirer. Pandarus had reported again how Troilus longs for her.

“I’ll be sworn ’tis *true*: for you he will *weep April*, as ’twere, like a man born of *Spring!*”

“And I’ll ‘spring up’ from his tears—a *nettle*, as ’twere, against ‘*may!*’”

From the nearby plain, where armies contest with each other, they can hear that a retreat is being sounded, signaling the end of struggles for today.

“*Hark!* They are coming from the field!” cries Pandarus. “Shall we stand up here and see them as they pass toward Ilium? Good niece, *do*, sweet niece Cressida!”

“At your pleasure.”

He looks around. “Here, *here!*—here’s an *excellent* place; here we may see most *bravely!*” The three move up the stone steps in front of a tall, city mansion, as gallant captains—shields held before them, faces partly hidden by helmet visors—march past, leading their tired troops to quarters.

Pandarus and the boy are stirred by the parade, an exhibition of manliness. “I’ll tell you them all, by their names, as they pass by—but mark *Troilus* above the rest!”

“Speak not so *loud*,” says Cressida, watching as the virile commanders pass by.

Pandarus points. “That’s *Aeneas!* Is not that a brave man?” He is noting the officer’s appearance as much as his boldness. “He’s one of the flowers of Troy, I can tell you! But mark *Troilus!*—you shall see anon!”

A middle-aged officer passes before them. “Who’s that?”

“That’s Antenor. He has a shrewd *wit*, I can tell you.” Lord Antenor is King Priam’s chief advisor on stratagems. “But he’s a man good *enough*; he’s one o’ the soundest judgments in whatsoever, and a proper man in his person.”

Pandarus peers ahead. “When comes *Troilus*? I’ll show you Troilus anon! If he see me, you shall see him nod at me!”

“Will he give you *the nod*?”—look askance, as one might at a fool.

He hasn’t heard. “You shall see!”

“If he do, the *rich* shall have *more*,” she gibes.

Pandarus is leaning forward. On his toes, he gazes down the street, looking out over the bobbing rows of soldiers’ tufted helmets. “That’s *Hector!*—that, *that*, look you, *that!* *There’s* a fellow!

“*Go thy way, Hector!* There’s a brave man, Niece! Oh, *brave* Hector! Look how he *looks!* *There’s* a countenance! Is’t not a brave man?”

Cressida watches the passing prince. “Oh, a *brave* man.” She has found that warriors, however useful in battle, can be vain, abrupt and stubborn elsewhere.

“Is he not? It does a man’s heart good! Look you what *hacks* are on his helmet! Look you yonder, do you *see*? Look you there! *There’s* no *jesting!*—there’s *laying on!* ‘*Take’t off* who will,’ as *they* say! There be *hacks!*”

“Be those from swords?” asks Cressida, feigning ignorance; men have been known to dent their own armor, knick blades in private.

“Swords—*anything!*—*he* cares not!—if the *Devil* come to him, it’s all one! *By God’s ’lid*, it does one’s heart *good!*”

“Yonder comes *Paris*, yonder comes *Paris!* Look ye yonder, Niece! Is’t not a *gallant* man, too—is’t not? Why, *this* is *brave* now!—who said he came home *hurt* today? *He’s* not hurt! Why, this will do *Helen’s* heart good!

“Would I could see *Troilus* now! You shall see Troilus anon!”

Another of old Priam’s many sons comes from within the city to meet the troops. Cressida cannot identify all of the princes, despite the bearings and crests emblazoned on their shields, and sewn onto their tabards. “Who’s that?”

Pandarus glances back briefly. “That’s Helenus,” he says, noting the slender man. “I marvel where *Troilus* is.... That’s Helenus; I think he went not *forth* today.....” He looks at the warrior’s long legs. “That’s Helenus....”

“Can Helenus fight, Uncle?”

“*Helenus?* No.” He sees her surprise, and shrugs. “Yes, he’ll fight indifferent well....” He

frowns. "I marvel where *Troilus* is! Hark, do you not hear the people cry, '*Troilus!*'?" He watches as the tall nobleman goes by. "Helenus is a priest."

Cressida glances down the rows. "What sneaking fellow comes yonder?"

"Where? Yonder? That's Deiphobus"—another of Priam's sons, one as old as Pandarus.

But now he sees the one she means. "'Tis *Troilus!* There's a *man*, Niece! Him! *Brave Troilus—the prince of chivalry!*" Other onlookers, along the steps below, look up at him, amused.

"*Peace!* For shame, *peace!*" Cressida is discomfited by his loud enthusiasm.

"*Mark him; note him!* Oh, brave *Troilus!* Look well upon him, Niece! Look you how his sword is *bloodied*, and his helm more hacked than *Hector's*—and how he *looks*, and how he *goes!* Oh, admirable *youth!*—he ne'er yet saw three and twenty!

"*Go thy way, Troilus, go thy way!*" he calls, encouragingly, as the prince and his soldiers march by. "Had I a *sister* who were *a-grace*, or a *daughter a goddess*, he should take his choice! Oh, *admirable* man! *Paris?*—Paris is *dirt* compared to him!—and I warrant, to boot, that *to exchange, Helen* would give an *aye!*"

But Cressida is looking past the prince. "Here come more."

"Asses, fools, *dolts!*" mutters Pandarus as the captains march past. "Chaff and bran, *chaff and bran! Porridge after meat!*

"I could *live and die* i' the eyes of Troilus!" he tells his niece, turning to her. "Ne'er look, ne'er look—the *eagles* are *gone!* Crows and daws, *crows and daws!* I had rather be such a man as *Troilus* than *Agamemnon* and *all of Greece!*"

"There *is*, among the Greeks, *Achilles*—a better man than Troilus...."

"*Achilles!*—a *drayman*, a *porter*, a very *camel!*" cries Pandarus.

As he fulminates, Cressida merely smiles. "Well, well...."

"Well? *Well?*—why, have you any *discernment?* Have you any *eyes?* Do you know what a *man* is? Are not *birth*—beauty, good shape, youth—and *learning*, discourse, gentleness, virtue, such-like—and *liberality* in *manhood* the spice and salt that *season* a man?"

"*Aye*—a *mincèd* man!—one to be *baked in a pie*—with no dates, for by then the man's *date's out!*"—he's too old.

"You are such an *other* woman!—one knows not on *what ward you'll rely!*"—where she could find support.

"Upon my *bark*"—clothing, "to defend my belly; upon my *wit* to defend my wills; upon my *secrecy* to defend mine honesty,"—good repute, "my *mask*, to defend my beauty—and *you*, to defend *all* of these!

"And at all these wards I lie under a *thousand watches!*"—would-be suitors' gazes.

Pandarus—her guardian, since her father's defection—frowns. "*Say* one of your watches!" he challenges.

"Nay, *I'll* watch *you* for that!—and that's one of the *chiefest* of them, too!" Among her main concerns is his urging her toward what he himself desires. "If I cannot *ward off* what I would not have *hit,*"—evade sex, "I can watch *you*"—rely on him—"for *telling* me *how I took the blow!*"

Her eyes sparkle with mischief. "Unless it swell past *hiding*, and then it's past *watching.*"

Jesting about pregnancy scandalizes the old man. "You are such an *other!*"

Troilus's page has spotted them from the street; he trots up the steps. "Sir, my lord would instantly speak with you!"

"Where?"

"At your own house; there he unarms him."

"Good boy, tell him I come!" He turns to Cressida as the lad runs home, to where Troilus is undressing. "I fear he be *hurt!* Fare ye well, good niece!"

"Adieu, Uncle."

"I'll be with you, Niece, by and by," he tells her.

She sighs. "To *bring*, Uncle?"

His smile expands as he nods. "*Aye*—a token from *Troilus!*"

By the same token, you are a bawd! she thinks, as he hurries away. *Words, vows, gifts, tears, and love's full sacrifice he offers—in another's enterprise!*

*But I see a thousandfold more in Troilus than may be in the glass of Pandarus's praise!
Yet hold I off.*

Women are 'angels' in wooing, but those won are done! Joy's soul lies in the doing!

A she who is beloved knows nought that knows not this: men prize a thing ungainèd for more than it is. Never ye was the she who knew love gotten as sweet as when desire did sue!

Therefore this maxim out of love I'd teach: achievèd hears command—ungainèd, beseech!

Though my heart's content firm love doth bear, nothing of that shall from mine eyes appear!

Chapter Two Concern—and Challenge

East of Troy one hot afternoon, in the Greeks' huge encampment—standing long enough now to be a sorry city of faded, mud-spattered canvas—Agamemnon, troubled, has summoned his dejected chief commanders. Beside him is his younger brother, Menelaus, Sparta's king and Helen's husband.

"Princes, what grief hath set the jaundice on your cheeks?" asks the general—rhetorically. "The ample proposition that *hope* makes in all designs begun here on earth below *fails* in the promised *largess*!"

"*Restraints* grow in the veins of actions highest rearèd, as do *knots*, by the conflux of meeting, sap a sound pine, and *divert* its grain, tortive and errant from the course of *growth*.

"Nor, princes, is it matter *new* to us that we come so far short of our supposes that, after *seven years' siege*, yet Troy walls *stand*, sith in every action that hath gone before whereof we have recorded, *trial* did draw *bias*"—in practice, the bowstring went askew, "and was thwarted, not answering to the *aim*, nor to that unbodied figure of thought that gave't surmisèd shape.

"*Why*, then, you princes, do you *abashèd* behold our works, and call those *shame* which are indeed nought else but *protractive tests* by great *Jove* to find persistive *constancy in men*?"

"The fineness of such mettle"—a play on metal—"is not assayèd in Fortune's *love*—for then the bold and coward, the wise and fool, the artist and unread, the hard and soft, all seem affinèd and kin—but in the wind and tempest of her *frown*!"

"*Disaster*, puffing at all with a loud and powerful fan, *winnows the light away*, and what hath *mass* or *matter* by itself lies rich in virtue, and unminglèd!"

His wizened, very old counselor moves forward. "With due observance of thy godlike seat, great Agamemnon, Nestor shall *apply* thy latest words.

"In the *reproof* of *chance* lies the true proof of men.

"The sea being *smooth*, many shallow, bauble boats dare sail upon her patient breast, making their way with those of *nobler* bulk. But let the ruffian Boreas"—the North Wind—"once enrage the gentle Thetis,"—a sea nymph, "then anon behold the *strong-ribbèd* bark through liquid mountains cut, bounding between the two moist elements like Perseus' horse! Where's *then* the saucy boat whose weak, *untimbered* sides just now did co-rival greatness? Either to *harbour* fled, or made a snack for *Neptune*!"

"Even so do valour's *show* and valour's *worth* divide, in the storms of Fortune. For in her ray and *brightness*, the herd hath more annoyance from the *breeze* than from the tiger; but when a *splitting wind* makes flexible the knees of *knotted oaks*, and flies are fled unto shade, why then the thing of *courage*—arousèd with rage, with Rage doth *sympathize*!—and with an accent tunèd in selfsame key—*replies* to chiding Fortune!"

A strong, weathered nobleman steps forward. "Agamemnon, thou great *commander*—nerve and bone of Greece; heart of our numbers; soul, and only spirit that should be enclosed in the tempers and the minds of *all*—hear what Ulysses speaks."

He says to the general, “To the *applause* and *approbation*, most mighty, for thy *place* and *sway*, and for *thou*, most reverend, for thy *stretched-out life*,” he tells Nestor, “I give *more!*”

“Both of your *speeches* were such that hands of Greece should *hold up high in brass* what Agamemnon tells us, and such again in *silver* as venerable Nestor hatchèd, which should, with a bond of air strong as the axle-tree on which heaven rides, knit all the Greekish ears to his experienced tongue!

“Yet let it please both of thou, great and wise, to hear Ulysses speak.”

Agamemnon is amused by the ornate preface’s subtle dig at his prolix advisor; white-haired Nestor enjoys relegation of the general’s words to ordinary brass.

The king tells Ulysses, “*Speak*, prince of Ithaca! And be’t a matter needless, of importless burden,”—empty refrain, “even less respectful than we are confident of when rank *Thersites* opes his mastic jaws, divide *thy* lips, and we shall hear *music, wit* and *oracle!*”

The officers laugh; the cynical Thersites, an impoverished gentleman serving Lord Ajax, is known for harsh rudeness.

Ulysses paces before them, perturbed by their situation. “Troy, yet upon its own basis,”—still standing, “would have been *down*, and the great Hector’s sword had lacked a master, but for *these instances*:

“The special equity of *rule*”—authority’s added weight—“hath been *neglected*—and look how many Grecian tents do stand *empty* upon this plain: as many as hollow *factions!* When the *general cause* is not like the hive unto which the foragers shall *all* repair, what honey is expected?

“And *degree* being *masked*, the unworthiest shows as fairly as *the mask!*”

“The heavens themselves—the planets, and this centre—all observe degree, priority, and place—insisture, course, proportion, season, form, office and custom, each in line of order! And therefore is the glorious *sun* in noble eminence enthronèd and sphered amidst the others—its medicinal eye *correcting* the ill aspects of planets, and posting commandment as a *king*, sans check, to good and bad alike!

“But when the planets in evil mixture to *disorder* wander, what *plagues* and what *portents!*—what *mutiny!*—what raging of the *sea*, shaking of *earth*, commotion in the *winds!* *Frights, changes, horrors* divert and crack, rend and deracinate the unity and married calm of *states*, quite from their fixture!

“Oh, when *degree*, which is the ladder to all high designs, is forsaken, then *enterprise is sick!*”

“How could communities—in schools and brotherhoods, in cities’ peaceful commerce from dividable shores, in the primogenitive due of *birth*, and prerogatives of *age, laurels, sceptres, crowns*—stand in authentic place but by *degree?*”

“Take degree away, *untune* that string, and hark what *discord* follows! Each thing, bare, meets its *repugnancy*: the bounded *waters* would lift their bosoms higher than the *shores*, and make a *sop* of all this solid globe!—*strength* would be lord over *civility*, and the rude son would *strike his father dead!*”

“*Force* would be *right!*—or rather, right *and* wrong, between whose endless jarring justice resides, would lose their *names!*—and so would *justice* too!

“Then everything *endues itself* by *power*—power from *will*—will from *appetite!* And appetite, an universal *wolf*, so doubly *seconded* by will and power, must take perforce an universal *prey!*—and at last *eat up itself!*”

“Great Agamemnon, thus *chaos* follows *choking*, when degree is *suffocated!*”

“Thus it is that *neglection of degree* goes *backward*, pace by pace, from the intention it hath to be *climbing!* The *general* is disdained by him one step below, he by the *next*, that next by him beneath! So at every step, exemplified by the first who is slack of his superior, grows an envious fever of pale and bloodless *rivalry!*”

“And ’tis *this failure* that keeps Troy up, not her own sinews!

“To end a tale of length: Troy by *our weakness* stands, not by her strength!”

Nestor nods gravely. “Most wisely hath Ulysses here uncovered the fever whereof all our

forces are sick.”

Agamemnon regards the veteran commander. “The *nature* of the sickness found, Ulysses, what is the *remedy*?”

Ulysses speaks to the leaders candidly—and angrily. “The great *Achilles*, whom opinion crowns as the sinew and the forehead of our army, having his ear full of his *airy fame*, grows fastidious about his worth—and lies *in his tent*, *mocking our designs*!

“*With him, Patroclus*, upon a lazy bed the livelong day, breaks *scurrilous jests*, and with ridiculous and awkward *acting*—which he, *slanderer*, ‘imitation’ calls—he *pageants* us!

“Sometime, great Agamemnon, *thine* unexcellèd reputation he puts on! And—like a strutting *player*, whose ability lies in his *hamstring*,”—skill at posing, “and who doth think it *rich* to hear *wooden* dialogue sound ’twixt his stretchèd footing and the *scaffoldage*—in such to-be-pitied and o’er-wrested *seeming* he acts *thy greatness*!

“And when he speaks, ’tis like unattended *chimes*,”—wind-blown tower bells, “*squaring off* with terms which would seem to be *hyperboles* dropped from the tongue of roaring *Typhon*!”

“At this fustian stuff the large Achilles, on his pressèd bed lolling, from his deep chest laughs out a loud *applause*—cries, ‘Excellent! ’Tis *Agamemnon*, *just right*! Now play me *Nestor*!—*um*... and stroke thy beard as does *he*, being addressèd to some oration!’

“That’s done as closely as the extremest *ends* of parallels!—as alike as *Vulcan* and his *wife*! Yet good Achilles still cries, ‘*Excellent*!—’tis *Nestor*, all right! Now, Patroclus, play him for me *arming* to answer in a *night alarm*!’

“And then, forsooth, the feignèd defects of *age* must be the scene of *mirth*!—*coughing* and *spitting*, and with a palsied fumbling at his gorget,”—trying to attach neck armor, “*shaking the rivet in and out*!

“And at this sport Sir Valour *dies*—cries, ‘Oh, *enough*, Patroclus!—or give me *ribs of steel*!—I shall *split*, in the pleasure of my spleen!’

“And in that fashion, all of our abilities, gifts, natures, several and general shapes of grace, exact achievements, plots, orders, preventions, excitements to the field or speech for success, truce, or loss—what *is* or *is not* serves as stuff for *those two* to make *paradoxes*!”

“*And*,” notes Nestor, “by the imitations of these twain—whom, as Ulysses says, opinion crowns with an *imperial* voice—*many* are infected!

“*Ajax* is grown self-willèd, and bears *his* head in such a rein!—in as full and proud a place as broad Achilles!—keeps to his tent like him; makes factious feasts,”—feeds his favorites, excludes others, “rails on our state of war, bold as an *oracle*!—and sets *Thersites*, a slave whose gall *coins* *slanders* like a *mint*, to match us in comparisons with *dirt*!—to weaken and discredit our efforts, by whatever rank, and however rounded-in with danger!”

Ulysses continues the complaint: “They tax our *policy* and call it *cowardice*; count *wisdom* as no member of the war; forestall prescience,”—undermine forethought, “and esteem no act but that of *hand*! The still and mental parts that do contrive *how* the many hands shall strike, *when* fitness calls them on, and, by measure of their observant toil, *know the enemies’ weight*—why, this hath not a *finger’s* dignity! They call this *bed-work*, *nappery*, *closet* war!

“So the *ram* that batters down the wall, for the great swing and rudeness of its poise, they place before him whose hand *made* the engine!—before those who, with the finesse of their souls, by *reason* guide its execution!”

“Let *that* be granted,” says Nestor, “and Achilles’ *horse* equals *many Thetis sons*!” Thetis is Achilles’ mother.

A tucket is sounded. Says Agamemnon, “What trumpet? Look, Menelaus.”

That king steps away to peer toward the line of sentinels; he sees an emissary, with a herald and attendants, coming through the camp. “From Troy.”

When Lord Aeneas reaches the Greek commanders, their general asks him, haughtily, “What would you ’fore our tent?”

“Is this great Agamemnon’s tent, I pray you?”

“Even this,” says he.

Aeneas pretends not to recognize the enemy general. “May one that is a *herald* and a *prince* deliver a fair message to his kingly eyes?”

Agamemnon is annoyed. “With surety stronger than *Achilles’ arm!*—’fore all the Greekish heads which with one voice call Agamemnon *crown and general!*”

Aeneas, adjusting his gloves, intones, “Fair leave, in large security. How may a stranger to those most imperial looks know them from those of *other* mortals?”

Agamemnon scowls. “*What?*”

“I ask so that I might waken ‘reverence’—aye, and bid the cheek be ready with a blush, modest as morning when she coldly eyes the youthful Phoebus,” the visitor explains casually. “*Which* is that god in office, guiding men?—which is the high and mighty Agamemnon?”

The general glares “This Trojan *scorns* us!—or the men of Troy are *unceremonious* courtiers!”

Aeneas smiles. “Our *courtiers* are as free, as debonair—*unarmèd*—as bending *angels!*—that’s their fame in *peace*.” His eyes flash as he faces the officers fearlessly. “But when they would seem *soldiers*, they have *balls!*—good *arms*, strong *joints*, *true swords*—and, by *Jove’s* accord, *no one’s* so *full of heart!*”

He can hear angry mutters; he tells himself aloud, “But peace, Aeneas!—*peace*, Trojan!—lay thy finger on thy lips! The worthiness of praise *disclaims* its worth if the praised *himself* bring the praise forth”—a dig at Agamemnon. “What a *repining enemy* commends, *that breath Fame* blows!—that praise alone surely transcends.”

“Sir, you of Troy—call you yourself *Aeneas?*”

“Aye, Greek; that is my name.”

“What’s your *affair*, I pray you?”

“Sir, pardon; ’tis for *Agamemnon’s* ears.”

“He hears nought *privately* that comes from *Troy!*”

“Nor come I from Troy to *whisper* to him—I bring a *trumpet* to *awake his ear!*—to set his senses on the *attentive* bent!” says Aeneas boldly. “And *then* to speak.”

“So that thou shalt know, it is not Agamemnon’s sleeping hour,” the general tells him. To avoid further taunts, he says, impatiently, “Trojan, he is *awake!*—he tells thee so *himself*. Speak as frankly as the wind.”

Aeneas motions to his attendants. “Trumpet, *blow loud!*—send thy brass voice through all these lazy tents!—and every Greek of *mettle*, let him *know*: what *Troy* means shall be fairly spoken *aloud!*”

The horn blares out a call, and—to their commanders’ irritation—Greek troops come to hear.

Aeneas begins his message. “We have, great Agamemnon, here in Troy a prince called *Hector*—*Priam* is his father—who in this dull and long-continuèd truce is *rusty* grown. He bade me take a trumpet, and to this purpose speak:

“*Kings, princes, lords!* If there be *one* among the fair’st of Greece who holds his *honour* higher than his ease—who seeks his *praise* more than he fears his peril—who knows his *valour*, and shows not his fear—who loves his mistress more in *confession*”—with a priest—“than with truant vows to her own lips whom he loves, but dares avow her beauty and her worth in *arms* other than *hers*—

“To him this *challenge!*

“*Hector*, in view of Trojans and of Greeks, shall make this good,”—verify his claim, “or do his best to do it! He hath a lady *wiser, fairer, truer* than ever *Greek* did encompass in his arms!—and will *tomorrow*, midway between your tents and the walls of Troy, with his trumpet call to rouse the Grecian who is *truly in love!*

“If *any comes*, Hector shall honour him; if *none*, he’ll say, in Troy when he retires, that the Grecian dames are *sunburnt*, and not worth the *splinter* of a lance!—not even so much!”

Agamemnon acknowledges the challenge in chivalry. “This shall be told our rovers, Lord

Aeneas; if none of them have a soul of such a kind, *we left them all at home!*

“But *we are soldiers!*—and if a soldier prove a *recreant*, it means not that he hath not been or is not now in love!

“If, then, one *is*, or hath *been*, or *means* to be *in love*, that one meets Hector!

“If none else, *I am he!*”

The ancient sage comes to Aeneas. “Tell him of *Nestor*, one that was a man when Hector’s *grandsire* suckled! He is old now, but if there be not in our Grecian host one noble man that hath one spark of fire to answer for his love, tell him from me I’ll hide my silver beard in a gold *visor*, and into my vambrace”—armor—“put this withered brawn!—and meeting him, will tell him that *my lady* was fairer than his *grandam*, and as chaste as may be *in the world!*

“His youth is in flood, but this truth I’ll prove—with my three drops of blood!”

Aeneas smiles. “Now may heavens forbid such scarcity of youth!”—vigor among the Greeks.

