The Odyssey

A HI-LO RETELLING

Retold from the novel by Homer



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CHAPTER 1

The Wooden Horse



It was dark inside the horse. It was hot, too, and it smelled of sweat and fresh-cut wood. Thirty men sat pressed together in the belly of a wooden horse, and not one made a sound.

One of them was Odysseus (say oh-DISS-ee-us), king of a small, rocky island called Ithaca (say ITH-uh-kuh). The horse had been his idea. He was the most clever of all the Greek kings, and this was his best trick yet.

For ten long years, the Greeks had fought the city of Troy. Troy had huge stone walls, and the Greeks could not get past them. Thousands of men had died on the plain outside the walls, and both sides were sick of war.

So Odysseus made a plan. The Greeks built a huge horse out of wood and left it on the beach outside the city. Then the rest of the Greek army got into their ships and sailed away. Or so it seemed, because really they hid their ships behind an island close by.

Now Odysseus waited. Through a crack in the wood, he watched the people of Troy come out to stare.

"The Greeks have gone home," they shouted. "The war is over, and we have won!"

"This horse is a gift for the gods," someone said. "Let's pull it into the city."

The horse began to move. It rolled and rocked and creaked, and inside, the men held on tight. One young soldier was shaking, so Odysseus put a hand over his mouth. If anyone made one sound, they would all die.

The horse rolled through the great gates. That night, Troy held a huge feast, and people danced until they fell asleep in the streets.

At midnight, Odysseus opened a secret door in the horse's belly. The men slid down a rope, one by one, and ran to the gates and threw them open. Outside, the whole Greek army was waiting, because the ships had come back in the dark.

By morning, Troy had fallen. The ten-year war was over at last.

Odysseus stood on the beach and looked out at the sea. He had only one thought in his head, and that thought was home.

He had twelve ships, with about fifty men on each one. They were fine wooden ships with one square sail, and painted eyes on each prow watched the waves. His crew cheered as they pushed off from the sand.

"Ithaca," they shouted. "We are going home to Ithaca!"

Far away on Ithaca, a woman stood on a cliff and looked out to sea. Her name was Penelope (say peh-NEL-oh-pee), and she was the wife of Odysseus. Beside her stood a boy of ten named Telemachus (say teh-LEM-uh-kus).

"Is that his ship?" the boy asked. He asked it every time he saw a sail.

"Not yet," said Penelope. "But he will come home to us."

Telemachus had been a baby when his father left, so he did not know his father's face. He only knew the stories. His father was strong and clever, and he was the best man in all of Greece.

Penelope took her son's hand. "Troy is not so far," she said. "The trip home will take a few weeks, or a month at most."

She was wrong. It would take ten more years, and the trip home would be far harder than the war.

Think about it

1. Why did the people of Troy pull the wooden horse into their city?
2. How many ships did Odysseus have when he set sail for home?
3. Penelope thought the trip would take a month at most. Why do you think the story tells us she was wrong right away?