

The story
of
Troy



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Legends and Heroes

About 2,700 years ago, when Greece was one of the greatest civilizations in the world, the Greek writer Homer wrote two poems: The Iliad and The Odyssey. Both of these are very long, and they tell us about people who fought in a war between Greece and Troy.

This war was already history when Homer wrote about it. The material he used was from traditional stories that had been handed down from parents to children over more than 500 years. How much truth there was in them, we simply do not know.

Troy was a large, walled city in what is now Turkey, although this was a long time before the Turks came to live here. The people who lived on the western side of Turkey then were Greeks. So, we can talk of Greeks and Trojans, but this is simply convenient. The people on both sides spoke and wrote the same language, prayed to the same gods, and shared the same culture.

The men who attacked Troy came from Sparta and a number of other cities and areas that were allied to it. Troy also had its allies among nearby states. Homer tells how the war went on for ten years with neither side able to win. Then, the invaders thought of the clever plan of using a huge wooden horse to get some men inside the city. It is the wooden horse that people think about when Troy is mentioned. We do not know if it really was built, but the idea is still alive.

The story of Troy has even given us an idiom in English. A "Trojan horse" can be used to mean a way of defeating your opponents by first offering them a gift.

The ancient Greeks believed in many gods. They built temples for the gods and made offerings to them of fruit. When they felt it was necessary, they might sacrifice an animal, or even a person. In the poems, the most important gods help to start the war and interfere in the plan for the wooden horse.

The gods in this story include Zeus, who was king over all; his queen, Hera; and two of his daughters, Aphrodite and Athena. They are responsible for starting the war. They watch it closely from their home on Mount Olympus. They also use their powers to protect their favourite humans and destroy their enemies.

The Golden Apple

The problem with Eris is that she causes trouble everywhere she goes. Well, that's her job. She's the goddess of arguments and disagreements, and somebody has to do it. But she's not the sort of person you might want at a wedding. So, when Peleus and Thetis got married on Mount Olympus, every god and goddess was there except Eris. Hera left her off the list.

Hera's the queen of the gods so the decision was hers, and, as we'll see, it caused a whole lot of trouble. Everybody was having a great time, eating the best food and drinking nectar from golden cups. Then Eris turned up.

She just stood there, glaring at everyone, then she pulled something out of her tunic, said, "My present for you!" and threw it among the guests. It was a golden apple - maybe not the most normal wedding present - but Eris knew what she was doing. The god who caught the apple looked at it closely, then said, "There is something written here on the apple. It says, 'To the most beautiful.'"

That started it, of course. Hera was first to speak. "I am queen of the gods!" she said. "I must be the most beautiful. The apple is mine." This was not the best argument I've ever heard, but it might have been the end of it, except that Athena got involved.

"No, Hera, you are wrong. I am the goddess of wisdom. The apple belongs to me."

Myself, I couldn't see any connection between wisdom and beauty, unless she meant some sort of inner beauty. More importantly, you might have expected a goddess of wisdom to stay out of a silly disagreement like that. However, Athena was also the goddess of warfare, so maybe she felt she had to speak up. Then, while Hera stared at her, it became a three-cornered fight because Aphrodite stepped in. "I am the goddess of love and

beauty," she said in that soft voice she always used. "The apple is mine."

Personally, I think Aphrodite had a point, and I would have given it to her, but neither of the other two were willing to give way. The air got fairly heavy with insults after that, and there was a feeling that the party was over.

The argument went on for some time, and you could see that the other gods were getting tired of it. In the end, Zeus had to intervene. He was king of the gods, and I suppose he could have settled it there and then, but Hera was his wife - and, what's more, Athena and Aphrodite were his daughters! You could see that any decision he made would cause serious trouble in the family.

So he told them to go and see a shepherd called Paris, who lived on Mount Ida near the city of Troy. Now, that's a good distance across the sea. It was far enough away to guarantee a bit of peace and quiet for the rest of us - you could see his thinking. Zeus said that Paris was famous for his good judgement. You might wonder why somebody with that kind of reputation was working as a shepherd, but we'll get to that later.

So off the three of them went - they just disappeared, like gods and goddesses do - and the rest of us got back to the food and the nectar.

A few seconds later, on Mount Ida, Paris looked up from his sheep and there they were, three goddesses, shining with light and scaring him half to death.

Hera showed him the apple and told him the problem. She made it clear that he had to choose. Then she said if he chose her, she would give him as much power on earth as Zeus had in heaven - which was a pretty fair offer.

Then, Athena made him another offer. She said she would make him the wisest man in the world, and the winner of every battle.