“*Amen!*” cries Ulysses.

Agamemnon comes to the emissary. “Fair Lord Aeneas, let me touch your hand!” They grip—very firmly—shaking hands. “To our pavilion shall I lead you, sir. *Achilles* shall have word of this intent!—so shall each lord of Greece, from tent to tent! Yourself shall feast with us before you go, and find the welcome of a noble foe!”

Aeneas nods, and walks with the general toward his pavilion. His top officers follow, all looking forward to a hearty noon meal.

But one commander keeps another noblemen back. “*Nestor*....”

“What says Ulysses?”

“I have a young conception in my brain; be you my tme to bring it to some shape.”

“What is’t?”

“This: ’tis *blunt wedges* rive hard knots! The seeded *pride* that hath to this maturity grown up in rank *Achilles* must now be *cropped*—or, shedding, breed a nursery of *like* evil to overbulk us all!”

Nestor concurs. “Well, but how?”

“This challenge that the gallant *Hector* sends, however it is spread in *general* name, relates in *purpose* only to *Achilles*.”

Nestor nods. “The purpose is conspicuous, even as is substance whose grossness little characters sum up. And the announcing made it so plain that *Achilles*, were his brain as barren as banks of *Libya*—though, *Apollo* knows, ’tis dry *enough!*—will with celerity”—he sees Ulysses skeptical look, “aye, with great *speed* of judgment, find *Hector*’s purpose *pointing to him*.”

“And wake him to *answer*, think you?”

“Yes, ’tis most meet. Whom *else* may we oppose that can from *Hector* return with his honour, if not *Achilles*? Though’t be a *sportful* combat, yet in the trial much *opinion* dwells!—for here the Trojans taste our dear’st repute with their finest palate!

“And, trust me, Ulysses, our estimation shall be poisèd greatly in this wild action: for the *result*, although particular, shall give a scantling of good or bad imputation unto *the general army*—and in such indexes, although small ticks compared to their subsequent *volumes*, there is seen the baby figure of the giant mass of things at large *to come!*

“It is supposed that he who meets *Hector* issues from our choice. And *choice*, being the mutual act of all our souls, makes *merit* its election, and so doth boil from us, as ’twere, a man distillèd out of *all* our virtues.

“Who, *miscarrying*....” He pauses to consider the potential result: a bolstering of their enemies’ confidence. “What *heart* the conquering part receives from hence, to steel a strong opinion of themselves!—which, entertained, is their *instrument*, no less in working than are *swords* and *bows* directed by their limbs!”

“Give pardon to my speech,” says Ulysses. “That is why ’tis meet *Achilles* *not* meet *Hector!*” He leans closer, aware that his stratagem will seem peculiar; the most famous Greek warrior is renowned for his powerful limbs and his great skill at fighting. “Let us, like *merchants*, show our

foulest wares—think *perchance* they'll sell; then, if not, the lustre of the better *yet* to show shall *show all the better!*

“Do not consent that ever Hector and Achilles meet!—for both our honour and our shame in this are dogged by two strange followers.”

Nestor is listening—but puzzled. “I see them not with *my* old eyes; what are they?”

The warrior explains. “Were he not *prideful*, whatever glory our Achilles might shake from Hector we all could *share* with him. But he *already* is too insolent; we were better to *parch in Afric sun* than in the *proud, insulting scorn* of his eyes should he 'scape Hector *fair!*”

“And if he were *foiled*, why then we did crush our strong esteem in the attainment of our best man!

“No, make it a *lottery*—and, *by device* in that sorting, let blockish *Ajax* draw to fight with Hector!

“Among ourselves, *give* him allowance as the *better* man—for that will *physic* the great Myrmidon”—be medicinal to Achilles, “who toils only in loud *applause*, and make him lower his crest!—not *prouder*, then, but *below* Iris's bands!”—the rainbow.

Adds Ulysses, “If the dull, brainless *Ajax* come *safely* off, we'll dress him up in *voices*; if he fail, we proceed with our position that we have still-better men.

“But, hit or miss, our project's shape this *one* life then assumes: *Ajax* employèd plucks down *Achilles'* plumes!”

Nestor smiles. “Ulysses, now I *relish* thy advice!—and I will give a taste of it forthwith to Agamemnon! Go we to him straight!

“Two curs shall tame each other! *Pride alone* must spur the mastiffs on—as if 'twere their *bone!*”

Chapter Three Dissention

Ajax, in his tent at the Grecian camp, has been waiting to learn the news. “Thersites!” he calls, even as his unsavory servant arrives. Both are drunk.

The threadbare gentleman poses a facetious question: “Agamemnon—what if he had *boils*?—full, all over—*generally*”—a play on the king's military role.

Ajax is impatient. “Thersites—”

“And those boils did *run*. Say it were so; would not the *general* run, then?—were not *that* a botchy score!” He laughs, delighted with the jest.

“Dog!” growls Ajax, blearily.

“*Then* would come some *matter* from him! I see none *now!*”

“Thou bitch-wolf's son, canst thou not *hear?*” Ajax knocks off the other's hat. “*Feel*, then!”

“The *plague of grease* upon thee, thou mongrel, *beef-witted* lord!” cries Thersites, recovering the spotted black felt.

“*Speak* now, you sinewless *heathen*, *speak!* Or I will *beat* thee into *handsomeness!*”—a considerable transformation.

Says Thersites, “I shall as easily rail *thee* into *wit* and *holiness!* But I think thy *horse* will sooner memorize an *oration* than *thou* learn a prayer without *book!*” Thersites rubs his sore head.

“Thou canst *strike*, canst thou? A red murrain o' thy jade's tricks!”

“Toadstool, learn me the *proclamation!*” He wants to know what Agamemnon has just announced.

Thersites pouts. “Dost thou think I have no *sense*, thou strikest me thus?”

“The *proclamation!*”

“*Thou* art proclaimed a *fool*, I think!”

Ajax raises a warning hand. “Do *not*, porpentine!—do *not!* My fingers itch...!”

“I would thou *didst* itch—from *head to foot!*—and I had the *scratching* of thee! I would make thee *the loathsomest scab in Greece!* When thou art forth in the *incursions*, then thou strikest as *slow* as any other!”—a petulant dig; when the sluggish warrior’s sword does move, it is deadly.

“*Ay!*—say the proclamation!”

“Thou grumblest and railest every hour about *Achilles*, and thou art as full of envy for his *greatness* as *Cerberus* is for Proserpine’s *beauty!*” The hideous, canine beast guards the entrance to Hades, where she is a goddess. “*Aye*, so much that thou *barkest* at him!”

Ajax is livid. “*Mistress Thersites...*!”

“Shouldst thou strike *him*—”

“*Cobloaf!*”—pile of shit.

“—he would *pound thee into shivers* with his *fist!*—as a sailor breaks a *biscuit!*”

Ajax, incensed by the taunting, stumbles forward, striking out ineffectually. “You whoreson cur!”

“Do, *do!*” the thin gentleman urges—while ducking away.

“Thou *stool* of a *witch!*”

“*Aye*, do, *do*, thou sodden-witted *lord!* Thou hast no more brain than I have in mine *elbow*—an *echo* may tutor *thee!* Thou scurrilously valiant *ass!*—*thou* art here *but to thrash Trojans*, and thou art bought and sold among those of any *wit* like a barbarian *slave!*”

Thersites dodges the warrior’s heavy fist. “If thou would beat me,” he warns, circling around a big table, “I will begin at thy *heel*, and tell what thou art *by inches*,”—at length, “thou *thing of no bowels*, thou!”

“You *dog!*”

“You scurvy *lord!*”

Ajax swings at him again. “You *cur!*”

Cries Thersites, from several feet away, “Mars’s *idiot!* *Do*, rudeness! *Do*, *camel!*—*do*, *do!*”

Noise of the squabble has drawn their massive neighbor and his younger companion, Patroclus. “Why, *how now*, Ajax?—wherefore do you thus?” demands Achilles, stepping between the tottering belligerents. “How now, Thersites? What’s the matter, man?”

Thersites points. “You see him there, do you?”

“*Aye*; what’s the matter?”

“*Nay*, *look* upon him!”

Achilles looks. “So I do: what’s the matter?”

“*Nay*, but regard him well!”

“Why, I do so....”

“And yet you look upon him *not* well!—for whosoever you *take* him to be, he is *Ajax!*”

Achilles frowns. “I know that, fool!”

Thersites pretends to hear *I know that fool*. “*Aye*,” he says, “but that fool knows not *himself!*”

Ajax blunders toward him again. “For that I’ll beat thee!”

Thersites backs away unsteadily. “*Lo, lo, lo, lo*, what *modicums* of wit he utters! *His* effusions have *ears thus long!*”—are *brayings*, he gibes, motioning about his own ears. “I have tapped on his *brain* more than he has beat my *bones!* I can buy nine sparrows for a *penny*, but his *pia mater*”—mind—“is not worth the *ninth part* of one sparrow!”

“*This* lord, Achilles—*Ajax*, who wears his wit in his *belly* and his *guts* in his head—I’ll tell you what I say of *him!*”

“What?” asks the huge visitor, grinning.

“I say: this Ajax—”

His target moves again to pound him, but Achilles bars the way: “*Nay*, good Ajax!”

“—has not so much *wit*—”

Achilles restrains Ajax. “*Nay*, I must hold you!”

“—as will fill *the eye of Helen’s needle*,”—a rude analogy, “for which he comes to fight!”

“*Peace*, fool!” laughs Achilles; he is bigger than Ajax, but controlling him, even when the

man is sodden, is difficult.

"I would have peace and quietness, but the *fool* will not!" shouts Thersites. "He there! *That* he! Look you *there!*" he insists, mocking the man who always wants attention.

Ajax is furious. "Oh, thou *damned cur!* I shall—"

Achilles interrupts with a proverbial question: "Will you set your wit to a *fool's*?"—and thus both demean his own and dignify the other's.

Thersites interjects: "No, I warrant you!—for a *fool's* will *shame* it!"

Patroclus is amused. "Good words, Thersites!"

Achilles asks Ajax, "What's the quarrel?"

"I bade the vile owl go learn for me the tenor of the proclamation—and he *rails* upon me!"

"I serve thee not!" says Thersites, resigning his post with tipsy dignity.

"Well, go to, go *to*," says Ajax, calming a little; he does very little himself—and wants to do no more.

"I served here *voluntarily*."

Achilles laughs. "Your *last* service was *sufferance*, 'twas not voluntary!—no man is beaten *voluntarily!* Ajax was here the *volunteer*, and *you* one under an *impress!*"—conscripted into service.

"E'en so," admits the drunken Thersites. But he looks up churlishly: "A great deal of *your* wit, too, lies in your *sinews*, or else there be liars. Hector will have a *great catch* if he knock out *either* of your brains!—it were as good as cracking a *fusty nut* with no *kernel!*"

Achilles is amazed at the small man's temerity: "What?—with *me too*, Thersites?"

The sometime sycophant persists: "There's Ulysses and old Nestor, whose wit was *mouldy* ere your *grandsires* had nails on their toes, who *yoke* you like *draught-oxen*, and make you *plough up* their wars!"

Now Achilles frowns. "What, *what?*"

"Yes, good sooth!—you *too*, Achilles! *To*, Ajax!—*go to!*"

Ajax glowers. "I shall cut out your tongue!"

"'Tis no matter," Thersites replies, "I shall speak as much as *thou* afterwards!"

"No more words," says Patroclus soothingly. "Thersites, peace!"

Thersites sneers. "I will hold my peace when *Achilles' brach*"—bitch—"bids me, shall I?"

Achilles laughs, noting the reward given his friend's kindly effort. "There's for *you*, Patroclus!"

Thersites rages on. "I will see you *hanged* like *clotpolls*"—blockheaded string puppets—"ere I come any more to *your* tents! I will keep where there is *wit* stirring, and *leave* the *faction of fools!*"

Patroclus, hurt, heads back to Achilles' tent.

"A good riddance," mutters Thersites; then he leaves as well.

Achilles informs the glumly silent Ajax: "Marry, sir, *this* is proclaimed through all our host: that by the fifth hour of the sun tomorrow morning, Hector will, with a trumpet 'twixt our tents and Troy, call to arms some knight who hath a *stomach*,"—guts, "and is such a one that dare maintain...." He blinks and winces, trying to recall the full challenge. "I know not what—'tis trash.

"Farewell."

"Farewell," says Ajax. But then he asks, "Who shall answer him?"

"I know not; 'tis put to lottery—otherwise he *knew his man!*" says Achilles proudly, as he leaves.

"Oh, meaning *you*," mumbles Ajax.

I will go learn more of it, he decides.

On his throne in the palace at Troy, King Priam solemnly addresses four of his sons. “After so many hours, lives, and speeches spent, thus once *again* says Nestor from the Greeks: ‘Deliver *Helen*, and all damages *else*—honour, loss of time, travail, expense, wounds, friends and what else dear that is consumed in the hot digestion of this cormorant war—shall be struck off.’”

Even after the fighting had bogged down, years ago, the Attic invaders, once eager for glory and pillage, still demanded, along with the return of Sparta’s queen, reparations and penalties. Now they want to go home.

“Hector, what say you to ’t?” the sovereign asks the eldest, strongest and most confident—the Trojans’ champion.

“Insofar as it touches me in particular,” says the prince, “though no man fears the Greeks *less* than I, yet, dread Priam, there is no *lady* of softer bowels—more spongy to suck in the *reasoning* of fear, more ready to cry out, ‘Who knows what *follows*?’—than Hector is. And modest *doubt*, called ‘the beacon of the wise,’ is the bandaging gauze that reaches to the bottom of a wound. The *worst* of peace is *surety*: safety *secured*.

“Let Helen go.”

All are surprised—and Prince Paris’s face is now flushed.

“Ever since the first sword was drawn about this question,” says Hector, “*every* tithèd soul ’mongst *many thousand* dead hath been as prizèd as *Helen*!

“I mean, of *ours*. If we have lost *so many tenths* of ours to guard a thing *not ours*—nor worth to us, *had* it our name, the *value* of one in ten!—what merit is in that thinking which denies the yielding of her up?”

“*Fie, fie*, my brother!” cries Troilus, the youngest prince. “Weigh you the *worth* in *honour* of a king so great as our dread *father* on a scale of *common* ounces? Will you with *counters* sum the vast proportion of his *infinite*?—and buckle-in a waist most *fathomless* with spans and inches so diminutive as *fears* and *reasons*? *Fie*, for his godly *shame*!”

Prince Helenus laughs. “No marvel, though, that *you* bite so sharply at reasons, you are so *empty* of them! Should *not* our father bear the great sway of his affairs with reason? Because *your* speech *hath none*, that tells him *so*!”

Troilus scoffs. “You are for *dreams* and *slumbers*, brother *priest*! You *fur* your *gloves* with reason!

“Here are *your* reasons: you know an enemy intends you *harm*; you know that a sword employèd is *perilous*—and reason *flies* from the intent of all harm! Who marvels then, when *Helenus* beholds a Grecian and his sword, if he do set the very *wings* of reason onto his heels, and fly like chidden *Mercury* from *Jove*?—or like a star *disorbèd*!”—a comet. “Nay, if we talk of *reason*, let’s shut our gates and *sleep*! Manhood and honour would have *hare*-hearts, if they but larded their thoughts with *his* cramped reason! Reason in *that* respect makes livers *pale*, and lustihood *dejected*!”

But Hector seems loath to abandon logic. “Brother, she is not worth what she doth cost for the holding.”

“What is *ought* but as ’tis *valuèd*?” counters Troilus; the Greeks apparently treasure her.

“But value dwells not in particular *will*,” says Hector, “it holds estimate, and dignity as well, when ’tis as precious *in itself* as in the prizer. ’Tis *mad idolatry* to make the *service* greater than the *god*! And the will *dots* that is attentive to what itself *infectiously* adores without some image of the adorèd’s *merit*!”

Troilus offers an argument: “Say I take today a wife, and my election is led on in the conduct of my enkindled will by mine *eyes* and *ears*—two trusted pilots ’twixt the dangerous shores of will and judgment.

“If my will later *distaste* what it elected, how may I *avoid* the wife I chose? There can be no *evasion*, no blenching from this standing firm by *honour*!” In his view, Troy is wedded to the

war. “We turn not back the *silks* upon the merchant when we have *soiled* them, nor the remaining *viands* we do not throw in unrespectful *stew* because we now are full!”

Helen’s lover is silent—but grinds his teeth, hearing the youth’s inept analogies.

Troilus presses on, citing the past. “It was thought *meet* that Paris should do some vengeance on the Greeks.” He tells Hector, “*Your* breath of *full consent* bellied his sails! The seas and winds, old wranglers, took a *truce*, and did him *service*: he touchèd the ports desired. And in reprisal for an old aunt whom the Greeks hold captive”—King Priam’s sister Hesione—“he brought back a Grecian *queen*, whose youth and freshness wrinkles *Apollo’s* face, and *makes stale* the morning!”

“*Why* keep we her?—the Grecians *keep our aunt!*”

“Is she *worth* keeping? Why, she is a *pearl* whose price hath launchèd ships above a *thousand*, and turned crownèd *kings* into *merchants!* If you’ll avouch ’twas wisdom that Paris *went*—as you must needs, for you all cried, ‘*Go, go!*’—if you’ll confess he brought home a *noble prize*—as you must needs, for you all clapped your hands and cried, ‘*Inestimable!*’—why do you now berate the *result* of your proper wisdoms, and do a deed that *Fortune* never did?—*beggar* the estimation of that which you prizèd *richer than sea and land!*”

“Oh, *theft* most *base*, that we have stol’n what we do fear to *keep!*—thieves *so unworthy* of a thing stolen that, in their company whom we did *disgrace*, we fear to warrant it *in our native place!*”

The princes—now defensive as *thieves*—are musing, when they hear a woman’s shrill, despairing voice coming nearer: “*Cry, Trojans, cry!*”

The old king is startled. “What noise? What shriek is this?”

“’Tis our mad sister,” says Troilus. “I do know *her* voice.”

She calls again. “*Cry, Trojans!*”

“It is Cassandra,” mutters Hector.

She storms into the hall. “*Cry, Trojans, cry!* Lend me *ten thousand eyes*, and I will fill them with *prophetic tears!*”

Hector tries to fend her off. “Peace, sister, *peace!*”

The lady stares at the warriors, wide-eyed in dismay. “*Virgins* and boys, mid-age and *wrinkled* *eld!*—soft *infancy*, that nothing canst *but cry, add to my clamours!*” she pleads. “Let us pay betimes a *moiety*”—half—“of that mass of *moan to come!*”

“*Cry, Trojans, cry!* Practice your eyes for *shedding tears!* Troy must not *be*, nor goodly *Ilium stand!*—our firebrand brother Paris *burns us all!* *Cry, Trojans, cry!*”

“Cry out ‘*Helen*’ and ‘*Ah, woe!*’ Cry ‘*Troy burns!*’—or else *let Helen go!*”

She has finished this repetition of one of her dire warnings; as always, the noblemen will ignore her exhortation. Tugging at her hair in frustration, she departs, reduced to sobs.

Hector resumes his probing. “Now, youthful Troilus, do not these high strains of divination in our sister work some touches of *remorse?* Or is your blood so madly hot that no discourse on *reason*—nor fear of bad *outcome* in a bad *cause*—can qualify the same?”

The youngest prince is unyielding. “Why, brother Hector, we may think the *justness* of each act such and no other than as *event* doth *form it!*—and *not once* reject the courage of *our* minds because *Cassandra’s* mad! Her brain-sick raptures cannot distaste the goodness of a quarrel which hath our several honours *all* engagèd to make it *gracious* to *fight for* and *maintain!*”

“As for my private part, I am no more touchèd than all Priam’s sons.” Suddenly aware of the older men’s wry amusement, he blushes. He aims sharp sarcasm at the priest—even Helenus had laughed: “And *Jove forbid* there should be done amongst us such things as might offend the *weakest spleen!*”

Paris, too, glares—at Troilus. “Else might the world be convinced of levity in *my undertakings* as well as *your counsels!*”

“But I *attest* by the gods: *your full consent* gave wings to my proposition, and cut off all fears attending on so dire a project! For what, alas, could these my *single* arms do?—what propagation is in *one* man’s valour to withstand the push and enmity of those this quarrel would excite?”

“Yet, I protest, were *I alone* to pass upon the difficulties, and had as ample *power* as I have *will*, Paris should ne’er retract what he hath *done*, nor *falter in the pursuit!*”

Old King Priam finds his bravado irksome. “Paris, you speak like one besotted on your sweet delights! *You* have the honey still—but *these*, the *gall!*—so to be valiant has no praise at all!”

But Paris persists. “Sir, I purpose not merely for *myself* the pleasures such beauty brings with it, but I would have the soiling in her ‘fair rape’ wiped clean, by honourably *keeping* her!”

He appeals to the others. “What *treason* it were to the ransackèd queen—*disgrace* to your great worths, and shame to *me*—now to deliver her possession up on terms of base *compulsion!* Can it be that so degenerate a strain as this should once set footing in your generous bosoms?”

“There’s not the meanest spirit in our party without a heart to *dare*, or sword to *draw*, where *Helen* is defended!—nor none so noble whose life were ill *bestowed*, or death *unfamed*, when *Helen* is the subject!”

“Then, I say, *well* may we fight for her whom, we know well, the *world’s* large spaces cannot parallel!”

Prince Hector has listened to the others’ arguments. “Paris and Troilus, you have both said well, but on the cause and question now in hand have *glozed*—spoken superficially, not much unlike young men whom Aristotle thought *unfit* to hear *moral* philosophy.

“The reasons *you* allege do more conduce to the hot passion of *distempered blood* than to making up of free determination ’twixt right and wrong!—for *pleasure* and *revenge* have ears more deaf than *adders* to the voice of any *true* decision.

“*Nature* craves that all dues be rendered to their owners; now, what dearer debt in all humanity than *wife* is to the *husband*? If this *law* of Nature be corrupted through emotion, and great minds, in partial indulgence of their benumbèd wills, resist the same, there is law in each well-ordered *nation* to curb those raging appetites that are most disobedient and refractory.

“If Helen, then, be wife to Sparta’s king—as it is known she *is*—these moral laws of nature and of nations speak loud to have her back returned!”

“Thus to *persist* in doing wrong extenuates not wrong, but *makes it much more heavy!*”

“Hector’s opinion is this, in the way of *truth.*”

He smiles. “Yet ne’ertheless, my spirited brethren, I do *defend* that you resolve to keep Helen still!—for ’tis a cause that hath no mean implication upon our joint and several *dignities!*”

Young Troilus is delighted. “Why, there you touch the *life* of our design! Were it not *glory* that we more cared about than the performance of our heaving spleens,”—strong emotions, “I would not wish a *drop* of Trojan blood spent more in her defence!

“But, worthy Hector, she is a theme of *honour* and *renown*, a spur to *valiant* and *magnificent* deeds—in whose presence *courage* may *beat down our foes!*”

“And Fame in time will come to *canonize us!* For I presume brave Hector would not lose so rich advantage of promised glory as smiles upon the forehead of *this* action for the wide *world’s* revenue!”

Hector nods, and smiles at his youngest brother. “I am yours, you valiant offspring of great Priamus!

“I have sent a *roistering challenge* amongst the dull and factious nobles of the Greeks which will strike *amazement* in their drowsy spirits!

“I was advisèd their great general slept, whilst dissension in his army crept.

