

2023 Classical Literature Scholarship--2nd Place

Abigail Nelson

Finding Home in Homer

I am a military brat. Missed birthdays, people wondering if my parents are still together, and long deployments are part of the job description. With age, I became more aware of my dad's absence when I saw my friends' dads performing in *The Nutcracker* with their daughters, cheering at soccer games, and eating dinner with their families. I began to push back against the sacrifices my family was making. Why did I have to suffer? Why did my dad continue to put my family in this position? Did he love his country more than his family?

After moving to my ninth school, Maeser, halfway through my sophomore year, I concluded that though my dad loved me, that love was not enough to make him give up his career. If he loved me, I would still be in Arizona. After each move, each deployment, and each monthly training, my resentment exponentially grew like bacteria in a petri dish, ugly and feeding on my angst. I resented him for making our family move, leaving my mom alone to parent, making me grow up faster, and returning home from deployments a completely different person.

When I had the opportunity to read the *Iliad* in Directed Readings, I thought all I would gain from the novel was an extensive amount of knowledge about dactylic hexameter and Grecian history. I have heard the stories of people my dad knew that were killed at war. My older sister wears the bracelet of a fallen hero. My brother's bookshelves are filled with my dad's military strategy books. I thought I knew what war does to people. I never expected an epic about the Trojan War to help me heal my relationship with my dad.

While reading the *Iliad*, Hector and his desire to serve his nation despite his inevitable death reminded me of my dad. In Hector's final conversation with his wife, Andromache, Hector says, "But may I be dead / And the earth heaped up above me / Before I hear you cry as you are dragged away" (Homer 6.488-490). Though Hector is fighting for Priam, the reason he is willing to continue fighting is not just for his nation but for the safety of his family. Despite openly admitting that he knows the Trojans will lose, he would rather know he did everything in his power, such as sacrificing his own life, than let the Acheans take Andromache and Astyanax. Is that not an innate human trait? To know the probable outcome, but to still have the hope that something, however small we do, will change that? To feel comfort in knowing we did not just give up but die trying?

I do not know if that is a universal human trait, but it is one that my dad exemplifies. He is willing to do anything to protect his country and, consequently, his family. It would be easier for both Hector and my dad to stay home and enjoy their time with their families. But by continuing to serve their nation, they are serving their families in the long run. Even though my dad could die and is absent from my life, he is willing to do so to prevent future suffering. He is ready to lay down his life so that my brother can play soccer in college instead of getting drafted and so his great-great-grandkids do not have to build bomb shelters.

I no longer believe my dad hates me, my mom, or my siblings. He never has. His way of protecting us is different from the typical nine-to-five dads I see. He may not have been there to talk to my homecoming date about what time to bring me home and intimidate them, but he is ensuring that our nation's founding principles are upheld and that my kids and their kids will have a country to defend. The sacrifices he uses to demonstrate his love may not be leaving work early to pick up a sick kid from school, but instead, his life and time with his family. Serving his

nation was ultimately serving us. Just because I could not read the ways my dad demonstrated his love does not mean his love was never there. It took me reading the *Iliad* and pondering Hector's motives behind returning to war to understand my dad, but now I accept the trials I face as his daughter. I am no longer the victim of my dad's sacrifices. I am the recipient of his love.

Works Cited

Homer, et al. *Iliad*. Hackett Publishing Company, Inc, 1997.