Then, Aphrodite stepped forward, and you could see the effect on Paris. She was absolutely beautiful, and she knew how to dress as well.

"Paris," she said, "if you give me the apple, you shall have Helen, a daughter of Zeus. She is as beautiful as I am."

He just grabbed the apple from the grass and handed it to her.

It was the right choice of course. Aphrodite was the most beautiful. But he made it for all the wrong reasons.

So, the goddesses vanished. Aphrodite was probably pleased with the apple, but the other two hated Paris like poison.

Paris and Helen

The king of Troy at the time was called Priam. Not long after the business with the golden apple, he decided to hold a sports contest. This was to be in memory of a son of his who had died a few years before. He sent his servants to Mount Ida to capture a bull for the first prize.

You might well ask what a valuable animal like that was doing just walking around a mountain on its own, but things were different in those days. Later, the servants were having a break and chatting, and Paris appeared. He had come down to see what was happening. He asked about the bull, and they told him what it was for. Now, Paris was actually quite good at sport. He liked the idea of joining in, so he packed his things and went down to Troy.

Did I say Paris was quite good at sport? The man was top-class. He won the pentathlon without any difficulty at all. This involved two throwing events, followed by jumping, wrestling, and running, and he came an easy first in every one. Even the royal princes couldn't keep up with him - and just think of the amount of specialist coaching they'd had. Paris had trained himself up to this standard in odd moments between watching his sheep.

It caused a fair amount of jealousy because the princes weren't used to being beaten as easily as this. Hector, the eldest one, drew his sword and said he was going to kill Paris there and then. Not very sporting, but Hector had a vicious temper. And, for a moment, it looked like the end for the shepherd, but then an old man pushed through the crowd and threw himself at King Priam's feet. "My lord!" he said. "This is no ordinary shepherd. This is your lost son - the one in whose memory you are holding these games."

Well, this came as quite a shock to Priam, and to the rest of us. The old man went on, "Remember when your son was born? Your wife dreamt that he would cause the destruction of Troy. I am the servant you ordered to leave the baby on Mount Ida to die. But I took pity on the child. I looked

after him and watched him grow into a fine young man."

Priam was so pleased. I think he'd regretted sending the boy away to die. He told the crowd that Paris was back, as a prince of Troy. They all cheered, though Hector didn't look too pleased.

That night, Paris woke suddenly to find Aphrodite standing there, with the moonlight all around her. She whispered to him, "Helen is the queen of Sparta. Go there and find her, Paris. Remember, I will always look after you, for you gave the golden apple to me."

Paris was pleased, even though Helen was another man's wife and lived quite a distance away. Next morning, he went to King Priam and asked for a ship. This caused a bit of a problem. Priam was pleased to have his son back, and was happy to give him anything he asked for. However, naturally he wanted to know what the ship was for, and Paris couldn't tell him. He couldn't just say "I'm going to sail across to Sparta and try to steal the king's wife." So he made up some story about wanting to see something of the world after spending so many years on Mount Ida.

Paris got a silver statue of Aphrodite and tied it to the front of the ship, to show who was looking after him. The next day, he set sail through the Aegean, round the southern point of mainland Greece, and into the bay near Sparta.

He arrived at the court of King Menelaus in some style, because King Priam had given him many attendants and servants, and also presents for the Spartan royal family. And when he saw Helen, he fell in love with her.

Both the king and queen were very welcoming. The slaves took him away for a bath and dressed him in a purple robe. Then they brought him to the dining room where Menelaus and Helen were waiting in front of a feast.

It was all wasted on Paris. He just picked at his food, and could hardly take his eyes off Helen. He didn't have a chance. Aphrodite had set the whole thing up, and he more or less had to fall in love with her. It never crossed his mind that stealing another man's wife might cause trouble.

As dinner drew to a close, Paris spilled his wine on the table. He apologized, of course. Menelaus just waved a hand to show it didn't matter, and went back to the conversation he was having. Then, while his eyes were turned away, Paris wrote the words "I love you" in the wine for only Helen to see.

The feast came to an end, and one by one, the guests left. Even Menelaus went off to bed, leaving just Paris and his wife talking together. He might have had his suspicions, but they were only talking, after all. By this point, Helen was probably half in love with Paris. Then Aphrodite lent a hand. She sent down some magic, and soon Helen was gazing into his eyes like he was the only man in the world.

He held out his hand, she took it, and suddenly they were running out of the silent palace. Before any of the Spartans noticed, they were well on the way back to his ship.