“*This*, I presume, will *wake* him!”

Chapter Four Clever Deceptions

Just outside Achilles’ capacious tent in the Greeks’ sprawling encampment, a seedy civilian paces, complaining to himself, his vexation in sobriety aggravated by a headache and

queasy stomach. *How now, Thersites! What?—lost in the labyrinth of thy fury!*

Shall the elephant Ajax carry it thus? He beats me, and I rail at him—oh, worthy satisfaction! Would it were otherwise: that I could beat him whilst he railed at me! 'Sfoot, I'll learn to conjure and raise devils but I'll see some issue of my spiteful execrations!

Then there's Achilles, a rare enginer! If Troy be not taken till those two undermine it, — tunnel beneath the city—the walls will stand till they fall of themselves!

O thou great thunder-darter of Olympus, forget that thou art Jove, the king of gods, and, Mercury, lose all the serpentine craft of thy caduceus, if ye take not that little, little, less-than-little wit from them that they have!—which short-armed Ignorance itself knows is so abundantly scarce in circumvention it will not deliver a fly from a spider without their drawing massive irons and cutting the web!

After that, a vengeance on the whole camp! Or rather, the bone-ache! —syphilis. For that, methinks, is the curse descendent on those that war over a placket!—a crude term for part of a woman.

I have said my prayers—and, devil Envy, say 'Amen!'

He turns to the tent with determination. “*What ho! My Lord Achilles!*”

“Who's there?” The canvas entrance-flap opens, and Patroclus emerges. “Thersites. Good Thersites, come *in* and rail!” he says—blocking the way.

Says Thersites, “If I could have *remembered* a gilded counterfeit, *thou* wouldst not have slipped out of my contemplation. But it is no matter. *Thyself* upon *thyself*: may the common curse of mankind, *folly in ignorance*, be thine in great revenue! May heaven bless thee from a *tutor*, and *discipline* come not near thee!

“Let thy *blood*”—lust—“be thy direction till thy death! Then, if she that lays thee out says thou art a *fair* corpse, I'll be sworn—*swear* upon't!—she never shrouded any but *lazars!*”—had buried only lepers. He glances up. “*Amen!*” He glares at the dim knight. “Where's Achilles?”

Patroclus blinks, not understanding. “What, art thou *devout*? Wast thou in prayer?”

“Aye—the *heavens* hear *me!*” mutters downtrodden Thersites. He can see Achilles in the tent.

“Who's there?” calls the famous warrior.

“Thersites, my lord,” says Patroclus.

“Where, where?”

Thersites' eyes roll as Achilles steps outside, ready to be amused.

“Art thou come?” asks the champion. “Why hast thou not served *thyself* unto my table for so many meals? *Why*, my *cheese*, my *digestion!*”—pleasant dessert. He thus welcomes Thersites, newly employed to be his jester. He asks, in a merry mood, expecting a droll description, “Come, what's *Agamemnon?*”

“Thy commander, Achilles,” Thersites replies. “Then tell me, Patroclus, what's Achilles?”

“*Thy lord*, Thersites.” He regards the servant. “Then tell me, I pray thee, what's *thyself?*”

“Thy *knower*, Patroclus. Then tell me, Patroclus, what art *thou?*”

Says the carefully groomed knight sourly, “Thou mayst tell, that *knowest.*”

Achilles chuckles in anticipation. “Oh, tell, *tell!*”

“I'll decline the whole question”—step through the full argument, says Thersites.

“Agamemnon commands Achilles; Achilles is my lord; I am Patroclus' knower—and Patroclus is a *fool.*”

“You rascal!” cries Patroclus.

“Peace, fool!—I have not done.”

“He is a *privileged* man,” Achilles points out; court fools must be allowed unusual license.

“Proceed, Thersites.”

The erstwhile gentleman nods. “Agamemnon is a fool; Achilles is a fool; Thersites is a fool, and, as aforesaid, Patroclus is a fool.”

Achilles demands explication: “Derive this; come.”

“*Agamemnon* is a fool for attempting to command Achilles; *Achilles* is a fool to be

commanded by Agamemnon. Thersites is a fool to *serve* such a fool—and Patroclus is a fool *positive!*—absolute.

Achilles frowns. “Why am *I* a fool?”

“Make that demand of the *prover!*”—*yourself*. “It suffices *me* thou art.”

Thersites sees that Achilles has not enjoyed the quiddities; he points to a party of tall warriors. “Look you: who comes here?”

Achilles is still dodging duty. “Patroclus, I’ll speak with *nobody*.” He grins. “Come in with me, *Thersites*.”

Smarting as he follows him into the tent, Thersites glances back at the arriving commanders. He shares in the lords’ material accommodations, but not in their vainglorious notions of gallantry. *Here is such patchery, such juggling, and such knavery! All the argument is a cuckold and a whore!—a fine quarrel to draw envious factions, and bleed to death upon!* He pictures Helen. *Now the dry ringworm upon the subject! And war and lechery confound all!*

King Agamemnon has come through the camp, bringing Nestor, Ulysses and his friend Diomedes, a handsome nobleman whose curly black hair is touched at the temples with silver—and a very piqued Ajax. “Where is Achilles?” demands the Greeks’ general.

Patroclus bows. “Within his tent—but ill-disposèd, my lord.”

Agamemnon is annoyed. “Let it be known to him that *we* are here. He sent back our messengers!—and we *lay by* our appertainments,”—forgo due respect, “in visiting *him!*”

“Let him be *told* so,” he says imperiously, “lest perchance he think we dare not move the question of our place,”—exercise authority, “or know not what we are!”

Patroclus bows again. “I shall say so to him.” He hastens inside.

“We saw him at the opening of this tent,” notes Ulysses. “He is not sick.”

“Yes, *lion*-sick—sick of *proud heart!*” cries Ajax angrily. “You may call it *melancholy*, if you will favour the man; but by *my* head ’tis *pride!* But why, *why?* Let him show us *cause!*”—justification. “A *word*, my lord.” He draws Agamemnon aside to complain privately.

Nestor watches the irate man’s protesting gesticulation. “What moves Ajax thus to *bay* at him?”

“Achilles hath inveigled his fool from him.”

“Who, Thersites?”

“He.”

Nestor laughs. “Then will Ajax lack *argument*, if he have lost his *matter!*” The jest also plays on *pia mater*.

Ulysses grins, watching Ajax point at the tent. “No... you see—he *is* his argument who *has* his argument: *Achilles*.”

“All the better,” says the ancient. “Their *fraction* is more our wish than their faction. But it was no *strong* composure that could disunite a *fool*.”

Ulysses nods. “The amity that *wisdom* knits not, folly may easily untie. Here comes Patroclus.”

“No Achilles with him,” Nestor notes.

Ulysses is not surprised. “The elephant hath joints, but none for *courtesy*: his legs are legs for necessity, not for *flexure!*”—kneeling.

Patroclus bows again as he returns to Agamemnon. “Achilles bids me say he is much sorry if anything more than your sport and pleasure did move Your Greatness and this noble state to call upon him. He hopes it is no other but for your health and your digestion’s sake—an after-dinner breath.”

Agamemnon fumes. “*Hear* you, Patroclus! We are *too* well acquainted with *these* answers!

“But his *evasion*, wingèd thus swiftly with *scorn*, cannot outfly our apprehending! Much in *attribute* he hath, and much is the reason that we ascribe it *to* him; yet all his virtues, not virtuously *upheld* on his own part, do in our eyes begin to lose their gloss!—yea, like fair fruit in an unwholesome dish, are *likely to rot, untasted!*”

“Go and tell him we come to speak with *him!* And you shall not sin if you do say we think him over-*proud* and under-*honest*—greater in *assumption* than in the note of *judgment!*”

“And *worthier* persons than himself here *note* the savage strangeness he puts on!—despises the holy strengths of *their* command, and underwrites in an *observing* kind *his own* mercurial *predominance!*—yea, watch his pettish *lunes*, his ebbs, his flows, as if the passage and whole carriage of this action *rode on his tide!*”

“Go tell him this—and add that if he overhold his price so much, we’ll *none of him!*—and let him, like an engine not portable, lie under *this* report: ‘Bring action *hither*; this cannot go to war!’”

“A *stirring dwarf* we do give allowance before a *sleeping giant!* Tell him so!”

“I shall,” says Patroclus, his face pale, “and bring his answer immediately.”

“In *second* voice we’ll not be satisfied! We come to speak with *him!*” calls Agamemnon as the knight goes. After a moment, he motions, “Ulysses, enter *you!*” The Ithican king nods and goes into the tall tent.

Frustration is still growing in envious Ajax. He asks the general, “What is *he* more than another?”

“No more than what he *thinks* he is!” says Agamemnon, disgusted.

Ajax blinks. “Is he *that much?*” He ponders. “Do you not think he thinks himself a better man than *I* am?”

“No question.”

“Will you *subscribe* his thought, and say he is?”

“No, noble Ajax; you are as strong, as valiant, as wise—no less noble, much more gentle—and altogether more *tractable.*”

Ajax, thinking himself flattered, shrugs. “Why should a man be *proud?* How doth pride grow? *I* know not what pride is,” he brags, with unintended irony.

“*Your* mind is the clearer, Ajax, and your virtues the fairer,” says Agamemnon—suppressing a smile, given the low scale of comparison. “He that is proud eats up himself! Pride is his own looking glass, his own trumpet, his own chronicle; but whatever praises itself beyond the *deed*, *devours* the deed in the praise.”

Says Ajax, “I do hate a proud man as I hate the engendering of *toads!*”

Thinks Nestor, *Yet he loves himself!*—*is ’t not strange?*

Ulysses comes from the tent. “Achilles will not go to the field tomorrow.”

“What’s his excuse?” demands Agamemnon.

“He doth *rely* on none, but carries on in the stream of his repose—in peculiar *will*, and in *self-permission*, without observance or *respect* for *any!*”

The king stares. “Why, will he not upon *our* fair request untent his person, and share the air with us?”

“For respect’s sake he makes *important* only things small as *nothing,*” Ulysses reports. “He is *possessed* with *greatness*, and speaks not of himself but with a pride that *quarrels* as it’s *breathèd!* *Imagined* worth holds in his blood such swollen and hot discourse that, ’twixt his *mental* and his *active* parts’ kingdoms, Achilles in commotion *rages*—and batters down *himself!*”

“What should I say? He is so *plaguy proud* that the death-tokens”—warning symptoms—“of it cry ‘*No recovery!*’”

“Let *Ajax* go to him,” says Agamemnon. He turns to the huge man. “Dear lord, go you and greet him in his tent. ’Tis said he holds you well, and will be led, at *your* request, a little from himself.”

Ulysses objects—theatrically: “*Oh, Agamemnon, let it not be so!* We’ll *consecrate* the steps that Ajax makes—when they go *from* Achilles!”

“Shall the *proud* lord that bastes his arrogance in his own *steam*, and never suffers matters of the world to enter his thoughts—save such as do revolve and ruminates about *himself!*—shall *he* be worshipped by one that we hold *more* an idol than he?”

“*No!*” cries Ulysses. “This *thrice-worthy* and *right valiant* lord must not so stale his palm,”—

tarnish his military honors, “*nobly* acquired! Nor, by *my* will, subjugate his *merit*—as amply titled as *Achilles*’ is—by *going* to Achilles! That were to enlarge *his* fat-already pride, and add more coals to *Cancer* when it burns with entertaining great *Hyperion!*” The northern constellation’s stars dance before the blazing sun at the start of summer.

“*This* lord go to *him*? *Jupiter forbid!*—and say in *thunder*, ‘*Achilles*, go to *him!*’”

- At the side, Nestor quietly tells Diomedes, “Oh, this is *well!*—he rubs what’s *vain* in him!”

- Diomedes is watching Ajax. “And how his silence *drinks up* this applause!”

Says Ajax, “If I go to him, with my armèd *fist* I’ll pash him across the face!”

“Oh, no, *you* shall not go,” says Agamemnon, seeming concerned.

Ajax continues dimly: “If he be proud with *me*, I’ll *freeze* his pride! Let me go to him!”

Ulysses is adamant. “Not for all the worth that hangs upon our quarrel!” He sees Nestor smile at that irony.

Ajax grumbles, staring at the closed canvas flap of Achilles’ tent, “A paltry, insolent *fellow!*”

- Nestor *tsk-tsk*s: “How he *describes* himself!”

Always-truculent Ajax frowns, resenting the champion’s absence. “Can he not be sociable?”

- “The raven chides *blackness!*” whispers Ulysses, joining his friends.

Ajax scowls. “I’ll *let his humour’s blood!*”—cure the sickness by bleeding, a common remedy.

- Says Agamemnon, “He would be the physician who should be the patient!”

Ajax’s temper is rising. “If all men were o’ *my* mind—”

- “*Wit* would be *out of fashion*,” says Ulysses.

—he should not bear it so! He should *eat ’s words* first! Shall *pride* carry it?”

- “If it did, you’d carry *half*,” chuckles Nestor.

- Ulysses amends: “He’d have *ten* shares!”—all of them.

Ajax cogitates, in his fashion: “I will *knead* him! I’ll make him supple!”

- Nestor whispers to Agamemnon: “He’s not yet thoroughly warmed; fill him with *praises!*”

Pour in, *pour in!* His *ambition* is dry!”

Ulysses speaks up, telling Ajax, solicitously, “My lord, you feed too much on this dislike.”

Nestor nods, “Our *noble general*, do not do so!”

Diomedes tells Agamemnon, mournfully, “You must prepare to fight without Achilles.”

“Why, ’tis this *naming* of him does him harm!” says Ulysses. He turns and looks admiringly upon Ajax. “*Here* is a *man!*—” He pauses. “But ’tis before his face; I will be silent. . . .”

“Wherefore should you do so?” asks Nestor. “*He* is not emulous, as *Achilles* is.”

Ulysses nods. “The whole *world* knows he is as *valiant!*”

Nearly lost in indignation, Ajax is muttering to himself. “A whoreson dog, that shall palter thus with us! Would he were a Trojan!”

The others comment: “What a *vice* were it in *Ajax* now,” says Nestor. “. . . If *he* were proud—” says Ulysses. “Or covetous of *praise*—” says Diomedes. “Aye, or *surly* borne—” says Ulysses. “Or strange, or *self-affected!*” adds Diomedes.

Their sarcasm is lost on Ajax, and Ulysses claps him on the back. “Thank the heavens, lord, *thou* art of sweet composure; praise him that begot thee, she that gave thee suckle! Famèd be thy tutor, and thy parts in nature *thrice* famed—beyond all *erudition!*”

“And he that disciplined thine arms to *fight*, let *Mars* divide *eternity* in twain and *give him half!*”

“And as for thy *vigour*, bull-bearing *Milo* yields his renown to sinewy *Ajax!*” As Ajax bears this bull, Ulysses continues: “I will not thy *wisdom* give praise—which, like a bourn, a pale, a *shore*, confines thy spacious and dilated parts!”

“Here’s Nestor, instructed by the antiquary times; he must—he is—he cannot *but* be wise!

“But, pardon, father Nestor: were your days as green as Ajax’ and your brain so tempered, you should not have the eminence of *him*, but only be as Achilles!”

Ajax can only blink again in pleased amazement; he looks at Nestor. “Shall I call you

Father?"

That nobleman—who, oddly enough, is touched—smiles kindly. "Aye, my good son."

"Be ruled by him, Lord Ajax," Diomedes advises.

"There's no good tarrying here," Ulysses now tells them, "the hart Achilles keeps to the thicket.

"Please it our great general to call together all his state of war. *Fresh* kings are come to Troy." The Trojans' allies from the south, in Asia Minor, are coming to help fight the Greeks. "Tomorrow we must with *all* of our main power *stand fast!*"

He beams at Ajax. "And *here's* a lord! Come knights now from east to west, then *cull* their flowers—*Ajax* shall cope *the best!*"

"Go we to *council!*" says Agamemnon. "Let Achilles *sleep!* Light boats sail swift, though greater hulls draw deep."

Ajax, something of a barge, is drawn along.

Pandarus calls, "Friend—*you!* Pray you, a word; do not you follow the young Lord Paris?" "Aye, sir—when he goes *before* me," replies the stuffy steward, coming into a courtyard of King Priam's palace. Musicians seated on stone benches by the walls are opening their instrument cases.

"You depend upon him, I mean."

"Sir, I do depend upon the Lord."

"You depend upon a *noble* gentleman; I must needs praise him!"

"The Lord be praised."

Pandarus smiles. "You know *me*, do you not?"

"Faith, sir, superficially." His tone implies *as superficial*.

Pandarus smiles warmly. "Friend, know me better; I am the Lord *Pandarus!*"

The steward is aware of his questionable reputation. "I hope I'll know your honour *better.*"

Pandarus has heard *know Your Honor better*. "I do desire it!"

"Then you are in the state of grace," says the man sanctimoniously.

"*Grace?*" Pandarus is puzzled. "Not *so*, friend—Honour and Lordship"—*Your Honor, Your Lordship*—"are *my* titles!" He hears the flutes and stringed instruments beginning to play. "What *music* is this?"

"I do know it but *partly*, sir."—a play on a term; the music is in *parts*, each written differently for each player.

"Know you the *musicians?*"

"*Wholly*, sir." He thinks their occupation frivolous.

Pandarus nods. "Who play they to?"

"To the hearers, sir."

"At whose *pleasure*, friend?"

"At mine, sir," says the man who issues their orders. "And theirs who *love* music."

"*Command*, I mean, friend."

"Whom shall *I* command, sir?"

"Friend, we understand not one another! I am too courtly, and thou art too clever. At whose request do these men *play?*"

"That's to't indeed, sir," mutters the steward; he suspects several sins. But he sees a frown beginning. "Marry, sir, at the request of Paris, my lord—who's *there* in person," he says, pointing toward a door. "With him is the *mortal Venus!*—the *heart-blood* of *Beauty*, *Love's* invincible *soul!*—"

"Who, my cousin Cressida?"

"*No*, sir!—*Helen!* Could you not figure-out that by her *attributes?*"

"It should seem, fellow, that thou hast not *seen* the Lady Cressida!

"I come from the *Prince Troilus* to speak with Paris! I will make a complimentary assault upon

him, for *my business seethes!*"

The supercilious servant considers *seethe* a cooking term: *Sodden business! There's a stewed phrase indeed!*

As the two watch, Lord Paris and Lady Helen stroll about the yard, followed by their attendants, listening to the music and enjoying the afternoon sunshine.

Pandarus goes to the royals and bows deeply. "*Fair* be to you, my lord, and to all this fair *company!* Fair desires, in all fair measure, fairly guide them! Especially to *you*, fair queen! Fair thoughts be your fair pillow!"

Helen is amused. "Dear lord, you are full of *fair words!*"

"You speak your fair pleasure, sweet queen!" Pandarus tells Paris, "Fair prince, here is good 'broken music'!"—melodies played in parts.

"*You* have broken it, cousin!" laughs Paris, "and, by my life, you shall make it *whole* again: you shall piece it out with a piece of your *performance!*" He tells Helen, "Nell, he is full of harmony!"

Pandarus is known for singing at court occasions; he affects modesty. "Truly, lady, no!"

She smiles. "Oh, sir—"

"*Rude*, in sooth," says Pandarus glibly, "in good sooth, very rude!" He means unpolished.

"Well *said*, my lord!" says Paris, having noted the discourteous interruption. "*Well* you say so; it fits!"

"I have business to *my lord*, dear queen," says Pandarus. "My lord, will you vouchsafe me a word?"

Protests Helen, "Nay, this shall certainly not hedge *us* out! We'd hear you *sing!*"

"Well, sweet queen, you *are* pleasant with me," says Pandarus, still facing Paris. "But, marry, it is thus, my lord: *my* dear lord and most esteemed friend, your brother Troilus—"

"My Lord Pandarus," says Helen, "honey-sweet lord—"

"Go to, sweet queen, to go," says the old man with curt politeness. He continues: "—commends himself most affectionately to you—"

Helen is not accustomed to rebuff. "You shall not bob us out of our *melody!* If you do, our *melancholy* upon your head!"

Pandarus patronizes: "Sweet queen, sweet queen, there's a sweet queen, i' faith—"

She appears to pout. "And to make a sweet lady *sad* is a sour *offence!*"

"Nay, that shall not serve your turn, that shall not, in truth, *la!*" murmurs Pandarus. "Nay, I care not for such words—no, no, no." He would brush her off with a condescending politeness. "And, my lord, he desires you that, if the king call for him at supper, you will make his *excuse.*"

Helen persists: "My Lord Pandarus—"

"What says my sweet queen, my very, very sweet queen?" he asks, still not looking at her.

But now Paris is curious about Troilus's odd request. "What exploit's in hand? Where sups he tonight?"

"Nay, but, my lord!—" says Helen.

Pandarus tries to stifle her speech. "What says my sweet queen? My cousin will *fall out* with you...."

Helen warns Paris petulantly, "You must *not* learn where he sups!"

The prince grins. "I'll lay my life that my *deposer*"—the one to take his place at Troilus's meal, "is *Cressida!*"

Pandarus prevaricates: "No, no, no such matter!—you are wide! Come now, your 'deposer'"—Troilus—"is *sick!*"

Paris agrees to his brother's request. "Well, I'll make excuse."

Pandarus smiles. "Aye, good my lord! Why would you say *Cressida?*—no, no, your poor deposer's sick."

Paris is not put off by the lie. "I spy—"

"You *spy!* *What* do you spy?" asks Pandarus lightly, turning to the musicians. "Come, give

me an instrument,” he tells the lutenist. “Now, sweet queen,” he says, preparing to play and sing.

Helen softens a bit. “Well, this is kindly done.”

Pandarus—tuning the lute, to the owner’s annoyance—tells her, “My niece is horribly in love with a thing you have, sweet queen. . . .”

Thing can be a term for *penis*. Says Helen mischievously, “She shall *have* it, my lord—if it be not my lord Paris’s!”

Pandarus scoffs. “*He?* No, she’ll none of *his*; they twain are two.”

“Falling out after falling *in* may make them *three!*”—parents and infant.

Old Pandarus is discomfited. “Come, come, I’ll hear no more of this. . . . I’ll sing you a song now.”

“Aye, aye, prithee *now*,” says Helen. But she moves closer, and seems to flirt. “By my troth, sweet lord, thou hast a fine forehead!” She flatters a brow extended well into baldness.

The old man blushes, and murmurs, “Aye, you may, you may.” Still, he is pleased.

“Let thy song be of *love*,” says Helen, touching his cheek. As he flushes again, she thinks, *Thus Love will undo us all! O Cupid, Cupid, Cupid!*

“Of *love?* Aye, that it shall, i’ faith!” says Pandarus, eager to please.

Paris takes Helen’s hand. “Aye, good enough! *Love, love, nothing but love!*”

“In good troth, it *begins* so!” says Pandarus. Plucking the strings, he sings:

“Love, love, nothing but *love* evermo’e!
For though Love’s bow shoots buck and doe,
The shaft confounds not what it wounds,
But tickles still the sore!”—*aggravates the inflammation.*

“These lovers cry,
‘*Oh! Oh!*’ then *die!*”—a term for ejaculation.

“Yet that which seems the wound to kill,
Doth turn ‘*Oh! Oh!*’ to ‘*Ah!*’ and ‘*Ah!*’

He *so* dying, Love lives still!
Oh! oh! a while, but then *Ah! Ah! Ah!*
‘*Oh! oh!*’ *groans* out for ‘*Ah! Ah! Ah!*’
Heigh-ho!”

