

Husband and Wife in Troy **from book VI of The Illiad, by Homer**

The story of the Illiad is about the warrior Hector. In this scene, he returns home briefly from battle and seeks out his wife, Andromache. He finds her carrying their son. She pleads with him not to return to the war.

Then Hector left her, and forthwith was at his own house. He did not find Andromache, for she was on the wall with her child and one of her maids, weeping bitterly. Seeing, then, that she was not within, he stood on the threshold of the women's rooms and said, "Women, tell me, and tell me true, where did Andromache go when she left the house? Was it to my sisters, or to my brothers' wives? or is she at the temple of Minerva where the other women are propitiating the awful goddess?"

His good housekeeper answered, „Hector, since you bid me tell you truly, she did not go to your sisters nor to your brothers' wives, nor yet to the temple of Minerva, where the other women are propitiating the awful goddess, but she is on the high wall of Ilius, for she had heard the Trojans were being hard pressed, and that the Achaeans were in great force: she went to the wall in frenzied haste, and the nurse went with her carrying the child.“

Hector hurried from the house ... and went down the streets by the same way that he had come. When he had gone through the city and had reached the Scaean gates through which he would go out on to the plain, his wife came running towards him, Andromache [had] now came to meet him with a nurse who carried his little child in her bosom- a mere babe. Hector's darling son, and lovely as a star. ... Hector smiled as he looked upon the boy, but he did not speak, and Andromache stood by him weeping and taking his hand in her own. „Dear husband,“ said she, „your valor will bring you to destruction; think on your infant son, and on my hapless self who ere long shall be your widow- for the Achaeans will set upon you in a body and kill you. It would be better for me, should I lose you, to lie dead and buried, for I shall have nothing left to comfort me when you are gone, save only sorrow. I have neither father nor mother now. Achilles slew my father when he sacked Thebe the goodly city of the Cilicians.

... I had seven brothers in my father's house, but on the same day they all went within the house of Hades. Achilles killed them as they were with their sheep and cattle. My mother- her who had been queen of all the land under Mt. Placus- he brought hither with the spoil, and freed her for a great sum, but the archer- queen Diana took her in the house of your father. Nay- Hector- you who to me are father, mother, brother, and dear husband- have mercy upon me; stay here upon this wall; make not your child fatherless, and your wife a widow; as for the host, place them near the fig-tree, where the city can be best scaled, and the wall is weakest. Thrice have the bravest of them come thither and assailed it, ...“

And Hector answered, „Wife, I too have thought upon all this, but with what face should I look upon the Trojans, men or women, if I shirked battle like a coward? I cannot do so: I know nothing save to fight bravely in the forefront of the Trojan host and win renown alike for my father and myself. Well do I know that the day will surely come when mighty Ilius shall be destroyed with Priam and Priam's people, but I grieve for none of these- not even for Hecuba, nor King Priam, nor for my brothers many and brave who may fall in the dust before their foes- for none of these do I grieve as for yourself when the day shall come on which some one of the Achaeans shall rob you for ever of your freedom, and bear you

weeping away. It may be that you will have to ply the loom in Argos at the bidding of a mistress, or to fetch water from the springs Messeis or Hypereia, treated brutally by some cruel task-master; then will one say who sees you weeping, 'She was wife to Hector, the bravest warrior among the Trojans during the war before Ilius.' On this your tears will break forth anew for him who would have put away the day of captivity from you. May I lie dead under the barrow that is heaped over my body ere I hear your cry as they carry you into bondage." He stretched his arms towards his child, but the boy cried and nestled in his nurse's bosom, scared at the sight of his father's armor, and at the horse-hair plume that nodded fiercely from his helmet. His father and mother laughed to see him, but Hector took the helmet from his head and laid it all gleaming upon the ground. Then he took his darling child, kissed him, and dandled him in his arms, praying over him the while to Jove and to all the gods. „Jove," he cried, „grant that this my child may be even as myself, chief among the Trojans; let him be not less excellent in strength, and let him rule Ilius with his might. Then may one say of him as he comes from battle, 'The son is far better than the father.' May he bring back the blood-stained spoils of him whom he has laid low, and let his mother's heart be glad.'",

With this he laid the child again in the arms of his wife, who took him to her own soft bosom, smiling through her tears. As her husband watched her his heart yearned towards her and he caressed her fondly, saying, „My own wife, do not take these things too bitterly to heart. No one can hurry me down to Hades before my time, but if a man's hour is come, be he brave or be he coward, there is no escape for him when he has once been born. Go, then, within the house, and busy yourself with your daily duties, your loom, your distaff, and the ordering of your servants; for war is man's matter, and mine above all others of them that have been born in Ilius." He took his plumed helmet from the ground, and his wife went back again to her house, weeping bitterly and often looking back towards him. When she reached her home she found her maidens within, and bade them all join in her lament; so they mourned Hector in his own house though he was yet alive, for they deemed that they should never see him re turn safe from battle, and from the furious hands of the Achaeans.

(This text is edited from the Ancient History Sourcebook at the Fordham University webpage. The complete text is available at <http://www.fordham.edu/halsall/ancient/homer-illiad.txt>)