There were some who noticed, of course. Hera, for one. She was sitting up on Olympus, watching everything closely in the way that gods and goddesses can do. She saw the ship leave and waited till they were far out to sea. Then, she sent down storm after storm to wreck it. She still hated Paris for not giving her the apple. But he had Aphrodite looking after him. She saved his life that night, and all the nights to follow, and brought him safely back to Troy.

Everybody turned out to greet him, and, if they had any doubts about the love-match, they didn't show it. Well, everybody except Cassandra. She was Priam's daughter, and she was a prophet. She ran about, tearing her hair, and shouting that Helen would bring about the end of Troy. Nobody believed her. She was always shouting about some disaster or other.

Meanwhile, up in her new apartment, Helen was beginning to recover from the magic, and to wonder just exactly what she had done.

On the night that Helen left, Menelaus had a bad dream. He dreamt that Paris was going to run away with Helen. It started to come true when he woke up and noticed that he'd been sleeping alone. He got up and moved through the palace, searching room after room, and he couldn't find

her anywhere. All the time, he was getting more and more angry. Then, somebody told him that Paris had run away with Helen, and he lost control completely. He took Paris' purple robe and tore it in two, and he shouted some really horrible things about what he'd do when he caught him.

Then, he looked up and shouted to the sky. "I call on you gods to help me get revenge on Paris!"

When Menelaus married Helen, all the Greek leaders promised that they would avenge any insult to her, so now he called in the debt. However, a few of them were reluctant. Odysseus was happily married, and had a son, and when the call came he pretended to be mad. He couldn't keep it up for long though, and in the end, he had to agree. Once he was in, Achilles followed. They needed Achilles - he was the greatest warrior in Greece.

Second to him was Ajax, a huge man, though a little slow in the head. Odysseus was quite useful as well, and brighter than the other two. As commander, they chose Agamemnon, the king of Mycenae. He was Menelaus's brother, and he was married to Helen's sister.

It took two years to get the fleet together and in the end, there were a thousand ships. They set sail for Troy. The sun god Apollo blew a gentle wind to help the ships, and told dolphins to follow them.

The War Begins

The ships sailed for nearly three weeks, through black storms one minute and blue skies the next, because the gods were arguing. Zeus, who was favouring Aphrodite, sent down thunder and lightning. Then, Apollo blew the storm clouds away and calmed the winds, which made Hera and Athena happy.

At last, the fleet landed on the shore near Troy. The Greeks got out of their ships, and were immediately attacked by the Trojans, led by Hector. The first man to die was a Greek called Protesilaus. Back in Greece, a prophet had said that victory would go to the side who first lost a man. Protesilaus had believed this, and felt that he had to be the one. His was the first ship to hit the beach, he was the first man off it, and he went straight for Hector. Well, not many men could hope to take on Hector and live, and Protesilaus didn't last long.

But Achilles was in good form that day. There was a circle of death all around him.

Ajax killed many too, in his slow and deliberate way, and Odysseus moved around, fighting when he had to, but using his brains to get the Greek army formed up properly. Then they moved forward and, before Hector could do anything to stop them, the Trojan army broke. They ran back to the city and shut the gates.

While the rest of the Greek army unloaded the ships, and settled down to a siege, Menelaus and Odysseus went to see Priam to ask for Helen's return. However, neither Priam nor the people of Troy were in the mood to talk peace. To make matters worse, as the two Greeks were walking back towards the city gate, the crowd turned on them. They were lucky to escape with their lives.

When the rest of the Greeks saw Menelaus and Odysseus chased out of the city, they were really angry. The battle had now become a war.

On the plain outside the city, and along the shore where their ships were tied up, the Greeks put up their tents. That night, the shore was covered with the lights from hundreds of campfires.

The Greeks made a number of attacks on the walls, but without success. After a while, they gave up and settled down for a long siege. They placed their soldiers all round the city, so that nobody could get in with food. But Priam had seen this coming, and had made sure that Troy had plenty of food. And so it went on for years, with the Greeks outside, and the Trojans inside. Sometimes, the Trojans would come out and fight, and men would die, but very little changed. In the tenth year, there was an argument between Agamemnon and Achilles. Agamemnon had taken a girl as a hostage. When her father produced the money, he wouldn't give her up. Now, the girl's mother was a prophet of Apollo, and Apollo was not pleased. He sent down nine days of illness on the Greeks.

Achilles spoke to Agamemnon, and said that the girl should be set free. Things got very heated and the result was that Agamemnon took a slave girl from Achilles as a punishment. Achilles walked off the field and went back to his tent. He said he would never fight for the Greeks again.