Says Helen, “In *love*, i’ faith, to the very *tip of the nose!*”

Paris laughs. “He eats nothing but *doves*, love!—and that breeds *hot blood*, and hot blood begets hot *thoughts*, and hot thoughts beget hot *deeds*—and hot deeds *is* love!”

Pandarus frowns. *Is that the origination of love?—hot blood, hot thoughts, and hot deeds! Why, those are vipers! Is love the generating of vipers?*

He returns the lute, which is immediately tuned again—but properly.

Pandarus asks Paris, “Sweet lord, who’s a-field today?”

“Hector, Deiphobus, Helenus, Antenor—and all the gallantry of Troy! *I* would fain have armed today, but my Nell would not have it so. How chances it my brother Troilus went not?”

Says Helen, “He hangs the lip at something. *You* know all, Lord Pandarus. . . .”

“Not *I*, honey-sweet queen.” *I long to hear how they sped today!* He asks the prince, “You’ll remember to make your brother’s excuse?”

“To a hair,” says Paris dryly; he has not forgotten Troilus’s barb.

Pandarus bows. “Farewell, sweet queen.”

“Commend me to your niece,” says she.

“I will, sweet queen.” They can hear distant horns sounding a retreat. Pandarus leaves, headed to the eastern gate to watch the returning heroes.

“They’ve come from field,” says Paris. “Let us go to Priam’s hall to greet the warriors.”

But she embraces him, warmly, and they kiss.

“Sweet Helen,” he says, with a sly smile, “I must woo you to help *unarm* our ‘*Hector!*’”—

and she understands which upright battler he means. “His stubborn *bucklers*,”—round shields, “by these your white, enchanting *fingers* touchèd, shall more obey than the edge of steel—or force of Greekish sinews!

“*You shall do more than all the island kings: bring down great ‘Hector!’*”

She smiles, eyes sparkling. “’Twill make me proud to be his *servant*, Paris!—yea, what he shall receive of us in duty gives us more *palm* than we have from beauty—yea, *overshines* ourself!”

The image of her glistening face already has Paris short of breath. He hurries her away. “Sweet, above *thought* I love thee!” he pants, as they rush toward their bed chamber.

Chapter Five Careful Seductions

Lord Pandarus, standing among his garden’s fragrant blooms late this mellow afternoon, is savoring the summer warmth when he spots Troilus’s page arriving. “How now!” he calls. “Where’s thy master? At my cousin Cressid’s?”

Her father, Lord Calchas, has absconded to the Greeks, but she still lives in his house, just across the avenue from her uncle’s stone mansion.

The boy runs over to him. “No, sir; he stays for you to conduct him thither.”

Pandarus sees Troilus at the gate. “Oh, here he comes! How now, how now?” he asks the young prince.

Troilus wants to speak in confidence. “Sirrah, walk off,” he tells the page, who wanders away to find a choice apple in the adjacent orchard.

“Have you seen my niece?” The young people have finally agreed to a tryst—this evening.

“No, Pandarus!” he moans. “I *stalk* about her *door!*—like a strange soul upon the Stygian banks staying for *waftage!* Oh, be thou my Charon, and give me swift transportance to those fields where I may wallow in the lily-beds preparèd for the deservers!” Charon ferries the newly deceased across the River Styx to the blissful fields of Elysium.

The prince longs for progress. “Oh, gentle Pandarus, from Cupid’s shoulder pluck his painted wings, and fly with me to *Cressida!*”

Pandarus, feeling success nearing, points. “Walk here i’ the orchard!—I’ll *bring* her straight!” He hastens toward the street.

Troilus paces. *I am giddy!—expectation whirls me round! The imagined relish is so sweet that it enchants my senses!—what will it be when the watering palate tastes in deed love’s thrice-repurèd nectar? Death, I fear me!—swooning destruction by some joy too fine, too subtle!—potently tunèd, too sharp in sweetness for the capacity of my ruder powers!*

I fear it much!

And I do fear besides that I shall lose distinction in my joys, as doth a battalion when they charge in heaps the flying enemy! The young man worries about clumsiness—and victory’s coming too soon.

Pandarus returns, from the house. “She’s making her ready; she’ll *come* straight!” He laughs. “You must be witty now!

“She does so *blush!*—and fetch her breath as if she were frayed by a sprite!”—were being pursued by an imp. He giggles. “I’ll fetch her! She’s the *prettiest* villain!—her breath is as short as a new-ta’en sparrow’s!” He dashes away again.

Troilus paces. *Even such a passion doth embrace my bosom! My heart beats thicker than a feverous pulse, and all my powers do their bestowing lose—like vassalage encountering at unawares the eye of majesty!*

Pandarus leads Cressida along the garden path. “Come, come, what need you *blush?*—shame’s a *baby!*”

“Here she is!” he tells the prince. “Now swear the oaths to *her* that you have sworn to me!”
Cressida turns away, annoyed that she is to receive repetitions; Troilus sees, and feels rejected.

Pandarus asks him, “What, are you *gone* again? You must be watched ere you be made *tame*, must you? *Come your ways*, come your *ways*!—if you draw *backward*, we’ll put you with the *fillies*!”

“Why do you not speak to her?” demands Pandarus. “Come, draw back this curtain, and let us see your picture!” But the young people stand still, bashful and silent, looking down awkwardly. “Alas the day, how loath you are to offend daylight! If ’twere *dark*, you’d close sooner!”

Troilus takes Cressida by the hand.

“So, *so!*—*rub on!*—and *kiss* thy mistress!” cries Pandarus. Troilus leans to touch her cheek with his lips. “How now?—a kiss in *bee* form? *Build* there, carpenter!—the air is *sweet*!”

“Nay, your hearts shall set in *flight* ere I part you!” says the advocate. “The *falcon* has the turn-stile for all the *ducks* i’ the river! Go to, *go to!*”

Troilus looks at her beautiful face. “You have bereft me of all words, lady!”

Pandarus is impatient. “*Words* pay no debts—give her *deeds*! She’ll bereave you o’ the deeds *too*, if she call your *activity* in question!” He watches, as they flirt tentatively. “What, *billing* again?”—as in mating birds’ billing and cooing. He gibes, playing on the term for *invoice*, “Here’s ‘In witness whereof the parties interchangeably....’”

“Come in, come *in!*” urges Pandarus, heading for the house; servants will prepare a bedchamber’s hearth to warm two lovers, he has decided. “I’ll go get a fire!”

She offers a slight smile, motioning toward the house. “Will you come in, my lord?”

“Oh, Cressid, how often have I *wished* me thus!”—alone with her.

“Wishèd, my lord? The gods grant—” She blushes, realizing that he might have meant *within her*. “Oh, my lord!”

“*What* should they grant?—what makes this pretty abruption?—what too-peculiar dreg espies my sweet lady, in the fountain of our love?”

“More *dregs* than *water*, if my *fears* have eyes!”

“Fears make devils of *cherubim*; they never see truly.”

“*Blind* fear which sees that *Reason* leads finds safer footing than blind *Reason* stumbling without fear! To fear the worst oft *cures* the worse.”

Troilus again takes her hand. “Oh, let my lady apprehend no fear! In all Cupid’s pageant there is presented no *monster!*” The lad has yet to encounter jealousy.

Cressida looks up at the handsome youth. “Nor nothing monstrous, neither?”

The prince’s wry smile is charmingly masculine. “Nothing but our *undertakings*, when we vow to *weep seas*, *live in fire*, *eat rocks*, *tame tigers!*—thinking it harder for our mistresses to *devise* imposition enough than for us to *undergo* any difficulty imposed!

“This is the *monstrosity* in love, lady: that the *will* is *infinite*, but the execution *confined*—that the *desire* is boundless, but the *act* a slave to limit!”

She looks down at their clasped fingers, considering. “They say all lovers swear more *performance* than they are *able*, and yet *reserve* an ability that they never perform—*vowing* more than the perfection of *ten*, and *discharging* less than the tenth part of *one!* They that have the voice of *lions* and the act of *hares*, are they not monsters?”

“Are there such?” The prince uses royal pronouns: “Such are not *we!* Praise us as we are found, allow us as we prove—our head shall go bare till *merit* crown it. No perfection in *prospect* shall have a praise in present; we will not *name* deserving before its birth—and being born, its offspring shall be humble.

“Few words for fair *faith*: Troilus will be so true to Cressida that his truth shall *mock* the *worst* that Envy can say; and what Truth can speak *truest* be not truer than *Troilus!*”

Hearing Pandarus returning for them, Cressida pulls her hand away. “Will you walk in, my lord?” she asks Troilus.

“What, *blushing still?*” complains the graybeard. “Have you not done *talking* yet?”

Cressida smiles demurely. “Well, Uncle, whatever *folly* I commit I dedicate to *you!*”

“Oh, I *thank* you for *that!*—if my lord get a *boy* of you,”—by impregnation, “you’ll *give him to me!*” laughs Pandarus. He smiles. “Be *true* to my *word,*” he tells Troilus. “If he *flinch,* chide *me* for it!” he tells Cressida.

Troilus tells her, “You know now your *hostages:* your uncle’s *word,* and my *firm faith!*”

“And I’ll give my word for *her too,*” says Pandarus. “Our kindred, though they be long ere they are *wooded,* they are *constant,* being won! They are *burs,* I can tell you!—they’ll *stick* where they are thrown!”

Cressida smiles happily. “Boldness comes to me now, and brings me heart. Prince Troilus, I have loved you night and day for many weary months!”

He is surprised. “Why was my Cressid then so hard to win?”

“Hard to *seem* won! But I *was* won, my lord, with the first glance that ever—” She looks down. “Pardon me! If I confess much, you will play the tyrant!”

“I *love* you *now;* but not *till* now so much but I might *master* it.” She blushes again. “In faith, I lie!—my thoughts were like unbridled children, grown too headstrong for their mother! See *we fools!*” cries the lady. “Why have I blabbed? Who shall be true to us, when we are so unsecret to *ourselves?*”

“But, though I loved you well, I wooed you not; and yet, i’ good faith, I *wished* myself a man—or that we women had men’s privilege of *speaking first!*”

“Sweet, bid me hold my tongue, for in this rapture I shall surely speak a thing I shall repent!” She points at his grin, teasing. “See, *see!*—your silence, speechless *cunning,* from my weakness draws my very soul from *counsel! Stop,* my mouth!”

“And *shall,* albeit sweet music issues thence!” says Troilus; he kisses her.

Pandarus is delighted. “*Pretty,* i’ faith!”

Cressida is abashed. “My lord, I do beseech you, *pardon* me! ’Twas not my purpose, thus to beg a *kiss!* I am ashamed. O heavens! What have I done?”

“For this time will I take my leave, my lord!”

Troilus is dismayed. “You’d *leave,* sweet Cressid?”

“*Leave?*” cries Pandarus, who has great hopes for this long-awaited assignation; he could become the uncle of a princess. “If you’ll take leave—*tomorrow morning!*”

“Pray you, content you,” she tells them.

Troilus’s eyes search her lovely face. “What offends you, lady?”

“Sir, mine own company.”

“You cannot shun *yourself!*”

“Let me go and try! I have a kind of self that resides in *you*—an *unkind* self, that *itself* will leave, to be another’s *fool!*”

“I would be gone! Where is my *wit?*—I know not what I speak!”

Troilus smiles, again taking her hand. “*Well* know they what they speak, who speak so wisely.”

Her eyes flash. “Perchance, my lord, I show more *craft* than love—and fell so roundly to a large confession to angle for *your* thoughts!

“But *you* are wise—or else you love not! For to be wise *and* love exceeds *Man’s* might: that dwells with gods above!”

Troilus takes her other hand as well. “Oh, if only I thought it could be in *Woman*—as it *can,* I will presume, in *you!*—to feel for *always* her rampant flames of love, and to *keep* her constancy plighted in youth, outliving beauty’s outward show with a *mind* that doth renew swifter than desire *decays!*”

“But, *alas,* I am simpler than the infancy of Truth, and true as Truth’s simplicity. Oh, if persuasion could but thus convince me that my integrity and truth *to you* might be comforted with *the match* in weight of such a *winnowed purity* of love—how were I then *uplifted!*”

This lady is not to be outdone in demanding fidelity. “In *that* I’ll war with you!”

He smiles. “Oh, *virtuous* fight, when *right* wars with *right* over who shall be *most* right!

“*True* swains in love shall, in the world to come, approve their truths by *Troilus!*”—claim him as an example. “When their rhymes full of *protest*, of *oath* in big compare, and of *truths* tired from iteration—*true* as *steel*, as *tide* to the *moon*, as *sun* to the *day*, as *dove* to her *mate*, as *iron* to *magnet*, as *earth* to its *centre!*—yea, after all comparisons of truth lack a simile to be cited as Truth’s authentic authority, ‘*As true as Troilus!*’ shall crown up the verse, and sanctify its numbers!”—lines.

“Prophet may you be!” says she, hopefully. “If *I* be false, or swerve a hair from truth, when time is old and hath *forgot itself*, when *waterdrops* have worn the stones of Troy, and blind *oblivion* swallowed cities up, when mighty states are grated to dusty *nothing*, *characterless*,”—their chronicles lost, “yet let memory among maids in love upbraid *my* falsehood from false to false!

“When they’ve said ‘as false as *air*’—as *water*, *wind*, or *sandy* earth, as *fox* to lamb, as *wolf* to heifer’s calf, *leopard* to the hind, or *stepdame* to her son—yea, let them say, to *stab the heart* of falsehood, ‘*As false as Cressida!*’”

Pandarus laughs. “*Go to!*—a *bargain made!* Seal it, *seal* it! I’ll be the witness!” He moves to Troilus. “Here I hold your hand, here my cousin’s. Since *I* have taken such pains to bring you together, if ever you prove *false*, one to another, let all pitiful goers-between be called, unto the world’s end, after *my* name: call them all *Pandars!*”

“Let all inconstant men be *Troiluses*, all false women *Cressidas*, and all brokers-between *Pandars!* Say amen.”

“*Amen*,” says Troilus, his heart racing.

“*Amen*,” says Cressida, reassured.

“*Amen!*” laughs Pandarus. “Whereupon I will show you a chamber with a bed—which bed, because it should not speak of your pretty encounters, *press it to death!* *Away!*”

As they all head inside, he turns, briefly, to survey the wide span of fertile earth beneath a glowing array of thin pink clouds at sunset.

Cupid, grant all tongue-tied maidens here: bed, chamber—and Pandar to provide this gear!

In the Greeks’ camp after supper, King Agamemnon walks with King Menelaus and Lord Nestor. The general is followed by three warriors, Ulysses, his friend Diomedes, and powerful Ajax.

A priest of Apollo, Calchas, approaches the foreign leader and his brother, and bows. “Now, princes, for the service I have done you, the advantage of the time prompts me to call aloud for recompense.

“Appear it to your mind that, through the sight I bear in *things to come*, I have abandoned Troy, left my possessions, incurred a *traitor*’s name!—exposed myself from certain and possessèd convenience to doubtful fortune, sequestering from me all that time, acquaintance, custom and condition made tame and most familiar to my nature!—and here, to do you service, am become as *new* unto the world—strange, unacquainted.

“I do beseech you to give me now, as by way of a taste, a little benefit out of those many registered in promise, which you say live to come in my behalf.”

Agamemnon knows and respects the nobleman, who occupies a tent within Menelaus’s large pavilion. “What wouldst thou of us, Trojan? Make demand.”

“You have a Trojan prisoner called *Antenor*, yesterday took,” says Calchas. “Troy holds him very dear.

“Oft have you—and often have you had *thanks* therefore—requested in rightly great exchange my *Cressida*, whom Troy hath still denied. But this Antenor, I know, is so much addressèd in their affairs that their military moves all must slack, lacking his manage, and they will almost give us a *prince of blood*, a *son of Priam*, in exchange for him!

“Let him be sent, great princes, and he shall buy *my daughter!*—and her presence shall quite strike off all service I have done in most-accepted pain!”

Agamemnon nods approval. “Let Diomedes bear him, and bring us Cressida hither. Calchas shall have what he requests of us.

“Good Diomedes, furnish you fairly for this interchange; withal, take word that Hector will tomorrow be *answerèd* in his challenge. *Ajax is ready!*”

“This shall I undertake,” says Diomedes, bowing. He smiles at Ajax. “And ’tis a burden which I am proud to bear!” He and Calchas go to prepare Lord Antenor for his return to Troy.

As the royal party walked here, Ulysses had been peering forward. “Achilles stands i’ the entrance of his tent,” he tells his companions. “Please it our general to pass *strangely* by him, as if he were *forgotten!*—and, princes all, lay negligent and loose regard upon him.

“I will come last. ’Tis likely he’ll question me why such unapplausive eyes are bent on him. If so, I have, to use between your strangeness and his pride, *derision—medicinable*, which his own will shall have desire to drink!

“It may do good, for *pride* hath no other mirror to show itself *but* pride! Supple knees *feed* arrogance, and are the proud man’s fees.”

Agamemnon agrees. “We’ll execute your purpose, and put on a form of strangeness as we pass along. So do each lord—and either greet him not, or else disdainfully, which shall shake him more than if not looked on. I will lead the way.”

As the first two lords pass him, Achilles, standing with his friend Patroclus, addresses them. “What?—comes the general to speak with *me?* You know my mind: I’ll fight no more ’gainst Troy.”

Agamemnon, not pausing to look, asks Nestor, “What says Achilles? Would he aught with us?”

The old man glances at Achilles, “Would you, my lord, aught with the general?”

“No.”

“Nothing, my lord,” Nestor tells Agamemnon.

“The better,” says the general, as he and Nestor walk on.

“Good day, good day,” says Achilles blandly as the king goes.

As he ambles past, King Menelaus, eyes on the path ahead, only mumbles, “How do you, how do you?”

Achilles asks Patroclus, “What?—does the *cuckold scorn* me?”

Then the new champion comes by. He nods. “How now, Patroclus.”

Achilles replies. “Good morrow, Ajax.”

“*Eh?*” grunts Ajax, trudging along.

“Good morrow.”

“Aye, and good *next* day, too.” Then Ajax is gone.

The Greeks’ greatest warrior is perturbed. “What *mean* these fellows? Know they not *Achilles?*”

“They pass by strangely,” Patroclus admits. “They were used to *bend*, to send their smiles *before* them to Achilles—to come as humbly as they use to creep to holy altars!”

“What, am I *poor* of late?” asks the hero. “’Tis certain: *greatness*, once fall’n out with Fortune, must fall out with men too. What the decline is he shall as soon *read* in the eyes of others as *feel* in his own fall; for men, like butterflies, show not their grainy wings but to the *summer*.

“Not a man, being simply Man, hath any honour but those honours that are *outside* him—place, riches, favour—prizes of *accident* as oft as *merit*. And when they fall, being slippery standers, the loves that leaned on them slip, too!—do pluck down one another, and together die in the fall.

“But ’tis not so with *me!*—*Fortune* and I are *friends!* I do enjoy at ample point all that I did possess!” He frowns. “Save these men’s looks, which do, methinks, find out in me something not

worthy of such rich beholding as they have often given.” He sees another passer-by. “Here is Ulysses; I’ll interpret *his* reading.

“How now, Ulysses!”

The commander, strolling past, glances up from his book. “Now, great Thetis’ son!”

“What are you reading?”

Ulysses looks down at the page as if puzzled. “A strange fellow here writes that, ‘A man, however dearly reported, however much in having, either without or in, cannot make boast to *have* that which he hath, nor *feels* not what he owns, but by a *reflecting*—as when his virtue, shining upon *others*, *heats* them, and they retort that heat again to the first giver.’”

Achilles takes charge. “This is not strange, Ulysses! The beauty that is borne here in the *face* the *bearer* knows not!—it commends itself to *others’* eyes. Nor doth the *eye*, that most pure spirit of sense, behold *itself*, not going into itself; but, eye to eye opposèd, each salutes the other with the other’s *form*. For speculation turns not to itself till it hath *travelled*, and is *mirrored* there where it may see itself. This is not strange at all.”

Still, Ulysses seems troubled. “I do not strain at the *position*—it is familiar—but at the author’s *drift*, which, in his explanation, expressly proves that no man is the lord of *anything*—though in and of him there be much consisting—till he *communicate* his parts to *others*!

“Nor doth he himself know *them* for aught, till he behold them formèd in the *applause* where they’re extended, which like an arch reverberates the voice again, or, like a gate of steel fronting the sun, receives and renders back its figure and its heat.

“I was much wrapt in this,” says Ulysses, “when suddenly I perceived the *unknown* Ajax!—Heavens, what a man is *there*!—a very *horse*, in that has he knows not his *nature*. What things there are most abject in *regard*, yet valuable in *use*!”

He shakes his head. “What things, again, most dear in the *esteem*, but poor in *worth*.

“And now shall we see, *tomorrow*—in acts that very *chance* doth throw upon him—*Ajax renowned*!

“O heavens, what some men *do*, which some men leave *to do*! How some men creep into skittish Fortune’s hall, while others play the idiot in her eyes! How one man *eats into another’s pride* while that pride is feasting on its *wantonness*!

“*To see* these Grecian lords!—why, even *now* they clap the lubber Ajax on the shoulder as if his foot were already on brave Hector’s breast, and great Troy shrinking!”

“I do believe it,” grumbles Achilles, “for they passed by me as *misers* do by *beggars*!—gave to me neither good word nor look! *What?*—are my deeds *forgot*?”

Ulysses shrugs. “*Time* hath, my lord, a pouch at his back wherein he puts *alms for Oblivion*—the great-sized monster of *ingratitude*! Those scraps are good deeds *past*—which are devoured as fast as they are made, forgotten as soon as done.

“*Perseverance*, dear my lord, keeps honour bright; *to have done* is to hang quite out of fashion, like a knight’s rusty mail, in monumental mockery!

“Take the *immediate* way!”—act *now*. “For *Honour* travels in a strait so narrow that *only one* goes abreast with her. Keep then the path!—for Envy hath *a thousand* sons, that one by one *pursue*! If you give way, or hedge aside from the direct sight forth, like an entered *tide* they’ll all rush by, and *leave you hindmost*!—or, like a gallant horse fall’n in the *first* rank, to *lie there* as *pavement* for the abject rear!—*o’er-run* and *trampled on*!

“Then what they do in *present*, though *less* than yours in past, must *o’ertop* yours! For Time is like a fashionable host that but slightly shakes a parting guest by his hand, yet with arms *outstretchèd* grasps-in the *comer* as if he would *flee*! ‘*Welcome*’ ever smiles, and ‘*Farewell*’ goes out sighing.

“Oh, let not Virtue seek remuneration for the thing it *was*; for beauty, wit, high birth, vigour of bone, desert in service, love, friendship, charity—all are subject to envious and calumniating Time.

“*One* touch of nature makes the whole world *kin*: that all with one consent praise *new-born*

gauds, though they are made and molded of things past, and give to *dust* that is a little *gilded* more laud than *gold* o'er-*dust*-ed!

"The present eye praises the object *present*. Then marvel not, thou *great* and *complete* man, that all the Greeks begin to worship Ajax, since things *in motion* sooner catch the eye than what stirs not.

"The cry went *once* on thee... and still it might. It may yet again, if thou—whose glorious deeds in these fields but of late made missions 'mongst the emulous gods themselves,"—drew them into the conflict, "and drave great *Mars* to faction!—wouldst not *entomb thyself alive*, encase thy reputation in thy tent!"

