

THE DEATH OF RHESUS FROM HOMER'S *ILIAD*, BOOK X, Verses 299-579

[299] Nay, nor did Hector suffer the lordly Trojans to sleep, but he called together all the noblest, as many as were leaders and rulers of the Trojans; and when he had called them together he contrived a cunning plan, and said: "Who is there now that would promise me this deed and bring it to pass for a great gift? Verily his reward shall be sure. For I will give him a chariot and two horses with high arched necks, even those that be the best at the swift ships of the Achaeans, to the man whosoever will dare --and for himself win glory withal—to go close to the swift-faring ships, and spy out whether the swift ships be guarded as of old, or whether by now our foes, subdued beneath our hands, are planning flight among themselves and have no mind to watch the night through, being fordone with dread weariness."

[313] So spake he and they all became hushed in silence. Now there was among the Trojans one Dolon, the son of Eumedes the godlike herald, a man rich in gold, rich in bronze, that was ill-favoured to look upon, but withal swift of foot; and he was the only brother among five sisters. He then spake a word to the Trojans and to Hector: "Hector, my heart and proud spirit urge me to go close to the swift-faring ships and spy out all. But come, I pray thee, lift up thy staff and swear to me that verily thou wilt give me the horses and the chariot, richly dight with bronze, even them that bear the peerless son of Peleus. And to thee shall I prove no vain scout, neither one to deceive thy hopes. For I will go straight on to the camp, even until I come to the ship of Agamemnon, where, I ween, the chieftains will be holding council, whether to flee or to fight."

[328] So spake he, and Hector took the staff in his hands, and sware to him, saying: "Now be my witness Zeus himself, the loud-thundering lord of Hera, that on those horses no other man of the Trojans shall mount, but it is thou, I declare, that shalt have glory in them continually."

[332] So spake he, and swore thereto an idle oath, and stirred the heart of Dolon. Forthwith then he cast about his shoulders his curved bow, and thereover clad him in the skin of a grey wolf, and on his head he set a cap of ferret skin, and grasped a sharp javelin, and went his way toward the ships from the host; howbeit he was not to return again from the ships, and bear tidings to Hector. But when he had left the throng of horses and of men, he went forth eagerly on the way, and Odysseus, sprung from Zeus, was ware of him as he drew nigh, and spake to Diomedes: "Yonder, Diomedes, cometh some man from the camp, I know not whether as a spy upon our ships, or with intent to strip one or another of the corpses of the dead. But let us suffer him at the first to pass by us on the plain a little way, and thereafter let us rush forth upon him and seize him speedily; and if so be he outrun us twain by speed of foot ever do thou hem him in toward the ships away from the host, darting after him with thy spear, lest in any wise he escape toward the city."

[349] So saying the twain laid them down among the dead apart from the path, but he ran quickly past them in his witlessness. But when he was as far off as is the range of mules in ploughing—for they are better than oxen to draw through deep fallow land the jointed plough—then the two ran after him, and he stood still when he heard the sound, for in his heart he supposed that they were friends coming from amid the Trojans to turn him back, and that Hector was withdrawing the host. But when they were a spear-cast off or even less, he knew them for foemen and plied

his limbs swiftly in flight, and they speedily set out in pursuit. And as when two sharp-fanged hounds,—skilled in the hunt, press hard on a doe or a hare in a wooded place, and it ever runneth screaming before them; even so did the son of Tydeus, and Odysseus, sacker of cities, cut Dolon off from the host and ever pursue hard after him. But when he was now about to come among the sentinels, as he fled towards the ships, then verily Athene put strength into Tydeus' son, that no man among the brazen-coated Achaeans might before him boast to have dealt the blow, and he come too late. And mighty Diomedes rushed upon him with his spear, and called: "Stand, or I shall reach thee with the spear, and I deem thou shalt not long escape sheer destruction at my hand."

[372] He spake, and hurled his spear, but of purpose he missed the man, and over his right shoulder passed the point of the polished spear, and fixed itself in the ground; and Dolon stood still, seized with terror, stammering and pale with fear, and the teeth clattered in his mouth; and the twain panting for breath came upon him, and seized his hands; and he with a burst of tears spake to them, saying: "Take me alive, and I will ransom myself; for at home have I store of bronze and gold and iron, wrought with toil; thereof would my father grant you ransom past counting, should he hear that I am alive at the ships of the Achaeans."

[382] Then in answer to him spake Odysseus of many wiles: "Be of good cheer, and let not death be in thy thoughts. But come, tell me this, and declare it truly. Whither dost thou fare thus alone to the ships from the host in the darkness of night, when other mortals are sleeping? Is it with intent to strip one or another of the corpses of the dead? Did Hector send thee forth to the hollow ships to spy out all, or did thine own heart bid thee?"