With Achilles in his tent, it was up to Odysseus to put some spirit back into the Greeks. He gathered them around him. "Men," he said, "we've been here ten years, and I want to go home as much as you do.

Achilles has left us, and I'm sorry about that. But we are a strong army, and we can fight on. We can still win, we can take Troy and take back Helen. Are you with me?"

Of course, he knew they were or he'd never have asked the question. He probably said more than I've repeated here, but these were the main points. He was a good speaker and he talked them round. The army formed up and marched across the plain towards Troy.

When the Trojans saw that Achilles wasn't with them, they showed just how much respect they had for him - they came out. Hector appeared first with the chariots, and a great show they made. They wheeled and circled, throwing up huge clouds of dust, and probably frightening the

Greeks, as they were meant to.

Then came the horsemen and the foot soldiers, group after group. These were men from Troy, but also from other cities nearby.

A Duel for Peace

When the armies had lined up, Hector led the Trojans forward. They shouted battle-cries and made a lot of noise. The Greeks came on in silence, and the dust from thousands of feet spread across the plain.

When they were close to each other, Paris came out ahead of the Trojan lines and waved the spear as a challenge to the Greeks. Menelaus saw him, jumped down from his chariot, and walked forward.

And that was when Paris's courage left him. This was the man whose wife he had stolen, the one man he never wanted to see again. He stepped back, and kept going back until he was

Hector was angry. "Paris," he said,

"what will the Greeks say when they see that our champion is just a handsome man with no courage? You're the one who started all this. Can't you face Menelaus?"

This seemed to steady Paris. You could see him pull his head up. Then he said, "Very well, Hector, if you want me to fight Menelaus, tell everybody to sit down. Let the winner have Helen and let there be peace."

Hector was happy to hear this, and he got the Trojans to sit down, and Agamemnon told the Greeks to do the same. Then Hector told the Greeks what Paris had said, and Menelaus made it clear that he agreed.

In the small space between the two front lines, Paris and Menelaus faced each other, and you could see that both of them were angry. Paris made the first move. He threw his spear at Menelaus, but it slid off his shield.

Then, Menelaus stepped forward, sent up a prayer to Zeus, and threw his spear. It went right through Paris' shield and armour, but he turned away, and it just tore a hole in his shirt. Menelaus drew his sword,

and ran at him. The first swing caught the front part of his helmet, but the sword broke into three or four pieces in his hand.

He said something nasty to Zeus - you could hear it loud and clear - then he caught Paris by the horsehair on the top of his helmet and started to drag him towards the Greek lines. The strap on Paris' helmet was choking him, and he might have died then if Aphrodite had not come down and broken it.

Menelaus was left with the helmet in his hand. He picked up a spear and was about to finish Paris off when Aphrodite stepped in again. She hid Paris in a cloud of mist and carried him away.

So Menelaus was the winner, and there was peace, at least for a while.

On Mount Olympus, the gods were sitting together drinking nectar and looking down on Troy. Zeus said, "Menelaus has two good friends among the goddesses - Hera and Athena. But they can only sit and watch, while Aphrodite keeps Paris out of danger. Look how she just rescued him! Are you all happy for Menelaus to take Helen back, and for there to be peace?" Athena glared at her father, but said nothing, but Hera spoke up. "Is all my hard work to go for nothing?" she asked. "You can do what you like, but we will not be happy with peace." This made Zeus angry. "What harm have Priam and his sons done you," he said, "that makes you so keen to destroy their city?" Then, with an effort, he got himself under control.

"Very well, I have nothing against Troy, but it isn't worth a fight between us."

"Thank you," Hera said. "Now, will you send Athena to make the Trojans break the peace?"

"Athena," Zeus said, with a sigh, "go and do what your mother wants."

Athena was delighted, of course. She turned herself into a Trojan soldier and went to see Pandarus, one of the Trojan chiefs. He thought he was talking to a friend of his, and had no idea it was Athena who said to

him: "You are good with a bow and arrow. If you could kill Menelaus all the Trojans would thank you, and Paris would give you a great reward."

Now, Pandarus was a bit of a fool, and he believed what he heard. He put an arrow to his bow and sent it flying towards Menelaus. But then Aphrodite stepped in.

She turned the arrow in its flight, so that it hit the lower part of his breastplate. It went through this and hit the belt buckle underneath.

That was enough to stop it, but it still cut him, and the blood ran down his legs. Agamemnon looked at him, and was afraid. So was Menelaus, until he saw that most of the arrow-head was still outside his armor. Then they held hands, and Agamemnon said, "My brother, I would never have forgiven you if this peace had led to your death. But the Trojans have broken a promise made before the gods, and they will pay for it."