Achilles is indignant. "For this my *privacy* I have strong *arguments!*"

"But the arguments '*gainst* your privacy are more *potent* than heroic. 'Tis *known*, Achilles, that you are *in love with one of Priam's daughters!*"—Lady Polyxena, Cassandra's sister.

Achilles is surprised. "*Huh? Known?*"

"Is that such a *wonder?* The prudence that's in a *watchful state* knows almost every *grain* of Plutus's gold, finds *bottom* in the incomprehensible deeps, keeps pace with *thought!*—and, almost like the gods, does uncover thoughts in their quiet *cradles!* In the soul of a state there is a *mystery*, with which reason durst never meddle, which hath an operation more divine than breath or pen can give expression to!

"All the commerce that you have had with Troy is *ours* as perfectly as yours, my lord—and much better would it fit Achilles to throw down *Hector* than Polyxena!"

Ulysses now mentions, with seeming sadness, Achilles' eight-year-old son: "And it must grieve young Pyrrhus, now *at home*, when Fame shall *in our islands* sound her trumpet, and all the Greekish girls shall trippingly sing, 'Great Hector's *sister* did Achilles win—but *our great Ajax* bravely beat down *him!*'

"Farewell, my lord. I as your friend speak: the fool"—Ajax—"slides o'er the ice that *you* should *break!*" Ulysses opens his book, resumes reading, and walks away.

Patroclus touches his patron's massive arm. "To that effect, Achilles, have *I* moved you!"

"A *woman* impudent and *mannish* grown is not more loathèd than an *effeminate man* in time of action! *I* stand *condemnèd* for this!—they think my little stomach for the war, and your great love for me, restrain you thus!

"Sweet, *rouse* yourself! The weak, wanton *Cupid* shall from your neck unloose his amorous fold, and, like a dew-drop from the *lion's* mane, be *shook to air!*"

Achilles is deeply vexed. "Shall *Ajax* fight with Hector?"

"Aye—and perhaps receive much honour by him!"

"I see my *reputation* is at stake. My fame is sharply *gorèd!*" He stares at the ground, considering.

"Oh, then *beware!* Those wounds *heal ill* that men do *give themselves!*" warns Patroclus.

"Omission to do what is necessary seals a commission to draw from a *reserve of dangers!*—and then like an ague, danger *subtly taints*, even when we sit idly in the sun!"

Achilles looks up. "Go call Thersites hither, sweet Patroclus. I'll send the fool to Ajax, and desire him to invite the Trojan lords to see us here, unarmèd, after the combat.

"I have a *woman's* longing—an appetite that I am *sick* withal, to see great Hector in his *garb of peace*—to *talk* with him, and to behold his visage, even to my full view." The theory Ulysses described troubles him. What will he see there of himself?

Just then Thersites comes to the tent. "A labour saved," says Patroclus.

The slender gentleman is annoyed. "A *wonder!*"

"What?" asks Achilles.

"*Ajax* goes up and down the field, *meeting by himself!*"

"How so?"

"He must fight singly tomorrow with Hector," says Thersites, "and is so pathetically proud of an *heroical cudgelling* that he *raves* by saying *nothing!*"

“How can *that* be?”

“Why, he stalks up and down like a *peacock*—a *stride*, then a stand!—*ruminates*, like a hostess that hath no arithmetic, but uses her brain to set down her reckoning!—*bites his lip* with a politic regard,”—a determined look, “as if to say, ‘There were *wit* in this head, if ’twould *come out!*’ And so there *is*—but it lies as *coldly* in him as fire in a *flint*, which will not show without *knocking!*”

Thersites laughs. “The man’s *undone forever!* For if *Hector* break not his neck i’ the combat, he’ll break it *himself* in *vainglory!*”

“He knows not *me!* I said, ‘Good morrow, Ajax,’ and he replied, ‘Thanks, Agamemnon.’ What think you of this man that takes *me* for the *general*? He’s grown into a very *land-fish!*—*languageless!*—a *monster!*”

“Thou must be my ambassador to him, Thersites.”

“Who, *I?* Why, he’ll answer nobody!—he *professes* not answering! Speaking is for *beggars*; *he* wears his tongue in’s *arms!*” Thersites offers to show them the warrior’s new demeanor. “I will put on his presence: let Patroclus make demands to me; you shall see the *pageant* of *Ajax!*”

Achilles grins. “*To him, Patroclus!* Tell him I humbly desire the *valiant* Ajax to invite the most *valorous* Hector to come unarmèd to my tent, and to procure safe-conduct for his person from the *magnanimous* and *most illustrious*, six-or-seven-times-honoured captain-*general* of the Grecian army, *Agamemnon... et cetera.* Do thus.”

Patroclus begins the skit. “Jove bless great Ajax!”

Thersites’ expression is blank. “Hm.”

“I come from the worthy Achilles—”

“Hmh.”

“—who most humbly desires you to invite Hector to his tent—”

“Hmph.”

“—and to procure safe-conduct from Agamemnon.”

“Agamemnon.”

“Aye, my lord.”

“Hmh.”

“What say you to ’t?”

Thersites’ *Ajax* merely blinks. “God b’ wi’ you, with all my heart.”

“Your answer, sir?”

The simulated hero mumbles. “If tomorrow be a fair day, by eleven o’clock it will go one way or other.” He scowls. “Howsoever, he shall *pay* for me ere he *has* me!”

“Your *answer*, sir?”

Thersites’ *Ajax* turns away. “A plague on *opinion*—a man may wear it on *both* sides, like a leather jerkin. Fare you well, with all my heart...”

Achilles laughs. “Why, he is not in *this* tune, is he?”

“No—he’s but *out* o’ tune thus!” replies Thersites. “What music will be in him when Hector has *knocked out his brains*, I know not—but I am sure *none*, unless the fiddler *Apollo* takes his *sinews* to make *catlings* of!”—to use as his instrument’s gut-strings.

Achilles regards the abrasive agent. “Come, thou shalt bear a *letter* to him straight.”

“Let me bear another one to his *horse*, for that’s the more *capable* creature!”

The big warrior frowns. “My mind is troubled, like a fountain stirrèd; and I see not myself at the bottom of it.” Finding no reflection is a bad omen. He and Patroclus go into the tent.

Thersites considers Achilles’ muddled thinking. *Would the fountain of your mind were clear again—so I might water an ass at it!*

I had rather be a tick in a sheep than such a valiant ignorance!

Chapter Six Rivals Meet

Beneath the stars early this morning, two Trojan princes stand in the road just east of the city. By the light of flickering torches held by servants, they have met with a Greek emissary, Diomedes. He has brought a prisoner: Antenor, the Trojans' chief military counselor.

Paris spots someone else coming from the town gates. "*See, ho!*—who is that there?"

His brother Deiphobus peers through the darkness. "It is the Lord Aeneas."

When he and a servant near the others, Aeneas asks, "Is the *prince* there in person?" He grins. "Had I *so good occasion* to lie for long as *you* have, Prince Paris, nothing but heavenly business"—death—"should rob my bed-mate of my company!"

Diomedes laughs, recognizing the newcomer. "That's *my* mind too! Good morrow, Lord Aeneas!"

Says Paris, "A *valiant* Greek, Aeneas!—take his hand! Witness the subject of your speech wherein you told how *Diomedes* for a whole week did *haunt you by day* in the field!"

As they clasp hands warmly, Aeneas smiles at his opponent. "*Health* to you, valiant sir, during any question of the gentle *truce*; but when I meet you *armèd*, as black *defiance* as courage can think, or heart execute!"

The Greek, too, smiles. "The one and *other* Diomedes embraces! Our bloods are now in *calm*, and for so long, *health!* But when contention and occasion meet, by Jove, I'll play the *hunter* for thy *life* with all my policy, pursuit and force!"

"And thou shalt hunt a *lion* that will *fly with his face backward!*"—charge forward.

Says Aeneas, "In humane gentleness, welcome to Troy! Now, by Anchises' life, welcome! Indeed, by *Aphrodite's* hand I swear,"—the two are his parents, "no man alive of such sort can love more excellently the thing he means to *kill!*"

"We are in sympathy!" says Diomedes. "Jove, let Aeneas live a thousand complete courses of the sun!—if *to my sword* his fate be not the glory! But, for *mine* emulous honour let him *die with every joint a wound!*—and that *tomorrow!*"

"We know each other *well,*" says Aeneas.

"We do—and long to know each other *worse!*"

Paris laughs as they release their grips. "This is the most *despitefully* gentle greeting, the noblest hateful *love*, that e'er I heard!"

"What business, lord, so early?" asks Aeneas. "I was sent by the *king*, but why I know not."

Paris nods toward Diomedes and the Trojan advisor. "His purpose *meets* you: 'twas to bring this Greek to Calchas' house, and there to render unto him, for the *free-èd Antenor*, the fair *Cressida!*

"Let us have your company. Or, if you please, hasten there *before* us; I certainly do think—or rather, call my thought a *certain knowledge*—that my brother Troilus lodges there this night! Rouse him, and give him note of our approach—with the whole quality whereof, I fear, we shall be much *unwelcome!*"

"Of that I *assure* you!" says Aeneas, surprised by the trade. "Troilus had rather *Troy* were borne to *Greece* than Cressida borne *from Troy!*"

Silently, Diomedes notes that intelligence well.

"There is no help," says Paris, in resignation. "The bitter disposition of the time will have it so. On, lord; we'll follow you...."

"Good morrow, all!" says Aeneas. He and his man turn back to town, headed for Lord Calchas's house. Antenor goes with them.

Paris regards the Greek amiably. "Then tell me, noble Diomedes—'faith, tell me *true*, even in the soul of sound good fellowship: who, in *your* thoughts, merits fair Helen best, myself or Menelaus?"

“Both alike,” Diomedes tells the smug Trojan prince. “He merits well to have her that doth *seek* her, with such a hell of pain and world of cost, not making any issue of her *soiling*; and *you* merit as well, who defend her to *keep* her, with such a costly loss of wealth and friends, not paling at the taste of her *dishonour*.”

Paris flushes, but Diomedes, meeting his glare boldly, goes on. “He, like a *puling cuckold*, would drink up the lees and dregs of a *flat, tamed piece*”—an exhausted wine cask, and, by analogy, a worn-out lay. “You, like a *lecher*, out of *whorish loins* are pleased to breed out your inheritors. Both merits poised, each weighs nor less nor more, but he as he: *neither* the heavier for the *whore!*”

Paris contains his anger at the commander’s insults. “You are too bitter toward your countrywoman.”

“She’s *bitter* to her *country!* *Hear me*, Paris: for every false drop in her bawdy veins a Grecian’s *life* hath sunk! For every particle of her contaminated, carrion weight, a Trojan hath been *slain!* Since she could *speak* she hath not given so many good *words* breath as—for *her!*—Greeks and Trojans suffered *death!*”

Paris affects equanimity. “Fair Diomed, you do as traders do—dispraise the thing that you desire to *buy*. But we in silence hold this virtue well: we’ll only *commend* what we intend to *sell*.” The Trojan prince turns and strides away toward the former home of Calchas. “Here lies our way.”

Both lords’ servants hurry ahead, their torches lighting the road through the dark to the fortified city.

Near the center of Troy, Troilus and Cressida meander, yawning, toward the front of Lord Pandarus’s home. She knows the prince now wants to leave for the palace.

“Dear, trouble not yourself,” he tells her, rubbing his arms. “The morn is *cold*.”

“Then, sweet my lord, I’ll call mine uncle down: he shall unbolt the gates.”

“Trouble him not; to *bed*.” Sated, he no longer needs the old man’s officiousness. “To bed!—*sleep* still those pretty eyes, and give as soft detachment to thy senses as an infant’s, empty of all thought.”

Cressida closes her eyes for a moment—then pops them open and smiles. “Good *morrow*, then!”

He laughs. “I prithee now, to *bed*.” He walks more briskly.

“Are you a-weary of me?”

“Oh, Cressid, but that the busy *day*, wakèd by the lark, hath roused the ribald crows,”—gossips, “and dreaming night will hide our joys no longer, I would not from thee.”

“*Night* hath been too *brief!*”

“Beshrew the witch! With venomous wights she *stays*, as tediously as hell, but *flies* the grasps of *lovers* with wings more momentary—swifter than *thought!*” He sees her shiver. “You will catch cold, and curse me!”

“Prithee, tarry—you men will never *tarry!* O foolish Cressida!—I might *still* have held off—and *then* you would have tarried!” She kisses him anyway. They hear sounds in the house. “Hark! There’s *one* up,” she says dryly.

A voice calls, “What, are *all* the doors open here?”

“It is your uncle,” says tired Troilus.

“A pestilence on him!” She groans. “Now will he be *mocking!* I shall have *such a life!*”

Pandarus comes into the corridor, pretending to be worried. “How now, how now?—how go *maidenheads?*”—virgins. “Here—you, where’s my maiden niece *Cressid?*” he asks the blushing lady.

She laughs. “Go *hang* yourself, you naughty, mocking uncle! You bring me to *do*, and then you flout me *too!*”

Pandarus pretends to be puzzled. “To do what? To do *what?*—let her *say* what! What have I

brought you to do?"

She chides, "Come, *come*"—only to blush again when he laughs. "*Beshrew your heart!*—you'll ne'er be *good*—nor suffer *others* to!"

Pandarus laughs. "Alas, poor wretch!" he teases. "Ah, poor *capocchia!*"—little monkey. "Hast not *slept* tonight? Would he not, the naughty man, let it sleep? A bugbear take him!"

Cressida shakes her head. "Did not I tell you?" she asks Troilus. "Would he were knocked i' the head!"

They hear rapping. "Who's that at door?" she wonders. "Good uncle, go and see.

"My lord, come you again into my chamber," she tells Troilus; then, seeing his face: "*You smile and mock me—as if I meant naughtily!*"

Troilus chuckles.

"Come, you are *deceived!* I think of no such *thing*," she claims, tugging him to her. They hear more noise from the front. "How earnestly they knock!" She hurries toward the back. "Pray you, come in! I would not for *half of Troy* have you *seen here!*"

As they return to a bed chamber, the bachelor wonders if she is mocking his own wish for secrecy.

"Who's there?" grumbles Pandarus, going to the front. "What's the matter?"

"Will you beat down the door? How now! What's the *matter?*" he demands, unbarring and opening the oaken door.

"Good morrow, lord, good morrow!" says the visitor in the dark.

"Who's there? My Lord *Aeneas!* By my troth, I knew you not!" He motions for the nobleman to come in. "What news with *you* so early?"

"Is not Prince Troilus here?" He was not at Lord Calchas's house.

"*Here?* What should *he* do here?"

"Come, he *is* here, my lord; do not deny him; it doth import him *much* to speak with me!"

"Is he *here*, say you? 'Tis more than *I* know, I'll be sworn! For my own part, I came in late. What should he *do* here?"

Aeneas grins. "*Whom.*" He sees the old man starting to protest. "Nay, then! Come, come, you'll do him *wrong* ere you're aware!—you'll be so true to him as to be *false* to him!"

"Do not *know* of him, then," he says agreeably, to avoid further talk, "but yet go fetch him hither. *Go!*"

Just then, though, Troilus comes into the corridor. "How now! What's the matter?"

"My lord, I scarce have leisure to salute you, my matter is so rash!" says Aeneas. "There are at hand Paris and your brother Deiphobus, the Grecian Diomed—and our *Antenor, deliverèd* to us!

"And *for* him, *forthwith*—ere the first sacrifice—*within this hour!*—we must give up to Diomedes' hand the Lady *Cressida!*"

Troilus is stunned. "Is it so *concluded?*"

"By Priam and the general state of Troy," says Aeneas nodding. "They are at hand, and ready to effect it."

"How my achievements mock me!" moans Troilus. "I will go meet them," he sighs—surprised to find that he is somewhat relieved. "And, my Lord Aeneas," he adds, "we met by *chance*; you did not find me *here.*"

Aeneas agrees. "Good, good, my lord; the secrets of *Nature* have not more gift in taciturnity."

Together they go to meet the parties still coming here through the city.

Pandarus stands by the door. *Is't possible?* he wonders. *No sooner got but lost? The devil take Antenor! The young prince will go mad! A plague upon Antenor! I would they had broken 's neck!*

Cressida, returning, can see that her uncle is very upset. "How now! What's the matter? Who was here?"

Pandarus groans.

“Why sigh you so profoundly? Where’s my lord?—*gone*? Tell me, sweet uncle, what’s the matter?”

“Would I were as deep *under* the earth as I am above!”

“Oh, the gods! What’s the matter?”

“Prithee, get thee in!” he says angrily. “Would thou hadst ne’er been born!” He waves her away. “I *knew* thou wouldst be his death!” cries Pandarus. “Oh, poor *gentleman*! A *plague* upon Antenor!”

“Good uncle, I beseech you, on my *knees*!” she cries. “Beseech you, what’s the *matter*?”

“Thou must be gone, wench, thou must be *gone*; thou art exchanged for *Antenor*. Thou must to thy father—and be *gone from Troilus*!”

“’Twill be his *death*! ’Twill be his *bane*!—he cannot bear it!”

“O you immortal gods!” She rises and stares, pale. “*I will not go!*”

“Thou must.”

“I will *not*, Uncle! I have *forgot* my father!—I know no touch of *consanguinity*!—no kin, no blood, no love, *no soul* so near me as the sweet *Troilus*!”

“O you gods divine, make Cressida’s name the very *crown of falsehood*, if ever she leave *Troilus*!”

“*Time, Force, and Death*, do to this body what extremes you can, but the strong base and building of *my love* is as the very *centre of the earth*, drawing all things to it!”

She moans, “I’ll go in and *weep*,—”

“Do, do,” mumbles Pandarus, going to watch from the door.

“—tear my bright hair and scratch my praised cheeks; crack my clear voice with sobs, and *break my heart* with sounding ‘*Troilus*!’”

She moves slowly back down the passage, dazed and completely wretched.

I will not go from Troy! she tells herself.

Paris and the others conducting the exchange of prisoners stand outside Lord Calchas’s mansion just after sunrise—on the day which boasts of Prince Hector’s chivalrous bout epitomizing Trojan gallantry.

“It is great morning, and the hour prefixed for her delivery to this valiant Greek comes fast upon us,” says Paris. “Good my brother Troilus, tell you the lady what she is to do—and hasten her to the purpose.”

“Walk into her house; I’ll bring her to the Grecian presently,” says Troilus. “And think his *hand* to whom I deliver her an *altar*!—and thy brother Troilus a *priest*, there offering to it his own *heart*!”

Says Paris, “I know what ’tis to love, and wish that I could *help* as I shall *pity*.”

“Please you walk in, my lords.” They pass into the traitor’s house, as Troilus goes across the way to fetch the conflict’s newest captive.

Inside his own home, Pandarus is upset with the distraught young lady: “Be moderate, be moderate!”

“Why tell you me of *moderation*?” she wails. “The *grief* I taste is *final*, fully *perfected*!—and *violent* to the senses, strong as that which *causeth* it! How can I *moderate* it? If I could temporize with my *affection*, or brew it to a weaker and colder palate, the *like* allayment could I give my *grief*! My love admits no qualifying dross—no more than my grief, in such a precious loss!”

“Hear!” Pandarus has gone toward the entrance. “*Hear!* Here he comes!” he says, as Troilus arrives.

At once, Cressida clings to the prince.

Says Pandarus sadly, “*Ah*, sweet *ducks*!”

“*Oh, Troilus! Troilus!*” she sobs into his chest.

“What a pair of spectacles are here,” says Pandarus, mournfully, if ineptly. “Let *me* embrace

too!” His arm stretches to clasp the prince’s shoulders. “‘O *heart*,’ as the goodly saying was, ‘O heart, *heavy* heart, why sigh’st thou without *breaking*?’—where it answers again, ‘Because thou canst not *ease* my smart, by friendship nor by speaking!’ There was never a truer rhyme! Let us cast away nothing, for we may live to have *need* of such a verse!—we see it, we *see it*!

“How now, lambs?”

Troilus pulls away from her. “Cressid, I love thee with so refined a purity that the blessed *gods*, jealous of my fancy, more bright in zeal than the devotion which cold lips blow to their deities—*take* thee from me.”

She can’t help a slight frown. “Have the gods *envy*?”

“Aye, aye, aye, *aye!*” cries Pandarus, “’tis all too plainly the case!”

“And is it true that I must *go from Troy*?”

“A hateful truth,” says Troilus.

“What, and from *Troilus* too?”

“From Troy and Troilus.”

She is taken aback by his tranquil expression: “*Is it possible?*”

He nods. “And immediate; imperious Chance pushes back leave-taking, jostles roughly past all time of pause—rudely beguiles our lips of all rejoinure, forcibly prevents our lockèd embrasures, strangles our dear vows even in the birth of our own labouring breath!

“We two, that with so many thousand sighs did buy each other, must poorly sell ourselves with the rude brevity and discharge of ‘*One*.’”

She starts to speak, but he continues: “Injurious Time now with a robber’s haste crams up his rich thievery, he knows not how! As many farewells with distinct breadth and consigned kisses to them as be *stars* in *heaven*, he crushes into a lone ‘*Adieu*,’ and scants us with a single, famished kiss, broken, distasted with the salt of tears!”

Echoing in her mind are his calm *Adieu*—and *buy* and *sell*.

From the front door, Aeneas asks: “My lord, is the lady ready?”

“Hark, you are called,” says Troilus. He regards her with pity. “Some say that an *extra sense* thus cries ‘Come’ to him who must immediately die.” He tells Pandarus, “Bid them have patience; she shall come anon.”

Looking at the now-experienced prince, the old man’s feelings are mixed: the beautiful boy’s pain is disturbing, but his new freedom will soon enlarge. *Where are my tears?—rain to allay this wind ere my heart be blown up by the root!* He ambles down the corridor to the door, thinking.

She look up at Troilus. “I must then to the *Grecians*?”

“No remedy.”

“A woeful Cressida ’mongst the merry Greeks! When shall *we* see again?”

“Hear me, my love. Be thou but true of heart—”

“*I* true? *How now?*—what wicked theme is *this*?”

“Nay, we must use expostulation *kindly*, for it is parting from us! I speak not ‘Be thou true’ as if *doubting* thee, for I will throw down my glove to Death himself that there’s no machination in thy heart! But ‘*Be thou true*’ say I in the fashion of my sequent protestation: ‘Be thou true, *and I will see thee*.’”

“Oh, you would be exposèd, my lord, to *dangers* as infinite as *imminent!*” she cries. “But I’ll *be true!*”

“And I’ll grow friendly with *danger!*” He hastily unfastens one of the wide, embroidered cuffs that decorate his coat. “Wear this sleeve.” She tucks the memento under the cord at her waist.

“And you this glove!” she says, giving it to him. “When shall I see you?”

“I will corrupt the Grecian sentinels, to give thee nightly visitation. But yet be true!”

“O heavens!—‘be true’ *again!*”

The prince’s intimate affair will certainly become known; her succumbing to a Greek could subject him to scorn from both sides.

“Hear why I speak it, love! The Grecian youths are full of *quality*: they’re loving, well composèd with gifts of Nature!—flowing and swelling o’er with arts and exercise! How *novelty* may *beguile* impart to a person, alas, a kind of *godly* jealousy!—makes me *afraid*, which, I beseech you call a *virtuous* sin!”

“O heavens!” Cressida stares at him. “You love me not!”

