

## The Wooden Horse

### The story of Odysseus in Troy

Long ago in Greece there was a beautiful queen called Helen. She should have been happy and content. Her King was kind and generous. She lived in a sumptuous palace with servants to look after her. But she fell in love with the handsome Paris, a prince from the city of Troy, and ran away with him.

The King sent a great army to bring her back. Commanded by the brave Odysseus, the soldiers surrounded the city of Troy. But, try as they might, they could not capture it. After nine long years of fighting, the soldiers were tired and wanted to go home. But Odysseus wanted to try just one more time to enter the city - and he had a cunning plan.

Odysseus called together his generals. Slowly he opened a scroll and laid it in front of them to see.

"Are you mad?" bellowed one general. "A wooden horse on wheels! How will that help us defeat the Trojans?"

"Look closely," said Odysseus, "and you'll see that it's a giant horse and it's hollow. There's enough space inside it for at least fifty soldiers."

"So what?" asked the general.

Odysseus lowered his voice.

"This is the plan," he whispered. "I'll hide inside the horse with my best soldiers. Then, when the Trojans become curious and take the horse into the city, we can capture Queen Helen."

"It's risky," said the general.

But all the other men know Odysseus was a great soldier. His plans usually worked.

"It's worth a try I suppose," said the general. "Start building it behind that hill so the Trojans can't see you!"

In a week, the giant horse was ready. At night, the other soldiers wheeled the horse to the gates of Troy. Odysseus chose fifty of the bravest soldiers and they all hid inside the horse. No one dared move in case they made a noise. All through the night the fifty soldiers sat absolutely still. At last, Odysseus heard a cock crow. It was morning. Just outside, he could hear the Trojans talking.

"Look! The Greeks have gone. They must have abandoned Queen Helen and gone home!"

Then someone spotted the horse.

"They've left a wooden horse behind!"

"Quick, bring it into the city," someone shouted. "Then we can have a closer look at it."

"No!" said someone else. "It could be a trick. Push it over the cliffs into the sea!"

Odysseus and his men held their breath and tried to keep calm. The wooden horse shuddered and started to move. The Trojans were pulling it along on its wheels - but which way was it going, into the city or over the cliff?

Odysseus knew how scared his men were. He wished he could say something to make them feel better but he didn't dare in case the Trojans heard him.

At last the horse stopped moving. Odysseus and his men could hear music and singing. The Trojans were celebrating their victory over the Greeks. For hours the beating drums echoed. Then gradually the noise stopped and everything went quiet.

"Are we in the city or out on the cliffs?" whispered one of the soldiers.

"I think we're in the city," Odysseus whispered back, carefully opening the trap door and peering out. He saw a few young men lying fast asleep on the paved ground with cups of wine in their hands.

"Yes, we're definitely in the city," he said. "Follow me!"

One by one the soldiers climbed down the ladder to the ground.

They followed Odysseus through the narrow streets of the city. Here and there men lay snoring in doorways. The Trojans had celebrated until they collapsed with tiredness.

"Where are we going?" asked one of the soldiers.

"We have to open the city gates and let in the rest of our soldiers," said Odysseus.

Quietly, they made their way through the streets, keeping their hands tightly on their swords. As they rounded a corner, there was a loud noise. The soldiers

turned around, their hearts beating faster than ever, but it was only a dog feeding on the leftovers from the feast.

Odysseus and his men hurried silently towards the city gates.

In the distance they could see that a Trojan soldier was still on guard.

"How will we get past him?" one of the men asked Odysseus. But as they grew closer and closer to the gates, they could see that the soldier was asleep at his post. Odysseus nodded to his men and they pulled back the huge wooden bolt that held the gates shut. It made a very loud creak. The guard began to stir. The soldiers looked at each other - was he about to wake up? But no, the guard simply turned over and continued to snore.

Slowly, the great gates of Troy swung open. Thousands of Greek soldiers poured into the city. They had captured Troy at last.

Queen Helen was taken back to Greece. In time, the King forgave her for running away, and Odysseus was remembered as a hero forever.