Hector, Trojan Hero

That night in Troy, Hector stood outside the royal palace, with his soldiers all around him. They were angry, and more than a little afraid. "You must show us how we can force the Greeks back. Show us how to fight them."

Hector didn't answer, but he took time to look at them. Then he looked up at the stars, turned and walked up the steps to the palace.

Once inside, he threw off his red cloak and started to put on his armor. His wife Andromache watched him, and there was fear in her dark eyes. "What are you going to do?" she said. He shook his head, but didn't answer. He knelt down on the stone floor to kiss his son.

The baby burst into tears. Hector laughed, and took off his helmet. This had two horns and a great plume of horsehair. It was enough to frighten any child. He picked up his son, and the baby started to laugh.

"Little one," Hector said, "one day you will be a Trojan hero."

He turned to his wife "The gods have given me no choice," he said. "I must fight to the death." Hector called his men together and told them what he had in mind.

When it came, the attack was sudden. The Greeks had left a line of men around the city, but the greatest part of their army was near the ships, behind a defensive line made of sharpened wooden posts. It was quite late at night by now, and most of them were sleeping. Others just sat around the fires, drinking wine and talking, and suddenly the Trojans were on them.

The first thing they heard was the shouts as a tight group of Hector's men burst through the men near the walls. There were Trojans with axes at the front, breaking down the wood and smashing holes in the line so that Hector and his best fighters could get through.

Some of the Greeks tried to stand and fight, but they were outnumbered. They were pushed aside like water from the front of a ship. And it was ships that Hector had in his mind - the lines of ships pulled up on the beach. His soldiers broke through to the edge of the sea and spread out in two lines, pushing back the Greeks.

This allowed men with torches to get to the ships and set fire to them. Ship after ship went up in flames, and sparks flew from one ship to the other, setting more and more on fire. Within minutes, half of the Greek army was trying to get the rest of the ships off the beach.

Later that night, when the fires were out, Patroclus went to see Achilles. Patroclus was his cousin, and his best friend. He was also one of the few people who could speak to him at that time. They both sat down.

"You saw what the Greeks did tonight?" Patroclus said.

"I did," said Achilles.

"Won't you come back and help us now?"

Achilles shook his head. "No. Not till Agamemnon returns the slave girl."

Patroclus picked up a piece of Achilles' armour. "I thought you might say that. And I had an idea. If you let me wear your armor, I might make the Greeks believe I am you. That would frighten them."

Achilles thought for a moment. "You can borrow the armor if you like. But don't try to attack Troy on your own. That would make Apollo angry, and he loves the Trojans."

The next morning, the Trojans were outside their walls and moving forward. The Greeks lined up and went to meet them.

Athena had disguised herself as a vulture. She sat and watched everything from a tall pine tree. Apollo himself was on the walls of Troy, shining in the sunlight.

The armies were close together, ready to meet, when Patroclus drove his chariot right down the middle of the space between them. He was wearing Achilles' armor, waving a spear, and shouting. The whole Trojan army saw him and he did look just like Achilles.

Then the Greeks ran forward.

Patroclus followed in his chariot, all the way back to the walls. It looked for a moment like he might try to capture the city on his own. That was too much for Apollo. From his place high up on the walls, he sent down a ray of sunlight, which hit one of Patroclus' horses right in the eye. The horse threw up its front legs and slid to a halt. The chariot rolled over and Patroclus was thrown to the ground. His helmet flew off and his spear broke into pieces.

Hector ran up to Patroclus, who was trying to crawl away, and he killed him with a single swing of his sword. As the army moved past him, throwing the Greeks back, Hector took Achilles' armor off the dead body of Patroclus and had it carried back into the city.

Death of the Heroes

The Greeks moved back to their camp, and stood behind their defensive line. The Trojans could not break it this time. After a while, they stopped trying and went back to the city.

A messenger came to tell Achilles that Hector had killed Patroclus, and had taken Achilles' armor. His shouts of anger and sadness could be heard all over the Greek camp. They could be heard in Troy itself, and far away in her sea cave his mother Thetis heard them. As soon as she heard Achilles' shouts, she rushed to his side. When she arrived, he asked for her help to avenge his friend's death. He was worried about his armor. This was very special, and had been made by the blacksmith of the gods. It was so strong that no weapon could go through it, and now Hector had taken it away.

That night on Mount Olympus, Thetis went to see the blacksmith of the gods and asked him to make new armor for Achilles.

He said that a full suit of armor would take some time, but he would do what he could that night. The next morning Thetis carried a new helmet and shield to Achilles.

