

THE WOODEN HORSE

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Read by Natasha. Duration 12 Minutes.

The happiest day in the history of Troy was when the Greek army sailed away. For ten long years the war had raged, and many of the finest and bravest warriors on both sides, had fallen in battle. How the Trojans rejoiced as they walked along the shore where the Greek enemy had camped! Here, cruel Achilles had set up his tent. There, the arrogant King Agamemnon had commanded his men. And now, for the first time in their lives, the children of Troy could run and play in the foam of the sea, and teenage boys and girls could walk hand in hand beneath the cliffs.

But little did they realise, that the enemy army had not set sail for far-away Greece. Instead, they had only taken their ships to the other side of the island called Tenedos, and there they were lurking, out of sight, but still not far away. It was all a cunning trick thought up by the wiliest of the Greeks, the red haired Odysseus, who was never short of a plan.

The Trojans saw that the Greeks had left behind a strange offering. It was a giant wooden horse with ribs made from the planks of fir trees. The people marvelled at the massive statue, but there were

different opinions about what they should do with it. Some wise old men saw there was something not quite right about the horse, and advised that they should set fire to it straight away. Others warned that , the gods would be angry with them if they did not honour the statue. After all, the wooden horse was dedicated to grey-eyed Athena, the great goddess of wisdom, and nobody wanted to feel her wrath.

The crowd was wavering, and a white-bearded old Priest spoke out above the murmur. “Fellow citizens. Whatever this strange horse may be, remember this: it is always wise to fear the Greeks, especially when they are bringing gifts. By the Great God Poseidon, Lord of the Seas, and by everything that is sacred, let us not fall into this deadly trap, for that is what is surely is! ”

So saying, the old priest hurled a mighty spear at the horse, and and it flew into the beast’s side and quivered, and the guts of the horse reverberated with an eerie hollow sound like a long, deep moan. And had the Trojans decided there and then to set fire to that horse of death, their lovely city would be standing to this day, and the descendants of King Priam would be living in peace and happiness.

But just then, a Trojan patrol came upon the scene, and they brought with them a prisoner – a Greek called Sinon whom the army had left behind.

“Now we will find out the truth!” said the Trojan guards. “Let’s poke this wretched Greek spy with our bronze Spears until he tells us what this Greek gift is all about!”

When he heard this, the poor prisoner cried out: “No, please! Don’t harm me. I’ll happily tell you all you want to know, for cruel, scheming Odysseus is no more a friend of mine, than he is of you.”

And so the Trojans listened to what Sinon had to say, and they tried to fathom whether or not he spoke the truth.

“Do you not think that the Greeks would have gladly given up this war before ten long years had had passed? Let me tell you that many times they planned to leave their sufferings behind, as they have done no. . . But each time they prepared to sail way in their beaked black ships, the sea-god Poseidon sent a terrible storm, and whipped up giant waves on the wine dark sea. Eventually, they consulted a priest who told them the reason why the gods were inflicting such pain. You see, before he left his home in Argos, King Agamemnon, the great leader of men, waited an entire month for a wind to blow his ships to Troy. Eventually, he decided that the gods required a very special offering. And as usual, it was scheming Odysseus who thought up the plan. He sent for Agamemnon’s own daughter, his darling Iphigenia, and told her that she was to marry

swift-footed Achilles. She came with great joy and gladness in her heart, for Achilles was the handsomest and bravest of the Greeks, but it was all the most dreadful trick. Instead of marrying Achilles at the altar on the cliffs high up above the sea, the priest sacrificed the lovely white-skinned young maiden to the sea-god. And straight-away that the foul deed was done, the winds began to blow.

“Now, ten long years later, as we were waiting for a wind to take back home, Odysseus came up with another plan. “I know,” he said, “Let’s sacrifice the most useless of those among us. Nobody will miss Sinon. He has only ever criticised our plans, and called us leaders wicked and foolish. We once sacrificed an innocent young girl, now let’s give the gods the life of a man, and you’ll see, they will send us a fair wind to blow us swiftly home.”

“But before Odysseus sent his guards to fetch me to my death, a rumour reached me of what he had said, and I ran into the woods and hid. And so the Greeks came up with a second plan to appease the Gods. And you see the result before you. This magnificent wooden horse is their offering, to say how sorry they are for all the needless death and destruction they have caused. Only bring it inside your walls before night falls, because unless I am far wrong, there will be gold and treasure hidden deep inside the belly of that wooden horse.”

And when the Trojans had heard Sinon's tale, many of them were greedy for treasure, and they believed his wicked lies – for he spoke very convincingly. But still the crowd was uncertain what to do – until, that is, a most terrible thing happened. The old priest who had thrown his spear at the horse, was standing by the sea, when a great monster came swimming into shore and carried him off its jaws. It all happened in a flash, and the Trojans were filled with a strange terror.

Sinon once again called out: “You see, you Trojans. Nothing but the truth I spoke! The Gods have rightly punished that wicked old priest for sending his spear into the wooden horse!”

And now nobody dared to disagree. And the Trojans brought ropes and placed wheels beneath the statue's feet, so that they might pull the wooden horse through the gates of their magnificent city. And as the ill-omened procession entered Troy, girls and boys danced around the horse singing holy chants. There was rejoicing in the city, and even the fortune teller, Casandra did not dare open her lips, though she foresaw the imminent doom. For the gods had given Casandra the gift of clear-sighted prophecy, but had decreed that not one person would believe her.

It was a clear moon-lit night, and the Trojans carried on partying. Sinon the Greek had been set free, and

nobody noticed that he lit a fire on the beach to signal to the army on the island of Tenedos that the wooden horse was within the walls of Troy. Next he returned to the city, and opened a secret door in the belly of the horse. And the Greek band of warriors, who had been hiding all that time within, let down a long rope- and they were led to the ground, by wily Odysseus, who was the first of them to stand in the central square of magnificent Troy.

It was not long before the Greek intruders had surprised the guards on the main gates and killed them. Soon the wide doors were open, and the Greek army was surging into Troy. The Trojans were either drunk or sleeping, and in no way ready to fight. On every side the city was in turmoil. Soon the palace of King Priam was in the grip of fire, and Helen – the most beautiful woman in the world, for whom these ten years of war had been fought, was throwing herself at the feet of her Greek husband, King Menelaus, and protesting how she had been kidnapped and brought to Troy against her will. It was all lies, of course, but Menelaus was ready to believe his lovely wife, and took her once more in his arms.