

Homer, *Iliad* 6. 370-413, 429-502

*Hector has returned to Troy from the fighting in the plain around the city, at the prompting of his brother Helenus, to tell his mother, Hecuba, and the other women of Troy to make an offering and prayer to Athena in order to seek her help against the Greeks and especially Diomedes who is running rampant. After fulfilling this part of the task, and resisting his mother's invitation to stay for a drink, Hector went to his brother Paris' house to recall him to the fighting. He again refuses an offer to linger (this time from Helen, who was with Paris), but telling Paris to catch him up, he meanwhile goes to look for his wife and their son, since he is not sure he will have the chance to see them ever again.*

Swiftly then he came to his comfortable house,

but he did not find white-armed Andromache in the halls,

but she, in fact, with her son and fair-robed servant

stood on the tower both weeping and wailing.

And Hector, when he did not find his excellent wife inside,

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went and stood on the threshold, and spoke to the maids:

‘Come now, maids, tell me the truth:

Where did white-armed Andromache go from the hall?

Perhaps, to the house of her fair-robed husband's sisters or brother's wives,

or did she go out to the temple of Athena, where indeed the other

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lovely-haired women of Troy are appeasing the terrible goddess?’

The busy housekeeper in turn addressed words to him:

‘Hector, since you have very much ordered me to speak the truth,

she has gone out neither to the house of one of her fair-robed husband's sisters or

[brother's wives,

nor to the temple of Athena, where indeed the other

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lovely-haired women of Troy are appeasing the terrible goddess,

but she went to the great tower of Ilium, because she heard

that the Trojans were being hard pressed, and that the strength of the Achaeans was great.

She indeed, hurrying, is arriving at the wall

resembling a mad woman, while the nurse is taking her child together with her.’

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So spoke the housekeeper, and Hector rushed off from the house

on the same route again down the well-built streets.

When, going through the great city, he arrived at the Scaean Gates,

where he was going to go through and out to the plain,

there his richly-dowered wife came running up to meet him,

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Andromache, the daughter of great-hearted Eetion,

Eetion, who lived beneath wooded Placus,

in Thebe-under-Placus, ruling over Cilician men;

his daughter indeed was married to bronze-helmeted Hector.

She then met him, and together with her came her servant

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holding her innocent son at her breast, still an infant,

the beloved son of Hector, like a beautiful star,

whom Hector indeed used to call Scamandrios, but the others

Astyanax: for Hector alone used to protect Ilium.  
He indeed smiled looking in silence at his son; 35  
and Andromache stood close beside him shedding a tear,  
and then she clung to him with her hand, spoke out and addressed him:

‘Noble sir, your own courage will destroy you, and you pity  
neither your infant son nor unlucky me, who will soon be  
your widow: for soon the Achaeans will kill you 40  
having all rushed against you; but it would be better for me,  
if I lose you, to go beneath the earth: for no longer will there be  
another comfort, when once you at any rate meet your fate,  
but sorrows; and I do not have a father and a lady mother.

*Here a few lines are omitted, in which Andromache explains that Achilles killed her father  
and all her seven brothers when he sacked her home town of Thebe. Though Achilles freed  
her mother for a ransom, she too is now dead.*

But you, Hector, are my father and lady mother 45  
and brother, and you are my husband in your prime;  
so come now, have pity and stay here on the tower,  
so that you may not make your child an orphan and your wife a widow;  
and position the troops next to the fig tree, where  
the city is especially accessible and the wall is climbable. 50  
For three times at that very point, the bravest came and made an attempt  
around the two Ajaxes and famous Idomeneus  
and around the sons of Atreus and the strong son of Tydeus;  
either, no doubt, someone told them who knows prophecies well,  
or now even their own heart urges and orders them.’ 55

In turn great Hector of the glinting helmet addressed her:  
‘Truly all these things are also a concern to me, my wife; but very terribly  
I feel shame in front of the Trojan men and the women with trailing dresses,  
if like a coward I shirk far from war;  
nor has my heart so ordered me, since I learned to be noble 60  
always and fight with the leading Trojans,  
winning great glory, both for my father and for myself.  
For I know this well in my mind and in my heart:  
there will come a day, when holy Ilium will at some point be destroyed  
and Priam and the people of Priam of the fine ash spear. 65  
But the suffering of the Trojans in the future does not so much concern me,  
nor that of Hecuba herself, nor that of lord Priam  
nor that of my brothers, who both many and noble  
will fall in the dust at the hands of hostile men,  
as much as that of yourself, when one of the bronze-clad Achaeans 70  
will lead you off weeping, having robbed you of your day of freedom;  
and when you are in Argos, you will weave at a loom at the command of another woman,

and will carry water from the Messeis or the Hyperia spring  
 very reluctantly, but powerful necessity will press upon you;  
 and one day someone, if they see you shedding a tear, may say: 75  
 “This is the wife of Hector, who at fighting used to be the best  
 of the horse-taming Trojans, when they were fighting around Ilium.”  
 So someone will say one day; and again there will be fresh pain for you  
 for lack of a man of the sort to avert the day of slavery.  
 But may heaped up earth cover me over, when I am dead, 80  
 before at any rate I find out anything about both your cries and your dragging off.’

Having spoken in this way, brilliant Hector reached out to his child;  
 but the child leaned back towards the breast of his well-girdled nurse  
 shrieking, terrified at the sight of his own dear father,  
 fearing both the bronze and the horse-hair crest, 85  
 after seeing it nodding dreadfully from the very top of the helmet.  
 Both his dear father and lady mother laughed out loud;  
 at once brilliant Hector removed the helmet from his head,  
 and put it down on the ground shining all over;  
 but he indeed, when he had kissed his own dear son and had swung him in his hands, 90  
 said in prayer to both Zeus and the other gods:  
 ‘Zeus and you other gods, grant indeed that this child too,  
 my boy becomes, as I myself also am, supreme amongst the Trojans,  
 and powerful like me, and rules over Ilium with strength;  
 and one day may someone say of him “This man is much better than his father at least” 95  
 as he returns from war; and may he bring back blood-stained spoils  
 after killing an enemy man, and may his mother rejoice in her mind.’

Having spoken in this way, he placed in the hands of his dear wife  
 his boy; she then received him in her fragrant bosom  
 laughing through her tears; and her husband pitied her when he saw her, 100  
 and he caressed her with his hand, spoke out and addressed her:  
 ‘Noble lady, do not worry at all for me too much in your heart:  
 for no man will dispatch me early to Hades before my time;  
 but I say that there is no man who has escaped his fate,  
 neither a cowardly man, nor even a good one, from the first moment when he has  
 [been born. 105

But go into the house and attend to your own tasks,  
 the loom and the distaff, and order the servants  
 to get on with their work; but war will be a concern for men,  
 all of them – but especially for me – who were born<sup>1</sup> in Ilium.’

Having then spoken in this way, brilliant Hector took his helmet 110  
 with its horse-hair crest; and his dear wife had gone to her home  
 as she kept turning round, shedding many a tear.

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<sup>1</sup> Not a participle as it says in the notes, but an indicative.

Swiftly then she came to the comfortable house  
of man-slaying Hector, and she found inside many  
female servants, and stirred up lamentation in all of them.  
They were weeping for Hector in his own home while he was still alive;  
for they did not think that he would any longer return, coming back from war,  
having escaped the might and hands of the Achaeans.