Achilles looked at them as if he had expected more. Then Thetis spoke. "My son," she said, "there is something I have never told you. When you were a baby, I dipped you in the River Styx. Because of this, no weapon can harm you - so you don't really need armor. But when I dipped you in, I held you by the heel. If your heel is wounded, you may die."

That day, as another battle swept across the plain, Achilles joined in and fought his way through the Trojan army. He left many dead men behind him. It was the real Achilles this time. Nobody could be in any doubt. The living Trojans looked at the dead ones who surrounded him, and began to move back.

All the time, Achilles was shouting, "Hector! Hector! Where are you?"

Near the walls, they met face to face. Hector had the city gate open behind him, and he could have run inside, but he stood and fought.

He fought well, but no man could hope to win against one whose mother was a god. Achilles chose his moment, when Hector was tiring, and drove his spear through his neck.

Hector fell dead on the ground, and a great sigh went up from the Trojans on the walls. It was blown away by the cries of the delighted Greeks. Achilles tore off Hector's armor and tied his body to the back of his chariot. Then, he drove round Troy three times, dragging the body of Hector behind him.

Priam and the rest of the Trojans watched in horror from the city walls.

Achilles organized a great funeral for Patroclus. His body was burnt on a huge pile of wood, and afterwards there were sports contests with a lot of eating and drinking. But Achilles kept Hector's body tied to his chariot, and day after day, he dragged it round the walls of Troy.

Priam sent a messenger to ask for the body to be returned, but Achilles refused. Many of the Greeks did not like what he was doing, but he would listen to nobody. Even the gods grew angry at his behavior, and Thetis came to speak to him, but she could not get him to listen either. The gods didn't like this at all, and began to think of a way to punish him.

In the end, Priam came himself. The sight of this old man coming to ask for the body of his son made many of the Greeks feel ashamed. Achilles realized that he was becoming very unpopular, so he rather sulkily offered to give up Hector's body - but only in exchange for Hector's weight in gold.

The next day, Achilles told some sailors from his ships to build a big set of scales outside the walls of Troy. They used large pieces of wood from the ships for this. Then Achilles dragged Hector's body to the scales. He cut it loose from his chariot, picked it up, and dropped it on the scales. A group of servants came out from the city, each carrying some of Priam's

gold. They opened the boxes and poured it out, and the scales began to go down. But even after all the gold was there, it was still higher than the side holding Hector's body. Achilles laughed.

Then somebody moved, high up on the walls. It was Cassandra, Hector's sister. She took a gold bracelet off her arm, and dropped it. Down and down it fell, turning in the sun.

It landed on the heap of gold. The body rose as the gold sank to the ground.

The Trojans took Hector's body away.

With Hector dead, there was no stopping Achilles. Every time the Trojans came out, he beat them back. The Trojans had other heroes, of course. There was Aeneas, Hector's brother, but he didn't have the same ability to encourage his men. The Trojans had seen Achilles kill their greatest fighter, and nobody was anxious to stand up to him. They began to stay in the city, and Achilles got in the habit of walking around the walls and shouting insults.

One day he went too far. "Look how strong I am," he called out. "I could even beat the gods."

The gods were already growing tired of Achilles, because of his treatment of Hector, and his refusal to listen to his mother, Thetis. On Olympus, Apollo heard Achilles, and rose to his feet.

At that moment, Paris was up on the walls, putting a poisoned arrow to his bow. Paris was a better Bowman than a fighter, but it was a long shot, and he let fly more in hope than expectation. But Apollo blew the arrow straight towards Achilles' foot. He was wearing the usual heavy sandals, which was perhaps a sign of how confident he was.

The arrow hit his left heel, the only weak part of his body. He looked down in disbelief, then the arrow's deadly poison began to work. There was a moment when you could see that he couldn't move his leg, while his arms beat about with the pain. Then he cried a great cry and fell to the ground.

He rolled about for some time, calling out in a loud voice, then was silent.

The Greeks burnt Achilles' body in front of the walls, while Paris went around the city telling everybody that he was the man who killed the great hero. Everybody knew this anyway, and they soon got tired of hearing it.

One day, after the funeral was over, Paris was up on the walls, shouting something. A Greek Bowman saw him and took aim with a poisoned arrow. A good Bowman can have three arrows in the air at the same time, and this man was very good. One of the three hit Paris, and that was the end of him.

And so the man who had started the whole thing left the field. But the war went on.