“*Die* I a *villain*, then!” he protests. “In this I do not call your *faithfulness* into question so mainly as *my merit*: I cannot sing, nor heel the high lavolt,”—do lively dances, “nor sweeten talk, nor play at subtle games!—*fair virtues* all, in which the Grecians are most prompt and preparèd.

“And I can tell you that in each grace of these there lurks a *devil* that with silent discourse tempts most cunningly! But be not *tempted*!”

“Do you think I will?”

“No, but some things may be done that we do not *will*. And sometimes we are devils to ourselves, when we will tempt the frailty of our powers, presuming on their changeable potency.”

They can hear Aeneas’s insistent voice: “Nay, good my lord....”

“Come, kiss,” says Troilus, “and let us part!”

But Paris is calling from the door. “Brother Troilus!”

“Good brother, come you hither,” he replies, “and bring Aeneas and the Grecian with you!”

Cressida looks up at Troilus, tears in her eyes. “My lord, will *you* be true?”

“Who, *I*? Alas, it is my vice, my fault!” he tells her glibly. “Whiles others *fish with craft* for great opinion, I with great truth catch mere simplicity; whilst some with *cunning* gild their copper crowns, with truth and plainness I do wear mine bare. Fear not *my* truth: the moral of my wit is ‘plain and true’—there’s all the reach of it.”

Paris and Deiphobus come into the room, followed by the Greek emissary and his prisoner.

“Welcome, Sir Diomedes,” says Troilus. “Here is the lady which for Antenor we deliver you. At the city gate, lord, I’ll give her to thy hand, and along the way possess thee what she is.

“Treat her *well*—and, by my soul, fair Greek, if e’er thou stand at mercy of my sword, name Cressid, and thy life shall be as safe as *Priam* is in *Ilion*!”

Irked by the youth’s arrogant presumption, Diomedes begins chafing his pride even sooner than he had intended. He bows deeply—to her. “Fair Lady Cressida, so please you, *save* the thanks this prince expects!

“The lustre in *your eye*, heaven in *your cheek*, plead your fair usage; and to *Diomedes* you shall be mistress, and command him wholly!” He kisses her hand.

As she is traded, whisked away on mere minutes’ notice, Cressida smiles weakly at the Greek lord, cheered by the unexpected courtesy, relieved at his kindness.

Troilus’s jealousy, as it turns out, is somewhat less than godly. “Grecian, thou dost not use me courteously!” he cries angrily, “to shame the zeal of my petition to thee by *praising* her! I tell thee, lord of Greece, she is as far high-soaring o’er *thy praises* as *thou* art unworthy to be called her *servant*!”

“I charge thee: use her well at *my* charge!—for, by the dreadful god of the dead, if thou dost *not*, though the great bulk *Achilles* be thy guard, *I’ll cut thy throat*!”

Says Diomedes calmly, obviously undaunted by the threat, “Oh, be not angered, Prince Troilus. Let me be privileged by my place and message to be a free speaker.” But his smile is fierce. “When I am *hence*, I’ll *answer* for my lust.

“And know you, lord,” he says with an iron gaze, “I’ll *nothing* do on *charge*. To her own worth she shall be prizèd; but as to what you say ‘Be’t so,’ I’ll speak, in my spirit and honour, ‘*No!*’”

Troilus starts toward the door. “Come, to the gate. I tell thee, Diomedes, this affront shall oft make thee to *hide thy head*!”

“Lady, give me your hand, and, as we walk, to our own selves will bend our needful talk.”

But as they all reach the entrance, a horn blast can be heard from the field, echoing among the city walls.

“Hark,” cries Paris, alarmed. “Hector’s trumpet!”

“How have we *spent* this morning?” says Aeneas. “The prince must think me tardy and *remiss*, who swore to ride *before* him onto the field!”

“’Tis *Troilus*’s fault,” says Paris, also eager to witness Hector’s performance. “Come, *come!*—to the field with him!”

Deiphobus concurs. “Let us make ready straight!”

Aeneas tells Troilus, “Yea, with a bridegroom’s fresh alacrity, let us address attending on Hector’s heels! The *glory of our Troy* doth this day lie on *his* fair worth in *single chivalry!*” The two hurry after the other men.

Diomedes smiles warmly at Cressida. With a gentle, courteous motion, he invites her to proceed; his waiting attendants follow them as they go, arm in arm.

Chapter Seven Single Contests

Fully armed and armored, Ajax clumps into the lists, a rectangle of space already cordoned off for the noble contest this bright morning, in a field at the edge of the Greek camp where it faces Troy.

Agamemnon tells him, “Here art *thou*, in appointment fresh and *fair!*—anticipating the time with *starting courage!* Give with thy trumpet a loud note to Troy, thou dreadful *Ajax*, that the appallèd air may pierce the head of thy great combatant, and hale him hither!”

Ajax hands a leather pouch of coins to his herald. “Thou, trumpet, there’s my purse. Now *crack thy lungs*, and *split* thy brazen pipe! *Blow*, villain, till thy cheeks, spherèd for *us*, outswell the choler of puffèd Aquilon!”—the angry North Wind. “Come, *stretch* thy *chest*, and let thine eyes *spout blood!*—thou blow’st for *Hector!*”

The gleaming brass horn hurls forth its summons.

Except for the chirping of a few sparrows, the plain is silent. Notes Ulysses, “No trumpet answers.”

“’Tis but early day,” says Achilles.

Agamemnon sees that a couple has emerged from Troy’s eastern gate. “Is not *Diomed* yonder, with Calchas’ daughter?”

“’Tis he,” says Ulysses, as the two come along the road. He grins. “I ken the manner of his gait: he rises on the toe; that spirit of his lifts him from the earth in *aspiration!*” His friend is undertaking this assignment with enthusiasm.

“Is this the Lady Cressida?” asks Agamemnon, when they reach him.

Diomedes bows. “Even she!”

As Cressida was taken from the town, she watched her lover hurrying away eagerly with the other princes; forlorn now, she has been comforted by the charming and attentive nobleman who has offered her aid and protection here among Troy’s enemies.

“Most dearly welcome to the *Greeks*, sweet lady!” says Agamemnon. She pales, as the king of Mycenae’s lips touch her cheek.

“Our *general* doth salute you with a kiss!” old Nestor informs her, smiling.

“Yet is the kindness but *particular*,” Ulysses tells him. “’Twere better she were kissed *in general!*”

“Very *courtly* counsel!” laughs the ancient. “I’ll begin,” he adds, leaning to kiss her. “So much for *Nestor*.”

She is clearly discomfited at being the center of several lords’ attention—and by their manner of introduction. Her eyes widen as a big, muscled mass looms before her.

“I’ll take that *winter* from your lips, fair lady!” he says, to tease old Nestor. “*Achilles* bids you welcome!” He bobs down to peck at her cheek.

She is relieved; the scariest meeting is now past.

King Menelaus, next in line, pauses. "I had good *argument* for kissing, once," he says mournfully, thinking of his wife—who is now being called *Helen of Troy*.

"But that's no argument for kissing *slowly*," says Patroclus, brushing past him to buss her lightly on the cheek, "for thus popped in *Paris* in his *hardiment*—and thus parted you from your *argument!*" he says liltily. "That first was Menelaus's kiss; *this, mine! Patroclus* kisses you!" He does so again.

Menelaus protest, laughing, "Oh, *this* is trim!"

Thinks Ulysses watching them, *Oh, deadly gall, and theme of all our scorn!—for which we lose our heads—to gild his horns!*

Patroclus nods toward the cuckolded king. "*Paris* and I kiss evermore *for* him!" he tells Cressida, whose color has returned.

"I'll *have* my kiss, sir!" insists Menelaus. "Lady, by your leave...."

She regards him, smiling, now. "In kissing, do you render, or receive?"

"Both take and give."

"I'd make *my* match to *live!*" she says pertly. "The kiss you'd *take* is better than you'd *give*—therefore no kiss!"

"I'll give you a *premium*," says Menelaus. "I'll give you *three* for one!"

"You're an *odd* man," she jests. "Give *even*, or give none!"

Menelaus only laughs. "An odd man, lady? *Every* man is odd!"

"No, *Paris* is not," she retorts, "for you know 'tis true, that you are odd,"—single, "and he is even with you!"

Menelaus winces as he chuckles, backing away. "You'll *fillip* me *on the head!*"

"No, I'll be sworn!" says she gaily, unaware of another meaning of *head*.

Ulysses approaches Cressida. "It were no match, your *nails* against his *horn!* May I, sweet lady, beg a kiss of you?"

"You *may*...."

"I do desire it."

"Well, beg then." Her patrician poise has returned.

Says Ulysses, glancing sourly at Menelaus, "Why then for *Venus*' sake give me a kiss—when Helen is a *maiden* again!—and is *his!*" Venus is the goddess of beauty and sex.

The Trojan lady nods, accepting the specious conditions: "I am your debtor." But she adds, "Claim it when 'tis *due!*"

Ulysses' eyes narrow. "*Never*'s my day. And *then* a kiss from you."

Diomedes now steps forward. "Lady, a word," he says. "I'll bring you to your father."

Cressida nods and follows him into the Greeks' extensive encampment.

"A woman of quick sense!" says Nestor, highly impressed.

"Fie, *fie* upon her!" says Ulysses peevishly, annoyed by his own arousal—and rebuff.

"There's *language* in her eye, her cheek, her *lip!*—nay, her *foot* speaks! Her wanton spirit looks out from every joint and motion of her body!"

"Oh, these *encounterers* so glib of tongue!—who *yield* to an accosting welcome *ere it come*, and wide unclasp the tablets of their thoughts to every ticklish reader! Set them down for *sluttish spoils of opportunity*—and daughters of the *game!*"

Old Nestor must quash a smile; the invaders have been afield—and away from women—for years. He shakes his head; the tough and hardy Ulysses, King of Ithaca, is not accustomed to feeling vulnerable.

And then from across the field they hear the clarion blaring of a Trojan trumpet. "Yonder comes their troop!" announces Agamemnon.

Hector, magnificently accoutered, strides toward them, leading, under the banner of Troy, a colorful party of noblemen, including his brother Prince Troilus and Lord Aeneas, along with many attendants.

“*Hail*, all you state of Greece!” says Aeneas as they approach that royal court. He comes before Agamemnon to settle terms. “What shall mean ‘done’ for him that Victory commends? Do you propose that, ere a victor shall be known, the knights shall to the edge of all extremity pursue each other, or shall they be divided by some voice or order on the field? Hector bade me ask.”

“Which way would Hector have it?”

“He cares not; he’ll obey conditions.”

An intruding laugh is harsh. “’Tis done like *Hector!*—done, but *securely!* A little proudly—and a *great deal* misprizing the knight opposed!”

Asks Aeneas, “If not ‘Achilles,’ sir, what is your name?” He knows well enough who the ponderous blusterer must be.

“If not *Achilles*, *nothing!*”

The Trojan seems to weigh both. “Therefore Achilles,” he decides. “But whate’er, *know this!* *Valour* and *pride* excel themselves in Hector—in the extremities of *great* and *little*: the one almost as infinite as *all*, the other blank as *nothing*. Weigh him *well*, and that which *looks* like pride is *courtesy*.”

“This *Ajax* is *half* made of Hector’s blood,”—they are cousins, “in love whereof, half of Hector *stays at home*—half *heart*, half *hand*. Half Hector comes to seek this *blended* knight, half Trojan and half Greek.”

Gibes Achilles, “Oh, I perceive you: a battle of *maidens* then!”

Agamemnon sees a commander returning from Calchas’s tent. “Here is Sir Diomedes.

“Go, gentle knight, and stand by our *Ajax*. As you and Lord Aeneas consent upon the order of their fight, so be it: either to the uttermost, or else a-breath.

“The combatants’ being *kin* half *stints* their strife before their strokes begin,” he tells Diomedes—dryly.

Ajax’s second expects Hector’s ways to be as devious as their own; Diomedes will urge the Greek to expend his utmost effort.

Ajax and Hector approach each other; Aeneas and Diomedes stand nearby.

“They are opposed already!” says Ulysses, watching as the fighters square off.

Agamemnon scans the faces of those who are observing. “What Trojan is that same that looks so troubled?”

“The youngest son of Priam,” Ulysses tells him, “a true *knight!* Not yet mature, yet matchless. Firm of word, speaking by *deeds*, and deedless in his *tongue*; not soon provoked, nor *being* provokèd soon calmed. His heart and hand, both open and both free: for what he has, he *gives*; what thinks, he *shows*—yet gives he not till *judgment* guide his bounty, nor dignifies an *impure* thought with breath.

“*Manly* as Hector, but more *dangerous*, for Hector in his blaze of wrath subscribes to tender objections,”—admits sympathy, “but *he* in heat of action is more vindictive than *jealous love!*”

“They call him *Troilus*—and on him erect a *second hope*, as fairly built as Hector.

“Thus says Aeneas, one who knows the youth even to his niches, and with private soul did in great Ilion”—in Troy; Ulysses was an ambassador there before the war—“thus translate him to me.”

The trumpet sounds, and the warriors both leap forward, swinging their heavy swords to begin vigorous, clanging combat, punctuated by thuds of sharp steel against wooden shields.

“*They are in action!*” cries the general.

“Now, *Ajax*, hold thine own!” urges Nestor.

Troilus calls: “*Hector*, thou *sleep’st!*—*awake* thee!”

“His blows are well-disposed!” notes Agamemnon. “*There*, *Ajax!*”

After much furious slashing and thrusting of blades, at one side Diomedes raises his arms to call for a respite. “You must no more!” he cries. The Greeks can still use Ajax.

Aeneas, too, tells the combatants, “Princes, *enough*, so please you!”

The heroes gasp for breath as the referees confer.

Ajax protests. "I am not *warm* yet," he claims, dripping sweat. "Let us fight again!"

The Greek second looks to the Trojan champion. "As Hector pleases," says Diomedes.

Hector responds calmly. "Why, then will I no more." He addresses Ajax. "Thou art, great lord, my father's sister's son—a cousin-german to great *Priam's* seed; the *obligation* of our blood forbids a *gory* competition 'twixt us twain!

"Were thy co-mixture of Greek and Trojan such that thou couldst say, 'This hand is Grecian all, and this is *Trojan*; the sinews of *this* leg all *Greek*, and this all Troy; my *mother's* blood runs on the dexter cheek, and this left one bounds in my *father's*,' by Jove multipotent, thou shouldst not bear from me a *Greekish* member wherein my *sword* had not impressure made in our frank feud!

"But the just gods gainsay that any drop thou borrowedst from thy mother, my sacred aunt, should by my mortal sword be drainèd!

"Let me embrace thee, Ajax! By him that thunders, thou hast lusty *arms!* Hector would have them fall upon him *thus!*" He hugs the crestfallen warrior. "Cousin, all *honour* to thee!"

Ajax can only blink. "I thank thee, Hector," he mutters. But he protests, dully, "Thou art too gentle and too free a man; I came to *kill* thee, cousin, and to bear hence a great addition earnèd in thy death."

Hector laughs—and mentions Achilles' young son: "Not Pyrrhus's *father*—on whose bright crest Fame with her loud'st *oyez* cries, 'This is *he!*'—is so admirable!—could promise to himself a thought of added honour *torn from Hector!*"

Aeneas is aware of the onlookers. "There is *expectance* here from both the sides; what further will you do?"

"We'll answer it: the outcome is *embracement!*" says Hector, clasping the Greek around the shoulders. "Ajax, farewell!" He turns to go.

Ajax tells him, "If I might in *entreaties* find success—as seld *I* have the chance—I would desire my famous cousin to visit our Grecian tents."

"'Tis *Agamemnon's* wish," adds Diomedes. "And great Achilles doth long to see, *unarmèd*, the valiant Hector."

Hector smiles and nods. "Aeneas, call my brother Troilus to me, and, conveying this loving interview to the spectators on our Trojan part, desire them home.

"Give me thy hand, my cousin!" he says, warmly gripping Ajax's, "I will go eat with thee, and see your *nights!*"

Ajax sees his general approaching. "Great Agamemnon comes to meet us here."

Hector turns to Aeneas. "The worthiest of them tell me, name by name—but for Achilles; mine own searching eyes shall find him by his large and portly size." The Greek hero has gained more than muscle during his dallying.

Agamemnon greets Hector ebulliently: "*Worthy* of arms, *welcome!*—as from one who would be *rid* of such an enemy!" He chides himself: "But that's no welcome! Understand more clearly: what's past and what's to come are strewed with the husks and formless ruin of oblivion; but in *this* extant moment—i' faith and troth constrained purely, all hollow bias withdrawn—I bid thee, with most divine integrity, from the *heart* of very *heart*, *great Hector, welcome!*"

Hector bows. "I thank thee, most imperial Agamemnon!"

The Greek general nods to Troilus. "My well-famèd lord of Troy, no less to you."

"Let me confirm my princely brother's greeting," says the King of Sparta. "You brace of warlike brothers, welcome hither!"

Hector doesn't know him: "Whom must we answer?"

Aeneas tells him: "The noble Menelaus."

"Ah, *you*, my lord!" Hector bows—too deeply. "By Mars's gauntlet, *Thanks!* Mock not that I effect that *untraded* oath! Your quondam wife still wears Venus' glove!"—resembles the alluring goddess. "She's well, but bade me not commend her to you," he adds dryly.

Menelaus is stone-faced. "Name her not *now*, sir; she's a *deadly* theme."

“Oh, *pardon*; I offend,” says Hector—too politely.

The venerable Nestor now comes to Hector, smiling. “I have, thou gallant Trojan, seen thee oft, labouring for Destiny, make cruel way through ranks of Greekish youth.

“And I have seen thee spur thy Phrygian steed, as hot as Perseus disprizing many in forfeits and subduements, when thou hast hung thy advanced sword *i’ the air*, not letting it decline on the declined!—so that I have said to some, my standers-by, ‘*Lo, Jupiter* is yonder, dealing *life!*’

“And I have seen thee *pause* and *take thy breath*—when a ring of Greeks have hemmed thee in, as an Olympian *wrestling!*”

“That have I seen; but this thy *countenance*, ever lockèd in steel,”—always helmeted, “I never saw till *now*. I knew thy grandsire, and once *fought* with him; he was a good *soldier*; but—by great Mars, the captain of us *all*—I never saw one like *thee!*”

“Let an old man embrace thee!—and, worthy warrior, welcome to our tents!”

- “’Tis old Nestor,” whispers Aeneas.

“Let me *embrace thee!*” says Hector, “good old chronicle that hast so long walked hand in hand with Time! Most reverend Nestor, I am glad to clasp thee!”

Nestor beams. “I would my arms could match thee in *contention* as they contend with thee in *courtesy!*”

“I would they could,” says Hector.

Nestor laughs. “*Hah!* By this white beard, I’d *fight* with thee tomorrow! Well, welcome, *welcome!* I have seen the *time*,” he murmurs, quite pleased.

Ulysses steps forward. “I wonder how yonder city *stands* now, when we have here by us her *base* and *pillar!*”

Hector grins. “I know *your* face, Lord Ulysses, *well*. Ah, sir, there’s many a Greek and Trojan dead since first I saw yourself and Diomedes!—in Ilium, on your Greekish embassy.”

“Sir, I foretold you *then* what would ensue,” says Ulysses sternly. “My prophecy is but half its journey, yet—for yonder walls that pertly front your town, yond towers whose wanton tops do buss the clouds, must kiss their own feet!”

Hector shrugs. “I must not believe you; there they stand yet!” he says, with a sweeping gesture toward Troy. “And I think, modestly, the fall of every Phrygian stone will cost a drop of Grecian blood!”

“The *end* crowns all; and that old, common arbitrator *Time* will one day end it.”

“So to him we leave it,” says Ulysses. “Most gentle and most valiant Hector, welcome! After the general, I beseech you next to feast with *me*, and see me at my tent.”

But Achilles’ bulk intervenes. “I shall forestall thee, Lord Ulysses, even *thou!*”

“Now, Hector, I have fed mine eyes on thee; I have with exact view perused thee, Hector, and noted, limb by limb—”

Hector interrupts: “Is *this* Achilles?” he asks Aeneas, as if disappointed.

“I *am* Achilles!”

Hector frowns. “Stand there, I pray thee; let me look on thee.”

“Behold thy fill!”

But Hector turns away. “Nay, I have done already.”

“Thou art too brief!” growls Achilles. “I will look a *second* time—view thee *joint by joint*, as if I would *buy* thee!”—like beef.

Hector raises an eyebrow. “Oh, thou’lt read me o’er like a *book of sport*? But there’s more in *me* than *thou* canst understand.” He seems surprised at the anger. “Why dost thou so oppress me with thine eye?”

Achilles’ red face turns skyward, and he kneels. “*Tell* me, you heavens: in which part of his body shall I *destroy* him?” He motions toward the Trojan’s legs, then trunk, then head: “Whether there... or there... or *there?*—so that I may give the location’s wound a *name*, and make distinct the very breach whereout Hector’s great spirit flew! *Answer* me, heavens!”

Hector shakes his head. “It would *discredit* the blest gods, proud man, to reply to such a

question!

“Stand again,” he says—generously, as if the warrior had been kneeling to him. “Think’st thou to catch my life so *pleasantly* as to prenominate in precise conjecture where *thou* wilt hit *me* dead?”

Achilles glowers, and his deep voice booms: “I tell thee, *yea!*”

Hector chuckles. “Wert thou an *oracle* telling me so, I’d not believe *that!*” The smile fades. “Henceforth guard thee well; for I’ll not kill thee *there*, nor *there*, nor *there*, but, by the forge that smithied *Mars*’s helm, I’ll kill thee *everywhere!*—*yea, o’er and o’er!*”

He says, glancing at Nestor, as Achilles fumes, “You *wisest* Grecian, pardon me this brag. His insolence draws folly from my lips; but I’ll endeavour *deeds* to match these words,” he vows, “or may I never—”

Ajax steps between the angry champions. “Do not chafe thee, cousin! And you, Achilles, let these threats alone, till purpose—or accident—bring you *to’t*. You may *every day* have enough of Hector, if you have the stomach! The general *state*, I fear, can scarcely *entreat* you to be at odds with *him!*”

Still glaring at Achilles, Hector nods. “We have had *pelting wars*”—mere stone-throwing—“since you refused the Grecians’ cause! I pray you, let us see you *in the field!*”

“Dost thou *entreat* me, Hector?” says Achilles, sneering. “*Tomorrow* do I meet thee!—fell as *Death!* Tonight, all *friends.*”

“Thy hand upon that match!”

Brawny arms bulging, they shake hands—each straining against the other’s crushingly powerful grip.

Agamemnon resumes his role as host. “First, all you peers of Greece, go to my tent; there to the full convive we! Afterwards, as Hector’s leisure and your bounties shall concur together, severally greet him!

“Beat loud the tambourines! Let the trumpets blow, that this great soldier may his welcome know!” He leads the champions, calming, for now, toward his pavilion.

As the other leave, Troilus stays behind; and as it happens, a Greek is there, too—waiting for Troy’s *second hope*. “My lord Ulysses, tell me, I beseech you, in what place of the field doth *Calchas* keep?”

“At Menelaus’ tent, most princely Troilus.” The wily warrior volunteers, apparently casually, some news: “There doth feast with him tonight *Diomedes*, who looks upon neither the heavens nor earth, but gives all gaze in bent of amorous view on the fair *Cressida.*”

Troilus wants to witness her devotion; he needs to see that her suitor is being foiled. “Shall I, sweet lord, be bound to you so much as that, after we part from Agamemnon’s tent, you guide me thither?”