[390] To him then Dolon made answer, and his limbs trembled beneath him: "With many infatuate hopes did Hector lead my wits astray, who pledged him to give me the single-hooved horses of the lordly son of Peleus, and his chariot richly dight with bronze; and he bade me go through the swift, black night close to the foemen, and spy out whether the swift ships be guarded as of old, or whether by now our foes, subdued beneath our hands, are planning flight among themselves, and have no mind to watch the night through, being fordone with dread weariness."

[400] Then smiling upon him Odysseus of many wiles made answer: "Verily now on great rewards was thy heart set, even the horses of the wise-hearted son of Aeacus, but hard are they for mortal men to master or to drive, save only for Achilles whom an immortal mother bare. But come tell me this, and declare it truly: where now, as thou camest hither, didst thou leave Hector, shepherd of the host? Where lies his battle-gear, and where his horses? And how are disposed the watches and the sleeping-places of the other Trojans? And what counsel devise they among themselves?—to abide where they be by the ships afar, or to withdraw again to the city, seeing they have worsted the Achaeans?"

[412] Then made answer to him Dolon, son of Eumedes: "Verily now will I frankly tell thee all. Hector with all them that are counsellors is holding council by the tomb of godlike Ilus, away from the turmoil; but as touching the guards whereof thou askest, O warrior, no special guard keepeth or watcheth the host. By all the watch-fires of the Trojans verily, they that needs must, lie awake and bid one another keep watch, but the allies, summoned from many lands, are sleeping; for to the Trojans they leave it to keep watch, seeing their own children abide not nigh, neither their wives."

[423] Then in answer to him spake Odysseus of many wiles: "How is it now, do they sleep mingled with the horse-taming Trojans, or apart? tell me at large that I may know."

[426] Then made answer to him Dolon, son of Eumedes: "Verily now this likewise will I frankly tell thee. Towards the sea lie the Carians and the Paeonians, with curved bows, and the Leleges and Caucones, and the goodly Pelasgi. And towards Thymbre fell the lot of the Lycians and the lordly Mysians, and the Phrygians that fight from chariots and the Maeonians, lords of chariots. But why is it that ye question me closely regarding all these things? For if ye are fain to enter the throng of the Trojans, lo, here apart be the Thracians, new comers, the outermost of all, and among them their king Rhesus, son of Eioneus. His be verily the fairest horses that ever I saw, and the greatest, whiter than snow, and in speed like the winds. And his chariot is cunningly wrought with gold and silver, and armour of gold brought he with him, huge of size, a wonder to behold. Such armour it beseemeth not that mortal men should wear, but immortal gods. But bring ye me now to the swift-faring ships, or bind me with a cruel bond and leave me here, that ye may go and make trial of me, whether or no I have spoken to you according to right."

[446] Then with an angry glance from beneath his brows, spake to him mighty Diomedes: "Nay, I bid thee, Dolon, put no thought of escape in thy heart, even though thou hast brought good tidings, seeing thou hast come into our hands. For if so be we release thee now or let thee go, yet even hereafter wilt thou come to the swift ships of the Achaeans, either to spy upon us, or to fight in open combat; but if, subdued beneath my hands, thou lose thy life, never again wilt thou prove a bane to the Argives."

[454] He spake, and the other was at point to touch his chin with his stout hand and make entreaty, but Diomedes sprang upon him with his sword and smote him full upon the neck, and shore off both the sinews, and even while he was yet speaking his head was mingled with the dust. Then from him they stripped the cap of ferret skin from off his head, and the wolf's hide, and the back-bent bow and the long spear, and these things did goodly Odysseus hold aloft in his hand to Athene, the driver of the spoil, and he made prayer, and spake, saying: "Rejoice, goddess, in these, for on thee, first of all the immortals in Olympus, will we call; but send thou us on against the horses and the sleeping-places of the Thracian warriors."

[465] So spake he, and lifted from him the spoils on high, and set them on a tamarisk bush, and set thereby a mark plain to see, gathering handfuls of reeds and luxuriant branches of tamarisk, lest they two might miss the place as they came back through the swift, black night. But the twain went forward through the arms and the black blood, and swiftly came in their course to the company of the Thracian warriors. Now these were slumbering, foredone with weariness, and their goodly battle-gear lay by them on the ground, all in due order, in three rows, and hard by each man was his yoke of horses. But Rhesus slept in the midst, and hard by him his swift horses were tethered by the reins to the topmost rim of the chariot. Him Odysseus was first to espy, and shewed him to Diomedes: "Lo, here, Diomedes, is the man, and here are the horses whereof Dolon, that we slew, told us. But come now, put forth mighty strength; it beseemeth thee not at all to stand idle with thy weapons; nay, loose the horses; or do thou slay the men, and I will look to the horses."