The death of Achilles left the Greeks in a sad mood. He was their greatest hero, and in that time between the death of Patroclus and his own death, he had turned the tide of the battles. Now there seemed to be no hope, just endless years of waiting in front of those high walls. However, some of them tried to think of a new way to win. Odysseus, who was one of the cleverest, thought he had an idea, but first he wanted to know more about the Trojans and their city.

He disguised himself as an ordinary slave, and slipped in through the gates one day when they were opened to let some soldiers in. Once inside, he spent a long time walking through the streets, watching the people pass by, and the Trojan guards up on the walls.

At one point, when he was near the royal palace, Helen looked down and recognized him. She hadn't seen him up close for many years, but they had once known each other well. She waved her hand, and he looked up. Then she made a sign for him to wait. A few minutes later, he saw her at one of the side doors. She was smiling.

Helen led him upstairs to her private room.

She stood and looked at him. "Odysseus, it has been such a long time." He nodded his head, not knowing quite what to say.

"I have no friends here now," she said, as if to gain his sympathy. "Not now that Hector is dead. His poor father is kind to me, but we can't talk much. He is an old man, and he still cries for his son Hector. And Achilles is dead too, our greatest hero."

"And Paris," Odysseus said.

"I don't miss Paris. Our love didn't last long. Odysseus, I didn't know what I was doing. I'm sure Aphrodite put a magic spell on me. I was happy with Menelaus."

Odysseus looked around the room. Over by the window there was a loom.

"Come and see," she said. "Keep back from the window."

On the loom was a picture of the death of Achilles. It was only partly finished. Achilles was huge, standing at the front with the arrow in his heel. High up on the wall there was a small figure that might have been Paris.

She showed him other pictures she had made, of the war and of her homeland of Sparta. Odysseus thought of Ithaca, where he had left his wife and family. It had been over ten years. Telemachus, his son, would be a young man now, almost. And Penelope would be an older woman.

He turned to look at her. "Listen, Helen, I think I know how we can win this war, and take you back to Menelaus, and your country."

The Wooden Horse

The next day, Odysseus told the other Greek leaders his plan. The Greeks pretended that they were going home. Some of the soldiers broke up their camps, loaded everything into the ships, and sailed away. However, they did not sail very far. There was an island nearby, and they hid the ships behind it.

Then Odysseus went into the forest with a shipbuilder called Epeius and some other men. They picked out fifty huge pine trees and cut them down. The Greeks used some of these trees to build a high wall on the plain.

Then the Greeks set to work, and they built a huge wooden horse. It was so big that thirty men could hide inside it. With Epeius and Odysseus in charge, the soldiers worked fast. Pine is soft wood and can be easily cut, and there were many in the Greek army with experience of shipbuilding.

The hair on the horse's head and tail was painted purple and gold, and valuable purple stones were used for its eyes. Under its legs were large wooden wheels so that it could be moved forward. When it was finished, it looked good enough to be a present for the gods. This was exactly what Odysseus wanted.

That night, he led thirty of his best soldiers up the ladder and into the body of the horse. They pulled the trap door shut behind them. They had brought food and water, and they now settled down to wait. One man, Odysseus' cousin Sinon, waited in the shade near the horse.

The rest of the Greeks got into their ships and sailed away. But they only went to join the other ships behind the island. Some men had climbed to the highest point. Now, lying hidden in the bushes, they watched to see what the Trojans would do when morning came.

On the ships, men also waited. Very few could sleep. They thought of their homes far away, of the wives and children they had left behind. It had

been a long war, and it was possible that Odysseus' idea would succeed where the strength and courage of Achilles and all the other soldiers had failed. They waited, and hoped.

When morning came, the Trojans on the walls saw that the Greeks had gone. There were no tents, no soldiers, and no ships. In their place, stood a huge wooden horse. A group of soldiers walked towards the horse.

Before they arrived, the city gates opened and a large crowd of people who had heard the news came running after them. They all stood around the horse. They looked at it and wondered why the Greeks had made it.

Then, an argument started between those who said it should be destroyed, and others who wanted to bring it into the city. A man called Laocoon stepped forward. He was priest of the sea-god Neptune, and he was very angry. "Are you mad?" he shouted. "Don't you know the Greeks well enough not to trust them? I fear the Greeks even when they bring gifts." Then he took a spear and threw it at the horse's side. It hit the wood, and a great hollow sound echoed around the crowd.

They might have listened to him, but then something else happened. A group of people dragged Sinon forward to the Trojan leaders. "We found him hiding in the bushes," somebody said. "He's a Greek," said another.

"What are you doing here?" said a Trojan leader. "Tell the truth and we'll let you live."

Sinon said that he had been left behind because Odysseus didn't like him.