“You shall command me, sir!” He seems curious. “And as kindly, tell me: of what honour was this *Cressida* in Troy? Had she no lover there who wails her absence?” He knows, of course; *Diomedes* has told him.

Troilus’s laugh seems careless. He dodges: “Oh, sir, to such as, boasting, ‘show their scars,’ a *mock* is due! Will you walk on, my lord?”

Thinks the young Trojan prince, *She was beloved; she loved.* He insists to himself, *She is, and doth!*

Still, he frets. *But always love is sweet food for Fortune’s tooth....*

Chapter Eight Trojans in the Greek Camp

I’ll *heat* his blood with Greekish *wine* tonight—and tomorrow I’ll cool it with my *sword!*” mutters angry Achilles. “*Patroclus*, let us feast him to the height!” he urges, as the two

stand outside his tent after a splendid, crimson sunset. Inside, servants busily prepare for Prince Hector's imminent entertainment.

Patroclus sees a slender figure moving through the dark. "Here comes Thersites."

Achilles' contumelious clown greets the young knight: "How now, thou *core of envy!* Thou crusty *batch of nature,*"—pile of old crap, "what's the news?"

Patroclus gives him the finger.

Thersites turns to Achilles. "Well then, *picture* of what thou *seemest*, and idol of *idiot-worshippers*, here's a letter for *thee*."

Achilles takes the paper. "From whence, *fragment?*" he asks, unsealing and unfolding it—and finding a ring.

"Why, thou *full dish of fool*, from *Troy*."

Patroclus wonders where their royal Trojan guest may be. "Who keeps the tent now?"

Thersites replies with a jest on *tent* as *bandage*: "The surgeon's box, or the patient's wound."

"Well said, *adversity,*" replies Patroclus, annoyed. "But who needs *these tricks?*"

"Prithee be *silent*, boy; I profit not by *thy* talk!—thou art thought to be Achilles' male *varlet*."

"*Male varlet!*"—a redundancy. "You rogue, what's *that?*" demands Patroclus.

Thersites explains: "Why, his masculine *whore!* Now may the *rotting diseases* of the *mouth*—the catarrhs, gut-grippings, eruptions,"—flatulence, "loads o' *gravel* i' the back,"—constipation, "lethargies, cold palsies, raw eyes, dirt-ridden liver, wheezing lungs, bladder full of imposthume,"—pus, "sciatica, limekilns"—burning—"i' the palms, permanent shriveling of *tetter*, and the *incurable bone-ache,*"—syphilis, "—*make* and make *again* such preposterous revelation!"—predict and confirm his fatal degeneration.

Patroclus is livid. "Why thou *damnable box of envy*, thou!—what *meanest* thou, cursing thus?"

Thersites challenges: "Do I *curse* thee?"—does it not *apply?*

"Why *no*, you ruinous *butt!*" cries Patroclus, "you *whoreson*, indistinguishable *cur*, *no!*"

"No? Why then art thou *exasperate*, thou green, idle, immaterial skein of sleeve-silk,"—decoration, "thou sarcenet flap for a *sore eye,*"—thin slice of cucumber, "thou *tassel* on a prodigal's *purse*, thou?"

"Oh, how the poor world is *pestered* with such *waterflies*, diminutives of Nature!"

Patroclus shouts, "Out, *gall!*"

"*Finch-egg!*"

Achilles has been reading. He looks up, alarmed. "My sweet Patroclus, I am *thwarted* quite from my great *purpose* for tomorrow's battle!"

"Here is a letter from Queen Hecuba, with a token from her daughter, *my fair love!*—both of them taxing me, *imploring* me, to keep an *oath* that I have sworn!"

Hector taunted him, and publicly. But he paces, rubbing his forehead in frustration; "I will not break it! *Fall*, Greeks!—fail, *fame!*—honour, either go or stay!" He fingers the ring. "My *major* vow lies here; *this* I'll obey." Still, he stares out into the dark, thinking; jaw muscles tighten as he ponders a scheme—one by which he can appear to keep his word.

He nods, having decided. "Come, come, Thersites, help to trim my tent! This night in *banqueting* must all be spent! Away, Patroclus!"

Thersites watches them go inside. *With too much blood and too little brain, those two may run mad; but if too much brain and too little blood will do, I'll be a curer of madmen!*

He can see the Greeks' leader approaching. *Here's Agamemnon. An honest enough fellow, and one that loves quails; but he has not so much brain as earwax!*

And his brother, there, a goodly transformation of Jupiter—a bull, the primitive statue and oblique memorial for cuckolds!—a thrifty showing of horn on a chain, hanging at his brother's leg!

He wonders how to mock one who is intrinsically ridiculous. *To what form but that in which he is should wit larded with malice, and malice forcèd with wit, turn him into?*

To an ass were nothing: he is both ass and ox! —a castrated bull. To an ox were nothing: he hath both horn and ass!

I would not mind being a dog, a mule, a cat, a fitchew, a toad, a lizard, an owl, a puttock, or a herring without a hope. But to be Menelaus!—I would conspire against Destiny! Ask me not what I would be if I were not Thersites, for I'd care not were I a louse on a leper, so long as I were not Mene-louse!

He moves back into the shadows, watching the procession of unsteady lords—most are already drunk—approaching by torchlight. *Hey-day! Spirits and fires!*

Agamemnon and his brother are accompanied by Nestor, Ulysses, Diomedes and Ajax. Earlier, the noblemen dined with Trojan Princes Hector and Troilus; now, following an afternoon of drinking, they are bringing the visitors to sup with Achilles.

Agamemnon peers at the long rows of tents, many scarcely visible beyond the flickering flames. “We go wrong, we go wrong,” he mumbles.

“No, yonder ’tis,” says Ajax, pointing. “*There*, where we see the lights.”

Says Hector, “I trouble you....”

“*No*, not a whit!” says Ajax genially.

Ulysses spots their next host at the tent entrance. “Here comes himself to guide you!”

Achilles greets the regal party: “*Welcome*, brave Hector!—welcome, princes all!” He motions them toward his tent.

“So now, fair prince of Troy,” says Agamemnon to Hector, “I bid you *good night!* Ajax commands the guard to attend on you.”

“Thanks, and good night to the Greeks’ general!”

“Good night, my lord,” says the Spartan king.

“Good night, sweet lord Menelaus!”

The nobles’ courtesies, slurred by their wine, disgust Thersites. *Sweet drink! ‘Sweet’ quoth he! Sweet sink—sweet sewer!*

“*Good night*, and *welcome*,” cries jovial Achilles, “both at once, to those that go or tarry!”

Agamemnon bows. “Good night!” He and Menelaus depart.

“Old Nestor, *tarry*,” says Achilles, “and you, too, Diomedes! Keep Hector *company* an hour or two!”

Says Diomedes, grinning, “I cannot, lord; I have important business, the *tide* whereof is *now!* Good night, great Hector!”

“Give me your hand!” laughs the Trojan, in masculine congratulation.

- As the men shake hands, Ulysses whispers to Troilus: “Follow his torch,” he says, nodding toward Diomedes. “He goes to Calchas’ tent! I’ll keep you company.” The trap is being set.

- Troilus replies, gratefully, “Sweet sir, you *honour* me.”

“And so, good night,” says Hector to Diomedes, who starts away.

“Come, come, enter my tent!” Achilles tells his guests; Hector and the other visitors go inside with him—except for Troilus and Ulysses, who slip away to follow Diomedes.

Thersites moves from the shadows, curious. *That same Diomed’s a false-hearted rogue, a most unjust knave! I will no more trust him when he leers than I will a serpent when it hisses! He will open his mouth and promise like Brabblers the hound; but when he performs, astrologers foretell it!—it is portentous! There will come some change!—the sun borrows from the moon when Diomed keeps his word!*

I will rather leave off seeing Hector so as to dog him! They say he keeps a Trojan drab, —whore— and uses the traitor Calchas’ tent! I’ll after.

He shakes his head. *Nothing but lechery! All incontinent varlets!*

In the sultry summer darkness he skulks behind the three men already making their way to Calchas’s small canvas abode in a large Greek pavilion.

Diomedes has reached the quarters of the exile. “What?—are you *up* here?” he asks, at the closed flaps fronting the tent. “Speak.”

It is late, but from within, a man demands, “Who calls?”

Calchas, I think. Diomedes need not be respectful of the Trojan traitor. “Where’s your daughter?”

After a moment of muffled contention inside, Calchas’s voice replies. “She comes to you.”

Beside a tent not far away, Troilus and Ulysses arrive, hidden by the darkness.

- “Stand where the torch may not discover us,” says Ulysses quietly, moving back.

- Troilus’s voice is hushed but surprised. “Cressid comes *forth* to him!”

“How now, my charge!” says Diomedes.

“Now, my sweet *guardian*. Hark, a word with you.” She speaks softly as he moves closer.

- Troilus is disturbed. “Yea, so *familiar!*”

- “She will sing *any* man at first sight,” says Ulysses—still stung by the snub.

Behind the two watchers, Thersites lurks now as well, close enough to overhear. *And any man may sing her, if he can take her cleft!* —a crude play on cleft. *She’s noted!* —another poor jest.

Diomedes asks her, “Will you remember?”

“Remember,” says the Trojan lady, softly and sadly. “Yes.”

“Nay, but *do*, then—and let your mind be coupled with your words!”

- “*What* should she remember?” wonders Troilus.

- “*Listen*,” says Ulysses; Diomedes will speak as he has advised.

Cressida looks up at Diomedes. “Sweet honey Greek, tempt me no more to folly!” she pleads.

- *Roguary!* thinks cynical Thersites.

“Nay, then—” begins Diomedes.

Cressida interrupts. “I’ll tell you what—”

“*Oh, fie!* Come, tell a *pin!*”—cavil, says Diomedes. “You are *forsworn!*” he cries, seemingly angered.

“In faith, I *cannot!* What would you have me *do?*”

- *A juggling trick: to be secretly open!* thinks Thersites.

Diomedes regards her. “What did you swear you would bestow on me?”

“I prithee, do not hold me to mine oath; bid me do anything but that, sweet Greek!”

Diomedes turns to go. “Good night.”

- Troilus is furious. *Hold, patience!* He starts to rise.

- Ulysses’ hand on his shoulder restrains him. “How now, Trojan?”

“Diomed—” she says.

“No, no, *good night!* I’ll be your fool no more.”

- “Thy *better* must!” mutters Troilus.

Cressida beseeches, “Hark, one word in your ear....”

- “*Oh plague and madness!*” gasps Troilus, overwhelmed by jealousy.

- “You are angered, prince! Let us *depart*, I pray you, lest your displeasure should enlarge itself to wrathful terms! This place is *dangerous*, the time right *deadly!*” warns Ulysses. “I beseech you, go!”

- Troilus stares at the couple, close together in the torchlight. “Behold, I pray you!”

- “Nay, good my lord, go off! You flow to great *distraction!* Come, my lord!”

- “I pray thee, *stay!*”

- “You have not *patience*; come!” says Ulysses.

- “I pray you, *stay!*” pleads Troilus. “By hell and all hell’s torments,” he promises, “I will not speak a word!”

Says Diomedes coldly, “And so, good night.”

Cressida appeals to her protector. “Nay, but you part in anger....”

- Troilus fumes. “Doth that *grieve* thee? O *withered* ‘true’!”

- Ulysses eyes his distress. “Why, how now, lord?”

- “By Jove, I *will* be patient!”

“*Guardian?*” says Cressida scornfully, challenging his honor. “Why, *Greek!*”—the Trojans’ term, he knows, for *assailant*.

Diomedes heads away. “*Fie, fie!* Adieu. You *palter*.”

“In faith, I do *not!*” The young woman, abandoned by Troy to the wholly masculine realm of invaders, is loath to make a powerful enemy. “Come hither once again.”

- Ulysses holds the prince back. “You *shake*, my lord, at something! Will you go? You will break out!”

- Troilus stares as Cressida reaches up to touch Diomedes’ face, hoping to revive his initial tenderness. “She strokes his cheek!”

- “Come, come!” says Ulysses, trying—not very hard—to draw him away.

- “Nay, *stay*; by Jove, I will not speak a word! There is between my will and all offences a guard of *patience!* Stay a little while....”

- Watching Diomedes work, Thersites chuckles to himself. *How the devil Luxury, with his fat rump and potato-finger, tickles these together! Fry, lechery, fry!*

Diomedes asks her bluntly: “But *will* you, then?”

She looks down for a moment, pondering; she has heard nothing from Troilus. “In faith, I will. Never trust me else.”

“Give me some token for the surety of it.” A visible action, he knows, will clinch the observer’s perception.

She thinks. “I’ll fetch you one,” she murmurs, going into the tent.

- You have sworn *patience*,” warns Ulysses.

- “Fear me not, sweet lord; I will not be *myself*, nor have cognition of what I *feel*: I am all *Patience!*”—the famous statue.

Cressida returns; tears are in her eyes.

- Thersites rubs his hands together eagerly. *Now the pledge! Now, now, now!*

Cressida offers her visitor an item made of finely embroidered cloth. “Here, Diomedes, keep this sleeve.”

- Troilus is stunned to see it again. “O *beauty!*—where is thy *faith?*”

- “My lord—”

- “I will be *patient!*—*outwardly* I will!”

“You look upon that sleeve,” says Cressida, as Diomedes examines the piece of another man’s apparel. “Behold it well. He *loved* me.”

But then she sobs. “O *false wench!* —Give’t me again!”

Diomedes returns the sleeve, asking, “Whose was’t?”

“It is no matter. Now I *have* it again!” Weeping, she looks at him. “I will *not* meet with you tomorrow night. I prithee, Diomed, *visit me no more!*”

- Thersites thinks he sees skillful seduction: *Now she sharpens! Well said, whetstone!*

“I shall have it!” says Diomedes.

She is clasping the sleeve over her heart. “What, this?”

“Aye, *that!*”

O, all you gods! She moans, looking at the flat, empty token. *O pretty, pretty pledge! Thy master now lies in his bed, thinking of thee and me, and sighs; and takes my glove, and gives dainty remembering kisses to it, as I kiss thee!* She touches the cloth to her lips, holds it against her cheek.

He reaches for the sleeve.

Cressida backs away. “Nay, do not snatch it from me!” she cries. “He that takes that doth take my *heart* withal!”

“I *had* your heart before; this follows it,” he claims.

- Troilus strains forward, but assures the Greek beside him, "I did swear patience...."

"You shall *not* have it, Diomed!—'faith, you shall not; I'll give you something else!"

"I will have *this*," he says, grabbing the sleeve. "Whose was it?"

"It is no matter."

"Come, tell me whose it was!" He wants the witness's humiliation to be thorough—as Ulysses will later confirm it to have been.

"'Twas one's that loved me better than *you* will," says the forsaken lady. "But now that you have it, take it."

"Whose *was* it?"

She is angry despite the tears. "By all *Diana's* waiting-women yond, and by *herself*, I will not *tell* you whose!"

Diomedes holds it in his fist before her face. "Tomorrow will I wear it on my *helm*—and *grieve his spirit* who dares not *challenge* it!"

- "Wert thou the *Devil* and worest it on thy *horn* it would be *challengèd*!" vows Troilus.

Cressida is pale. "Well, well; 'tis past; 'tis done." She looks up at him. "And yet it is not. I will not keep my word."

"Why, then, farewell; thou never shalt mock *Diomedes* again!"

She pleads. "You shall not *go*! One cannot speak a *word* but straight it *starts* you!"

"I do not like this *fooling*!" growls Diomedes.

- *Nor I, by the Devil*, thinks Thersites, *but what pleases not you pleases me* best!

"What?—shall I come?" demands Diomedes. "The hour?"

She wipes her eyes. "Aye, come." *O Jove!* "Do come," she says quietly. She thinks, in despair, *I shall be plaguèd!*

"Farewell till *then*!" says Diomedes loudly, as if a time had been set. He strides away among the tents.

"Good night! I prithee, come," Cressida calls after him—for her father to hear. She stands in the darkness for a moment, dejected and alone. *Troilus, farewell! One eye yet looks on thee; but, with my heart, the other eye doth see.*

She knows he will never return to her.

Ah, poor our sex! This fault in us I find: the error of our eye directs our mind. What error leads must err! Oh, then conclude—minds swayed by eyes are full of turpitude!

She goes into her father's tent; he will want assurance of their continued good standing with Lord Diomedes.

Thersites is happy; his assessment seems confirmed. *A stronger proof she could not publish more, unless she said, 'My mind is now turnèd whore!'*

Ulysses turns to go. "All's done, my lord."

Troilus does not move. "It is."

"Why stay we, then?"

The young man looks at the tent. "To make a *recordation* to my *soul* of every syllable that here was spoken.

"But if I *tell it* how these two did co-act, shall I not *lie* in publishing a *truth*?—sith yet there is a credence in my *heart*—an *esperance* so obstinately strong that it doth invert the attest of eyes and ears, as if those organs had *deceptious* functions, created only to *calumniate*!" He frowns, still amazed. "Was *Cressida* here?"

"I cannot *conjure*, Trojan," says Ulysses, hoping to allay doubt.

"She was *not*, surely...."

"Most surely she was."

Troilus shakes his head. "Why, my negation hath no taste of *madness*...."

"Nor mine, my lord; Cressida was *here* but now."

"Let it not be *believed*!—for the sake of *womanhood*!" cries Troilus. "Think!—we had *mothers*! Do not give advantage to stubborn critics who hope to measure the general sex by

Cressida's rule with a theme of *degradation*! Rather think this *not Cressida!*"

"What hath she done, prince, that can soil our *mothers*?"

"Unless this *were* she, *nothing at all!*"

Thersites, still hidden, is annoyed: *Will he swagger himself out of's own eyes?*

The prince paces, distraught. "This, *she?* *No!*—this is *Diomed's* *Cressid!*

"If Beauty have a *soul*, this is not she! If souls guide *vows*—if vows be *sanctimonies*, if sanctimony be the *gods' delight*—if there be rule in *unity itself*,"—as opposed to duplicity—"this is not she!"

"Oh, *madness* of discourse that sets up an argument both *with* and *against* itself! *Bi-fold* authority!—where *reason* can revolt without *perdition*, and *loss* consume all reason without *revolt!* This *is*, and *is not*, *Cressida!*

"Within my *soul* there doth conduce a fight of this strange nature: that a thing *inseparable* divides more wider than the *sky* and *earth!*—and yet the *breadth* of this spacious division admits no orifice for a point as subtle as *Ariachne's* broken warp"—a spider's thread—"to enter!"

"*Instance:* oh, *this* instance, strong as *Hell's gates!*—*Cressida* is *mine*, tied with the bonds of *heaven!*

"*Instance:* oh, instance strong as *heaven itself:* the bonds of heaven are *slipped*, dissolved and loosed!—and with *another* knot, by *fingers* tied, the fractions of her faith—scraps of her love, the pieces, fragments, bits and *greasy relics* of her o'er-eaten 'faith'—are bound to *Diomed!*"

Ulysses asks, dryly, "Can worthy Troilus be *half* aggrieved, by that which here his passion doth express?"

"*Aye*, Greek!—and that shall be *divulged well!*—in characters *red as Mars*, his heart inflamed with *Venus!* Never did young *man* fancy with so eternal and so fixed a soul!"

"*Hark*, Greek!—as much as I do *Cressida* love, by so much weight I *hate* her *Diomed!*

"That sleeve is *mine* that he'll bear on his helm! Were it a casque"—helmet—"composed by *Vulcan's* skill, my sword should *bite into it!*

"Not the dreadful spout which shipmen do the *hurricane* call, constringed into mass by the almighty sun, shall dizzy with more *clamour in descent on Neptune's ear* than shall *my prompted sword* falling on *Diomed!*"

Thersites almost laughs. *He'll be tickled by it—for his concupiscence!*

Troilus looks toward the tent. "O *Cressida!* O *false Cressida!* *False, false, false!* Let all untruths stand by *thy stained name*, and they'll seem *glorious!*"

Ulysses looks around as if uneasy. "*Contain* yourself!—your passion draws ears hither!" He leads the youth away.

They have just started back toward the general's pavilion when Aeneas, with a Greek escort, hurries to them. "I have been *seeking* you this *hour*, my lord!" he tells the prince. "*Hector* by now is *arming him in Troy!* Ajax, your guard, is waiting to *conduct you home!*"

Troilus is ready to return to the palace—and eager to join Hector for *this day's* combat. "Have with you, prince!" Aeneas is of royal descent, as are several others among Troy's Dardanian allies.

"My courteous lord, adieu," says Troilus to Ulysses. He looks back, as dawn approaches, toward Calchas's tent. "Farewell, revolted fair!"

"And *Diomed*, stand fast—and wear a *castle* on thy head!"

Having successfully provoked Achilles and Ajax, Ulysses now wants Hector and Troilus to face them on the field. "I'll bring you to the gates."

Troilus nods. "Accept distracted thanks."

The four nobles hurry away.

Thersites rises, sore and stiff from crouching in shadow.

Would that I could meet that rogue Diomed! I would croak like a raven!—I would bode, I would bode!

He rubs his hands together happily. *Patroclus will give me anything for the intelligence of*

this whore! A parrot will not do more for an almond than he for a commodious drab! Thersites knows; he has provided him with a few.

Lechery, lechery!—ever wars and lechery; nothing else holds fashion!

The parasitic procurer scowls as he returns to Achilles' tent. *A burning devil take them!*

Chapter Nine Final Warnings

Upstairs in King Priam's palace, Prince Hector's wife, Andromache, wrings her hands as she watches him, at sunrise, prepare for combat. "When was my lord so much *ungently temperèd*, so to stop his ears against admonishment? Unarm, *unarm*, and do not fight today!"

He replies, annoyed, "You press me to offend you! Get you in!" Despite the Greeks' best efforts, he has come home sober, and the day promises to be of great moment: Achilles took the bait; he vowed to meet Hector's bold challenge. "By all the everlasting gods, I'll go!" If he can defeat the Attic champion—*when* he does so—the disheartened enemy may well decide, finally, to go home.

His wife frets: "My *dreams* will surely prove *ominous* to the day!"

"*No more*, I say!" he insists, and goes to a window from which he can look down toward the Greeks' camp.

Cassandra comes into the prince's quarters. "Where is my brother Hector?" she asks.

Cries Andromache, motioning toward him, "*Here—armèd*, and bloody in intent! Consort with me in loud and dire petition!—pursue we him *on knees!*—for I have dreamed of a *bleeding turbulence*, and this whole night hath been nothing but shapes and forms of *slaughter!*"

"Oh, 'tis *true!*" cries Cassandra.

Hector, ignoring them, calls to his page. "*Ho!* Bid my trumpet sound!"

Cassandra pleads: "No notes of *sallying*, for the heavens' sake, sweet brother!"

Hector waves the ladies away. "Be gone, I say! The gods have heard me swear!"

"The gods are deaf to *hot and peevish* vows!" argues Cassandra. "They are *polluted* offerings, more abhorred than spotted livers in a sacrifice!"

"Oh, be *persuaded,*" his wife implores. "Do not count it holy to be *hurt* in being *just!* We want to give much, but is it lawful to use *violent thefts*, and *rob* in the behalf of charity?"

Cassandra concurs. "It is the *purpose* that makes strong the vow—but vows to *every* purpose must not hold! *Unarm*, sweet Hector!"

