

The following introduction is from D. B. Monro's annotation
to the beginning of Book I of Homer's *Illiad*,¹

‘After an invocation to the Muses, the story launches *in medias res* (in the midst of action) towards the end of the Trojan War between the Trojans and the besieging Greeks. Chryses, a Trojan priest of Apollo, offers the Greeks wealth for the return of his daughter Chryseis, held captive of Agamemnon, the Greek leader. Although most of the Greek army is in favour of the offer, Agamemnon refuses. Chryses prays for Apollo's help, and Apollo causes a plague to afflict the Greek army.

After nine days of plague, Achilles, the leader of the Myrmidon contingent, calls an assembly to deal with the problem. Under pressure, Agamemnon agrees to return Chryseis to her father, but decides to take Achilles' captive, Briseis, as compensation. Angered, Achilles declares that he and his men will no longer fight for Agamemnon and will go home. Odysseus takes a ship and returns Chryseis to her father, whereupon Apollo ends the plague.

In the meantime, Agamemnon's messengers take Briseis away. Achilles becomes very upset, sits by the seashore, and prays to his mother, Thetis. Achilles asks his mother to ask Zeus to bring the Greeks to the breaking point by the Trojans, so Agamemnon will realise how much the Greeks need Achilles. Thetis does so, and Zeus agrees.’

Extract Homer. *Illiad*, Book I, in 19th century translation.²

'Thus were they busied throughout the host; but Agamemnon ceased not from the strife wherewith he threatened Achilles at the first; he spake to Talthybios and Eurybates that were his heralds and nimble squires: 'Go ye to the tent of Achilles Peleus' son, and take Briseis of the fair cheeks by the hand and lead her hither; and if

¹ Homer. *Illiad*, edited by D.B. Monro, Oxford: Claendon Press, 1884.

² Homer. *Illiad*, translated by Walter Leaf and revised with A. Lang and E. Myers, 1891, pp.25-27.

he give her not, then will I myself go, and more with me, and seize her; and that will be yet more grievous for him.'

So saying he sent them forth, and laid stern charge upon them. Unwillingly went they along the beach of the unvintaged sea, and came to the huts and ships of the Myrmidons. Him found they sitting beside his hut and black ship; nor when he saw them was Achilles glad. So they in dread and reverence of the king stood, and spake to him no word, nor questioned him. But he knew in his heart, and spake to them: 'All hail, ye heralds, messengers of Zeus and men, come near; ye are not guilty in my sight, but Agamemnon that sent you for the sake of the damsel Briseis. Go now, heaven-sprung Patroklos, bring not knowledge to look before and after, that so his Achaians might battle in safety beside their ships.'

So said he, and Patroklos hearkened to his dear comrade, and led forth from the hut Briseis of the fair cheeks, and gave them her to lead away. So these twain took their way back along the Achaians' ships, and with them went the woman all unwilling.'

Extract Homer. *The Illiad*, Book I, in late 20th century translation.³

'So the men were engaged throughout the camp.
But King Agamemnon would not stop the quarrel,
the first threat he hurled against Achilles.
He called Talthybius and Eurybates briskly,
his two heralds, ready, willing aides:
"Go to Achilles' lodge. Take Briseis at once,
his beauty Briseis by the hand and bring her here.
But if he will not surrender her, I'll go myself,
I'll seize her myself, with an army at my back —
and all the worse for him!"

³ Homer. *The Illiad*, translated by Robert Fagles, Harmondsworth &c.: Viking Penguin, 1990, pp. 88-89.

He sent them off
with the strict order ringing in their ears.
Against their will the two men made their way
along the breaking surf of the barren salt sea
and reached the Myrmidon shelters and their ships.
They found him beside his lodge and black hull,
seated grimly—and Achilles took no joy
when he saw the two approaching.
They were afraid, they held the king in awe
and stood there, silent. Not a word to Achilles,
not a question. But he sensed it all in his heart,
their fear, their charge, and broke the silence for them:
"Welcome, couriers! Good heralds of Zeus and men,
here, come closer. You have done nothing to me.
You are not to blame. No one but Agamemnon—
he is the one who sent you for Briseis.
Go, Patroclus, Prince, bring out the girl
and hand her to them so they can take her back.
But let them both bear witness to my loss ...
in the face of blissful gods and mortal men,
in the face of that unbending, ruthless king—
if the day should come when the armies need *me*
to save their ranks from ignominious, stark defeat.
The man is raving—with all the murderous fury in his heart.
He lacks the sense to see a day behind, a day ahead,
and safeguard the Achaeans battling by the ships."

Patroclus obeyed his great friend's command.
He led Briseis in all her beauty from the lodge
and handed her over to the men to take away.
And the two walked back along the Argive ships
while she trailed on behind, reluctant, every step.'