"What about the horse?" the leader asked.

"It's an offering to Athena," Sinon said. "But a prophet said it must be left outside Troy. If it is taken into the city, nobody will defeat Troy."

It was all a lie, of course. There was no prophet, but the Trojans believed Sinon. The Greeks had gone, and they had nothing to show for over ten years of war except death and suffering. The horse meant that

they had at least taken something from the Greeks.

So all the musicians, singers, and dancers in the city came out. People pushed from behind, and the horse began to move. All the way to the city and through the main gate, there was shouting and cheering, songs and laughter.

Then people brought food and wine. The eating and drinking went on all day.

Inside the horse, Odysseus and his men waited for night to come.

High up on Mount Olympus, the goddess Athena looked down on Troy. She could see the end coming, and it was close. She thought of the help that she had given to Troy over the years. Was it all going to come to nothing? She decided to try one last time.

In the royal palace, Helen was making a new picture on her loom. It showed the wooden horse standing inside the gates of Troy. It didn't show that there were Greeks inside the horse, but Helen knew this. Aphrodite put a magic spell on Helen, and she got up from her loom.

She went down into the street. There was a soldier standing there, guarding the palace. After all the food and wine, he was as sleepy as everyone else. "Come with me," Helen said.

The soldier followed her, complaining a little. Helen went and stood below the horse. Then she called out to each of the Greek soldiers inside. Aphrodite's magic made her voice change with every name, so that it sounded like their wives and children. "Odysseus," she called, in the voice of his wife, Penelope. Inside the horse, Odysseus bit his lip. He knew it was a trick, but the tears came to his eyes all the same.

And so it was with all the Greeks inside the horse. They all cried when they heard the voices of the loved ones they had not seen for many years. Only one man started to answer back, but as soon as his mouth opened, Odysseus put a hand over it. After that, they all stood as still as statues while Helen called name after name.

Down below, the soldier yawned, and looked up at the stars. "There's no one there," he said. "I have to go back to the palace."

In the place where the Greeks had built the horse, Sinon had collected all the leftover pieces of wood and made them into a huge pile. Now he took a burning torch, and pushed it into the middle of the pile. The wood was dry and the fire spread quickly.

On the island, the Greek lookouts saw the red glow from the fire in the sky. They ran down to their ships.

The Fall of Troy

One by one, the Greek ships came round each end of the island and pointed their fronts towards Troy. Sinon went back inside the city and found a high place near the wooden horse. There he waited and watched. The night was clear, and he saw the ships when they were far away. He was the only one to notice. The guards on the walls were either drunk, or asleep.

When the first ships hit the beach, Sinon ran quietly across the courtyard, stood beneath the horse, and waved to the men above. A few seconds later, the trap door opened. A rope ladder was lowered and Odysseus climbed down. They embraced and exchanged a few words, then Odysseus led the first of the Greeks across to the main gate.

The guards died without ever waking up, and the Greeks began to pull open the heavy gates. The gates swung open and a great number of men came into the courtyard. A shout went up, which wakened many of the sleeping Trojans. Soldiers pulled themselves to their feet and looked around for their weapons, but it was already too late.

The Greeks ran everywhere through the city. They had ten years of anger inside them, and they killed every Trojan man they could find. Usually, they let the women and children live, but some of these died as well. Hector's baby son was dragged from his mother's arms and thrown down from the high walls to his death. In the royal palace, the old King Priam slowly put on his armor. His wife, Hecuba, came in and told him to stop. There were younger men to do the fighting.

Instead, Priam took his wife and his daughter to the temple of Zeus to pray. While they were standing there, the door crashed open and his youngest son, Polydorus, came in.

He was holding his stomach, and the blood ran through his fingers onto the floor.

Through the door after him came Pyrrhus, a son of Achilles. There

was blood on his sword. He didn't need to do any more. Polities took two or three steps towards his father, fell on the floor and died. He hadn't said a word. Priam said a word then, and it was a strong one. Then he picked up his spear.

With an old and weak hand, he threw it at Pyrrhus, who brushed it aside, stepped in, and killed Priam with his sword.

Hecuba, Cassandra, and Hector's wife Andromache became his prisoners that night. Helen was with them. He took her through the burning streets to Menelaus. They looked at each other, and held hands. Words would come later, but for the moment, neither of them spoke.

Later, with their ships loaded with treasure and Trojan women, the Greeks sailed for home. The gods were angry that so many Trojans had been killed, especially King Priam. They were thinking about ways to punish the Greeks.

Some of the heroes would take a long time to reach home. Some would not return at all.

- THE END -

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