He is adamant. "Be *still*, I say! Mine *honour* keeps the whether of my fate! Life every man holds dear; but the *brave* man holds honour far more precious—*dearer than life!*"

He turns to see Troilus, now coming into the room; he is clad partly in armor. "How now, young man!" calls Hector. "Mean'st *thou* to fight today?" he asks, surprised.

The ladies rise. "Cassandra, call thy father to persuade!" urges Andromache; the princess nods, and hurries away to find the king.

"*No*, 'faith, young Troilus!" protests Hector jovially, "doff thy harness, youth! I am today i' the vein of *chivalry!*"

"Let *grow* thy sinews till their knots be strong, and tempt not yet the bruises of *war!* Unarm thee!—go!—and doubt thou not, brave boy, *I'll stand* today!—for thee, and me, and *Troy!*"

Troilus has not slept, his thoughts roiled by jealous fury. "Brother, you have a *vice* of *mercy* in you," he replies, "which fits a man better than a *lion.*"

Hector is busy adjusting the straps of his own armor. "What vice is that, good Troilus?" he asks. "Chide me for it."

"When, many times, the captive Grecians fall, even in the fan and wind of your fair sword you bid them rise and live!"

"Oh, 'tis fair play."

“*Fool’s* play, by heaven, Hector!”

His older brother frowns. “How now! *How now?*”

“For the love of all the gods, let’s leave the hermit *Pity* with our *mothers!* And when we have our armours buckled on, let the venomed *Vengeance* ride upon our swords!—*spur* them to rueful work, and rein them from *ruth!*” he cries fiercely.

“*Fie, savage, fie!*”

“Hector, then ’tis *war!*”

Hector regards him gravely. “Troilus, I would not have you fight today.”

“Who should *withhold* me?” demands the defiant young man. “Not *fate* nor *obedience* may retire the hand of *Mars*, beckoning with fiery truncheon! Not *Priamus* and *Hecuba*”—his parents—“on *knees*, their eyes o’ergallèd with recourse of tears!—nor *you*, my brother, with your true *sword* drawn, opposèd to hinder me, should stop my way but *by my ruin!*”

Before Hector can reply, Cassandra bursts into the room, bringing the white-bearded king. “Lay *hold* upon him, Priam, *hold him fast!*” she cries. “He is *thy crutch!* If thou now lose thy *stay*, thou on *him* leaning—and all *Troy* on *thee!*—*all fall together!*”

Priam approaches his son. “Come, Hector, come *back!* Thy wife hath *dreamed*; thy mother hath had *visions*; Cassandra doth *foresee!* And I *myself* am like a *prophet*, suddenly enrapt to tell thee that this day is *ominous!* Therefore, come back!”

“*Aeneas* is a-*field,*” Hector counters, “and I do stand engagèd to meet many *Greeks*, even in the faith of *valour!*—to *appear* this morning to them!”

“Aye, but thou shalt not go!” insists old Priam.

“*I must not break my faith!*” says Hector earnestly. “You know me *dutiful!*—therefore, dear sir, let me not *shame respect*, but give me leave, by your consent and voice, to *take* that course which you did here forbid me, royal Priam!”

Cassandra sees that her father is wavering; she begs, again on her knees, clutching his frail hand: “Oh, Priam, yield not to him!”

“Do *not*, dear father!” the warrior’s wife pleads.

“Andromache, I am offended with you,” says Hector. “Upon the love you bear me, *get you in!*” She curtsays and goes, weeping, into their bed chamber.

Troilus protests to Priam, “This foolish, dreaming, superstitious *girl makes* all these bodements!”

But Cassandra seems to be elsewhere. She rises and, seized with a new vision, speaks slowly—eyes open wide.

She stares in horror at sights unseen by others. “Oh, *farewell*, dear Hector. . . . Look, how thou *diest!* Look, how thine eye turns pale! Look, how thy *wounds* do *bleed* at many vents!”

Her voice rises. “Hark how *Troy roars!*—how *Hecuba* cries out!—how poor *Andromache* shrills her dolours forth! Behold *distraction, frenzy* and *amazement!* Like witless, antic ones, each another meets—and all cry, ‘*Hector! Hector’s dead! Oh, Hector!*’”

Troilus is disgusted. “Away! *Away!*”

“Farewell!” sobs Cassandra. She stops at the entrance. “Yet, soft.” She gazes at the eager champion. “Hector, *take* thy leave; thou dost thyself and all our Troy *deceive.*” She goes to her chambers, to wait.

Prince Hector faces the tremulous old king. “You are amazèd, my liege, at her exclaim.

“Go in and *cheer the town!*” he urges heartily. “We’ll *forth* and *fight!*—do deeds worth *praise*, and tell you them at night!”

Priam wants to be persuaded. “*Fare well!* The gods with safety stand about thee!” He means *surround and protect*, despite the irony that those observers are deathless.

Hector goes down to face Achilles; Priam leaves to rally the city.

Soon the sunny streets below echo with drums’ and trumpets’ bright alarums.

At the window, Troilus can see many opposing soldiers approach each other on the field, their knights in gleaming armor. He can almost hear the troops’ distant cries. *They are at it, hark!*

Proud Diomed, believe: I come to lose my arms or win my sleeve!

Pandarus finds him. “Do you *hear*, my lord!” he calls, coming in, “do you *hear!*”

Troilus turns. “What now?”

Pandarus, wheezing, catches his breath, then pulls a paper from his coat. “Here’s a *letter* come from yond poor girl!”

“Let me read.” Troilus, still watching the field below, carelessly unseals the missive.

Old Pandarus, worried about his position, craves sympathy; he whines about his consumptive cough, and other ailments. “A whoreson testicle, a whoreson rascally *testicle* so *troubles* me!—and the foolish fortune of this girl—what with one thing or another, I shall *leave* you one o’ these days!

“And I have a rheum in mine eyes, too; and such an ache in my bones that, unless a man were *cursèd*, I cannot tell *what* to think on’t!” he groans—unaware of how it would please Thersites to hear that.

Pandarus frowns; the prince is not listening. “What says she there?”

Troilus has merely glanced at the tear-stained pages. “Words, words, mere *words*—not matter from the *heart!* The effect doth operate *another* way.” He tears the letter into pieces. “Go—*wind* to *wind!*” he cries angrily, hurling the bits from the window, “there *turn* and *change* together!

“My love with words and errors still she *feeds*—but edifies *another* with her *deeds!*”

This angry warrior will be subject to no vice of mercy.

Chapter Ten Glorious Battle

Thersites creeps warily across the field, glancing around at the pairs of soldiers who grunt and sweat in strenuous fighting. Swords’ sudden flashes cripple some; others stagger away, aghast, after knives have plunged deep during angry embraces. Many lie alone, moaning—or dead.

The gentleman enjoys the spectacle. *Now they are clapper-clawing one another! I’ll go look on.* He moves to a place nearer a path, and spots a Greek with a familiar shield. He laughs. *That dissembling, abominable varlet Diomedes has got that same scurvy, doting, foolish young knave of Troy’s sleeve there on his helm!*

I would fain see them meet, so that that same young Trojan ass who loves the whore then might send that Greekish, whore-masterly villain with the sleeve back to the luxurious drab on a sleeveless errand! The visit would be futile for one who is castrated.

On t’other side, the scheming of those crafty, swearing rascals—that stale, dry old mouse-eaten cheese Nestor, and that tame-dog fox Ulysses—has not proved worth a blackberry! They set up, in policy, that mongrel cur Ajax against that dog of as bad a kind, Achilles!

He laughs again, even harder. *And now is the cur Ajax prouder than the cursèd Achilles, and will not arm today!—whereupon the Grecians begin to proclaim ‘Barbarism!’—and ‘policy’ grows into an ill opinion!*

Soft! Here comes Sleeve, and t’other! He sees Diomedes rush toward an open area on the turf, with Troilus chasing after him.

“*Fly not!*” cries the prince, “for shouldst thou take to the *River Styx*, I would *swim* after!”

Diomedes halts, and turns to face him angrily, steel blade raised and ready. “Thou dost *miscall* a retire!—I do not *fly!* Only advantageous *care* withdrew me from the odds of multitude! Have at thee!”

Thersites savors the spectacle of their fight. *Hold thy whore, Grecian! —Now for thy whore, Trojan!* That reversal of their respective armies’ aims delights the cynic. *Now The Sleeve! Now for thy sleeve!*

As the men in armor assail each other, sparring and stabbing with loud-clashing strokes,

Prince Hector comes up behind Thersites.

“What art *thou*, Greek?” he demands; red already runs glistening on his sword. “Art thou for *Hector’s* match?—art thou of blood and honour?”

“*No, no*, I am a *rascal!*” cries the jester, backing away, empty hands raised defensively, “a scurvy, railing *knave!* A very filthy *rogue!*”

Hector laughs. “I do *believe* thee!” He strides away along the field of combat. “Live.”

Thersites watches him, astonished. *God of mercy, that thou wilt believe me! But a plague break thy neck for frightening me!*

He looks around the field for Diomedes and Troilus. *What’s become of the wenching rogues? I think they have swallowed one another! I would laugh at that miracle; but, in a way, lechery does eat itself.*

I’ll seek them. He wanders away, carefully avoiding the furious combatants, and stepping over the fallen ones.

—

Further south on the plain, at the fringe of battle, Diomedes is exulting. He speaks hastily to his page: “*Go, go*, my servant, take thou Troilus’s horse; present the fair steed to my lady Cressida! Fellow, commend my service to her beauty; tell her I have *chastised* the amorous Trojan—and am her knight *by proof!*”

The boy bows and takes the reins. “I go, my lord!” Looking around apprehensively, he leads away the skittish stallion.

—

“*Yea*, Troilus? Oh, *well fought*, my youngest brother!” While combat raged near them, Hector has heard astirring account of the encounter.

Now they separate. The older prince, leading several other warriors, heads back into the area of most-intense fighting. And there the battle-weary Trojan champion faces yet another Greek knight—and is surprised to find that it is his rival. “*Now* do I see thee!”

“*Have at thee*, Hector!” cries Achilles. But he does not advance. He has ventured forth hurriedly this afternoon without his own armor, sword and shield, to search for Patroclus; that young knight joined the fray to prove himself. Achilles, recognized here amid the row, does not want to break his vow to a lover.

Hector regards his chief opponent. “*Pause*, if thou wilt.”

“I do *disdain* thy *courtesy*, proud Trojan!” says Achilles. Still, he does not press forward. “Be happy that *my* arms are out of use! My rest in negligence befriends thee now—but *anon* thou shalt *hear of me again!* Till then, go seek thy fortune.” He stamps away.

Hector hurls another taunt: “Fare thee well! I would have been a *much fresher* man, had I *expected* thee.” He sees that his companions have again engaged opponents. “How now, my brother?” he asks, as Troilus returns.

“Ajax hath *ta’en Aeneas!* Shall it *be?* *No*, by the flame of yonder glorious heaven, he shall not carry him! I’ll *bring him off*, or be *ta’en too!*”

“Fate, hear me what I say: *I’ll wreak now*, though I end my life today!” Troilus storms away, bent on exorcising the demoniac fury that possesses him.

But now a man bearing the distinctive shield of Achilles appears, sword poised for a fight.

“Stand, *stand*, thou Greek!” cries Hector happily, “thou art a goodly mark!” But the other warrior suddenly turns away. “No? Wilt thou *not?* I like *thine* armour *well!*—I’ll *crush* it and unlock all the *rivets*, but I’ll be *master* of it!

“Beast, wilt thou not *abide?*” he cries, laughing. “Why, then fly on!—I’ll *hunt* thee for thy *hide!*”

He chases the overreacher—poor Patroclus, in his friend’s borrowed armor.

—

Agamemnon is rallying his officers, and calling for more troops. “*Renew, renew!*”

The general is alarmed by the Greeks’ losses. “The fierce Polydamas hath beat down *Menon!*”

Bastard Margarelon”—one of Priam’s sons—“hath *Doreus prisoner*, and stands colossus-wise, waving his beam”—club—“over the pashèd corpses of the kings *Epistrophus* and *Cedius!*”

He tells Diomedes, “Polyxenes is *slain*, Amphimachus and Thoas *deadly hurt!* Patroclus ta’en or slain, and Palamedes sore hurt and bruised!

“The dreadful *sagittary*”—a small Trojan contingent, but on horseback—“appals our *numbers!*”

“Haste we, Diomed, to *reinforcement*, or we perish all!”

Nestor comes to them. He tells some soldiers, “Go, bear Patroclus’ body to *Achilles*; and bid the snail-paced *Ajax* arm for *shame!*” He hopes to stir those warriors. The troops hurry away to find the corpse.

“There are a *thousand* Hectors in the field!” Nestor tells Agamemnon, highly alarmed. “Now *here* he fights on Galathe, his horse, and *there* lacks *work!* Anon he’s *there* afoot, and there they fly or die, like scared *sculls*”—rowboats—“before the belching *whale!* Then is he *yonder*—and there the *straw Greeks*, ripe for his edge, fall down before him like a *mower’s swath!*”

“Here, there, and every where, he takes and leaves, *dexterity* so obeying *appetite* that what he wills he *does!*—and does so much that *impossibility* is callèd *proof!*”

Ulysses rushes to them. “*Ah, courage, courage*, princes! Great *Achilles* is *arming!*—weeping, cursing, vowing *vengeance!* Patroclus’ wounds have roused his drowsy blood!—together with his mangled *Myrmidons*,”—unquestioning followers, “who, noseless, handless, hacked and clipped, come to him, crying against *Hector!*”

“*Ajax* hath lost a friend too, and *foams at mouth!*—and he is *armed and at it*, roaring for *Troilus!*—who today hath done mad and fantastic execution, engaging, then redeeming himself, with such unforcèd care and careless force as if *Luck*, in very *spite* of cunning, *bade him win all!*”

Ajax clumps past them, eyes searching the field. “*Troilus!* Thou *coward*, Troilus!”

“Aye!—there, *there!*” cries Diomedes, pointing, and following after to urge him on.

Nestor spies the Greeks’ chief hero, finally ready to take part. “So, so, we draw swords together!”

Achilles meets them, raging. “*Where* is this *Hector?*”

“Come, *come*, thou *boy-queller*, *show thy face!*” he bellows to the field. “Know what it is to meet *Achilles angry!*”

“*Hector!*” he howls, “where’s Hector? I will none but *Hector!*”

He moves heavily past the lesser combatants, followed closely by four of his own obedient men of Thessaly.

—
Ajax pauses again to call. “*Troilus*, thou *coward Troilus!*—show thy head!”

Diomedes catches up to him, sword in hand. “*Troilus*, I say! Where’s Troilus?”

“What wouldst *thou?*”

“I would correct him!”

“Were I the *general*, thou shouldst *have my office* ere *that* correction!” growls Ajax. “*Troilus*, I say!” he shouts, “What, *Troilus!*”

That prince himself strides up behind the two Greeks. “O *traitor* Diomed!” he cries. “Turn thy false face, thou *trader*—and pay the *life* thou owest me for my *horse!*”

Diomedes turns, smiling with satisfaction. “*Hah*, art thou *here?*”

Ajax is eager. “*I’ll* fight with him alone! *Stand*, Diomed,” he orders.

“He is *my prize!*” protests Diomedes. “I will not *look on!*”

“Come *both* you cogging *Greeks!*—*have at you both!*” cries Troilus, in a rage. He rushes forward, viciously swinging his heavy sword.

—
Achilles addresses the warriors with him. “Come here about me, you my Myrmidons; mark what I say.

“Attend me where I wheel. Strike not a stroke, but keep yourselves in breath. And when I

have the bloody Hector found, *empale him* with your weapons round about!—in fellest manner execute your aims!

“Follow me, sirs, and my proceeding eye! It is *decreed*: Hector the great must *die!*” He sets off, with the others close behind, watchful and ready.

Thersites observes with interest—but carefully—as King Menelaus and Prince Paris fight. *The cuckold and the cuckold-maker are at it!*

“Now, *bull!* Now, *dog!*” He calls, as if he were at a public ring for animal baiting: “*Halloo*, Paris, *'loo!* now, my drabble-henned sparrow! *'Loo*, Paris, *'loo!*”

“The *bull* has the game! Beware *horns*, ho!”

Lord Margarelon startles him. “*Turn*, slave, and *fight!*”

Thersites stares, wide-eyed. “What art thou?”

“A bastard son of *Priam's.*”

Thersites falls to his knees and leans back, hands held high, beseeching. “*I am a bastard, too!* I love bastards! I am a bastard *begot*, bastard *instructed*, bastard in *mind*, bastard in *valour*—in *everything* illegitimate!

“One *bear* will not bite another!—then wherefore should one bastard?”

“Take heed: this quarrel's most *ominous* to us: if the son of a whore *fight*s for a whore, he tempts *Judgment!*”

Margarelon starts forward, but Thersites is already on his feet and running. “Farewell, bastard!” he cries, legs pumping.

Margarelon laughs. “The *Devil* take thee, coward!”

Hector looks down at the man lying dead at his feet. As is customary, he has claimed the defeated champion's armor; but while pulling off the helmet, he was annoyed. “Most *putrefièd* core, so *fair* without, this goodly armour hath cost thy life!”

He is exhausted. “Now is my day's work done. I'll take good breath. Rest, sword; thou hast thy fill of blood and death!” He sits, laying his shield and sword on the turf beside him, next to those Patroclus had carried.

Achilles and the Myrmidons have spotted him; they approach from behind, cautiously, silently.

The Greek hero steps around to stand before him. “Look, Hector, how the sun begins to *set*, how ugly *night* comes breathing at his heels!” He says grimly, “Even with the veiled darkening of the sun to close up the day, Hector's *life* is done!”

Hector rises calmly. “I am unarmed; forego this vantage, Greek.”

“*Strike*, fellows, *strike!*” cries Achilles, “this is the man I seek!”

He watches as the others' swords pierce the Trojan, then slash brutally as he lies dying on the bloody ground.

Says Achilles with satisfaction, “Hector falls.” He has not, in his mind, violated his promise to Hector's sister. “*So*, Ilium, fall *thou* next!

“Now, Troy, *sink down!* Here lie thy *heart*, thy *sinews*, and thy *bone!*”

“*On*, Myrmidons, and cry you all amain, ‘*Achilles* hath the mighty Hector *slain!*’”

He hears trumpets sounding a retreat. “*Hark!*—a retire upon our Grecian part.”

“The Trojan trumpets sound the like, my lord,” a Myrmidon tells him.

Achilles sees that the surviving fighters of both sides are indeed starting to withdraw. “The dragon wing of night o'erspreads the earth, and, stricken alike, the armies separate.

“My half-suppered sword, that frankly would have *fed*, pleasèd with this dainty bait, thus goes to bed.” He sheathes his dry blade.

“Come, tie his body to my horse's tail; along the field I will the Trojan trail.”

Agamemnon and Menelaus are leading their warriors back into camp when they hear voices

calling out in jubilation. “Hark! *Hark!*—what shout is that?” asks the general.

Nestor calls, to the soldiers pounding a lively cadence, “*Peace, drums!*”

They can now discern the troops’ words: “*Achilles!*” “*Achilles!*” “*Hector’s slain—Achilles!*”

Nestor, misunderstanding, pales and gasps. Diomedes tells the old man. “The bruit is, *Hector’s slain, and by Achilles.*”

Ajax is glum. “If it be so, yet bragless let it be; great Hector was a man as good as *he.*”

Agamemnon motions his troops forward. “March along patiently.

“Let one be sent to pray Achilles see us at our tent. If in this death the gods have us befriended, great Troy is ours, and our sharp wars are ended!”

Tonight the Greeks will eat and drink, in celebration of the Trojan champion’s demise, and in hopes that the war will soon draw to a close.

It will not.

—

Aeneas, ebullient, given his soldiers’ successes, their minor losses, calls out to the assembling Trojans: “*Stand, ho! Yet are we masters of the field! Never go home!—here starve we out the night!*”

Troilus comes forward to announce the news. “Hector is slain.”

All around them are cries of anguished disbelief: “*Hector? The gods forbid!*”

“He’s *dead,*” says Troilus. “And at the murderer’s horse’s tail, in beastly manner, *dragged through the shameful field!*”

“*Frown on, you heavens!—effect your rage with speed! Sit, gods, upon your thrones, and smite at Troy!—at once I say! Let brief plagues be your mercy—and linger not in our sure destruction!*”

The commander protests—their men can hear: “My lord, you do discomfort all the host!”

“You understand me not that tell me so!” cries the embittered prince. “I do not speak of *flight*, of fear, of death, but *dare all* imminence that gods and men address their dangers in!” He will continue the fight, however hopeless, recklessly, with abandon.

He glares. “Hector is gone. Who shall tell *Priam* so, or *Hecuba*?” he demands, his voice cracking. “Let him that would a *screech-owl* forever be called go into Troy and say there, ‘Hector’s *dead!*’—*there is a word will Priam turn to stone!*—make of the maids and wives *wells* and *Niobes* eternal”—sources of endless flowing tears, “make cold statues of the youth, and with the word, *scare Troy out of itself!*”

“But march away,” he tells the soldiers. “Hector is dead; there is no more to say.”

His bloody hands hanging beside him, Troilus stares wearily over the plain, toward the thin lines of smoke already rising from the enemy’s cooking fires. “*Stay yet,*” he suddenly tells Aeneas.

He shouts, his voice raw, toward Achilles’ camp. “You vile, abominable *tents*, thus proudly pight upon our Phrygian plains, let *Titan*”—a legendary giant—“rise as early as he *dare*, I’ll *through and through you!*”

“And, thou great-sized *coward*, no space on earth shall sunder *our two hates!*”

“I’ll haunt thee like a wicked *conscience*, that moldeth goblins swift as *frenzy’s* thoughts!”

He tells Aeneas, “Strike a march to Troy. With comfort go: *hope of revenge* shall hide our inward woe.”

Aeneas signals the drummers, and the sullen Trojans return to their gated city.

—

As he enters the palace, Troilus finds Pandarus waiting.

The portly lord approaches. “Only hear you, *hear you—*”

“*Hence, broker-lackey!*” cries Troilus. “*Ignominy* and *shame* pursue thy life, and live forever with thy name!” He brushes roughly past the old man, and goes to his quarters.

Pandarus is distressed. *A goodly medicine for my aching bones!*

O world, world, world! Thus is the poor agent despisèd!

*O traitors and bawds, how earnestly are you set a-work—and how ill requited!
Why should our assignment be so loved and the performance so loathed?
What verse for it? What instance for it?
Let me see....*

He pictures Troilus.

*Full merrily the bumble-bee doth sing—
Till he hath lost his honey and his sting!
And being once subdued in armèd tail,
Sweet honey and sweet notes together fail!*

Good traders in the flesh, set that upon your painted cloths! —wall mottos.

He stands watching as shadows rise, slowly, to cool the walls and towers, and the reddening sun sets on Troy.

—
Now the London actor playing Pandarus faces the ages' audience.

*“As many as be here of panders' hall,
May your eyes, half-dim, weep *dark* at Pandar's fall!
Or if you cannot weep, yet give some groans—
If not for *me*, then for *your* aching bones!*

*“Brethren and sisters of the hold-door trade,
Some two months hence my will shall be made.
It should be *now* but that my fear is this:
Some gallèd goose of Winchester”—local whore—“would hiss!*

*“Till *then* I'll sweat, and seek about for eases”—relief from syphilis.
“And at *that* time—bequeathe *you* my diseases!”*