[482] So spake he, and into the other's heart flashing-eyed Athene breathed might, and he fell to slaving on this side and on that, and from them uprose hideous groaning as they were smitten with the sword, and the earth grew red with blood. And even as a lion cometh on flocks unshepherded, on goats or on sheep, and leapeth upon them with fell intent, so up and down

amid the Thracian warriors went the son of Tydeus until he had slain twelve. But whomsoever the son of Tydeus drew nigh and smote with the sword, him would Odysseus of the many wiles seize by the foot from behind and drag aside, with this thought in mind, that the fair-maned horses might easily pass through and not be affrighted at heart as they trod over dead men; for they were as yet unused thereto. But when the son of Tydeus came to the king, him the thirteenth he robbed of honey-sweet life, as he breathed hard, for like to an evil dream there stood above his head that night the son of Oeneus' son, by the devise of Athene. Meanwhile steadfast Odysseus loosed the single-hooved horses and bound them together with the reins, and drove them forth from the throng, smiting them with his bow, for he had not thought to take in his hands the bright whip from the richly dight car; and he whistled to give a sign to goodly Diomedes.

[503] But he tarried and pondered what most reckless deed he might do, whether to take the chariot, where lay the war-gear richly dight, and draw it out by the pole, or lift it on high and so bear it forth, or whether he should rather take the lives of yet more Thracians. The while he was pondering this in heart, even then Athene drew nigh and spake to goodly Diomedes: "Bethink thee now of returning, son of great-souled Tydeus, to the hollow ships, lest thou go thither in full flight, and haply some other god rouse up the Trojans."

[512] So spake she, and he knew the voice of the goddess as she spoke, and swiftly mounted the horses; and Odysseus smote them with his bow, and they sped toward the swift ships of the Achaeans.

[515] But no blind watch did Apollo of the silver bow keep when he saw Athene attending the son of Tydeus; in wrath against her he entered the great throng of the Trojans, and aroused a counsellor of the Thracians, Hippocoön, the noble kinsman of Rhesus. And he leapt up out of sleep, and when he saw the place empty where the swift horses had stood, and the men gasping amid gruesome streams of blood, then he uttered a groan, and called by name upon his dear comrade. And from the Trojans arose a clamour and confusion unspeakable as they hastened together; and they gazed upon the terrible deeds, even all that the warriors had wrought and thereafter gone to the hollow ships.

[526] But when these were now come to the place where they had slain the spy of Hector, then Odysseus, dear to Zeus, stayed the swift horses, and the son of Tydeus leaping to the ground placed the bloody spoils in the hands of Odysseus, and again mounted; and he touched the horses with the lash, and nothing loath the pair sped on to the hollow ships, for there were they fain to be. And Nestor was first to hear the sound, and he spake, saying: "My friends, leaders and rulers of the Argives, shall I be wrong, or speak the truth? Nay, my heart bids me speak. The sound of swift-footed horses strikes upon mine ears. I would that Odysseus and the valiant Diomedes may even thus speedily have driven forth from among the Trojans single-hooved horses; but wondrously do I fear at heart lest those bravest of the Argives have suffered some ill through the battle din of the Trojans."

[540] Not yet was the word fully uttered, when they came themselves. Down they leapt to earth, and the others were seized with joy and welcomed them with hand-clasps and with gentle words. And the horseman, Nestor of Gerenia, was first to question them: "Come tell me now, Odysseus, greatly to be praised, great glory of the Achaeans, how ye twain took these horses. Was it by entering the throng of the Trojans? Or did some god that met you give you them? Wondrous like are they to rays of the sun. Ever do I mingle in battle with the Trojans and nowise methinks do I

tarry by the ships, old warrior though I be; howbeit never yet saw I such horses neither thought of such. Nay, methinks some god hath met you and given you them; for both of you twain doth Zeus the cloud-gatherer love and the daughter of Zeus that beareth the aegis, even flashing-eyed Athene."

[554] Then in answer spake unto him Odysseus of many wiles: "Nestor, son of Neleus, great glory of the Achaeans, easily might a god that willed it bestow even better horses than these, for the gods are mightier far. But these horses, old sir, whereof thou askest, are newly come from Thrace, and their lord did brave Diomedes slay, and beside him twelve of his comrades, all them that were the best. And for the thirteenth we slew a scout near the ships, one that Hector and the other lordly Trojans had sent forth to spy upon our camp."

[564] So spake he, and drave the single-hooved horses through the trench, exultingly, and with him went joyously the rest of the Achaeans. But when they were come to the well-built hut of the son of Tydeus, the horses they bound with shapely thongs at the manger where stood the swift-footed horses of Diomedes, eating honey-sweet corn. And on the stern of his ship did Odysseus place the bloody spoils of Dolon until they should make ready a sacred offering to Athene. But for themselves they entered the sea and washed away the abundant sweat from shins and necks and thighs. And when the wave of the sea had washed the abundant sweat from their skin, and their hearts were refreshed, they went into polished baths and bathed. But when the twain had bathed and anointed them richly with oil, they sate them down at supper, and from the full mixing-bowl they drew off honey-sweet wine and made libation to Athene.