

The Story of the Trojan war

Long ago, when the gods still walked the earth, a great feast was held to celebrate the wedding of Thetis and Peleus. All the gods were invited except Eris, the goddess of quarrels. The wedding feast was almost over when Eris stormed in. She threw a golden apple on the table. On it were written the words: "For the fairest." Each of the goddesses thought she was the fairest and should have the apple. All of them were very beautiful. Nobody could decide between them. They argued about it for years. At last the gods chose the three loveliest, and they decided to ask a human to judge between them. They chose Paris, the son of the king of Troy. He was very surprised one evening to see Hermes appear with three goddesses. They were: Hera, the queen of the gods; Athena, the goddess of wisdom; and Aphrodite, the goddess of love and beauty. "Congratulations, Paris!" said Hermes. "You have been chosen to judge which goddess deserves this golden apple for being the most beautiful."

Hermes and the goddesses agreed that Paris could give them his decision in the morning, so Paris went to bed. He was just falling asleep when Hera appeared. "Paris," she said, "if you give me the golden apple in the morning I shall make you the most powerful man on earth." Paris thought that might be rather nice. "Certainly, your majesty," he said. "I shall give you the prize tomorrow." Hera vanished in a blaze of peacock feathers. Paris scarcely had time to collect his thoughts when Athena appeared. "Paris," she said, "if you give me the golden apple in the morning I will make you the wisest man on earth." Paris thought that might be even better. "Then I shall give you the golden apple tomorrow, my lady," he said. Athena vanished with a flash of her grey eyes. Paris could hardly believe his good fortune. Then Aphrodite appeared. "Paris," she said, "if you give me the

golden apple in the morning I will give you the most beautiful woman in the world to be your wife.”

Next morning, when Hermes brought the three goddesses back for Paris’s decision, he marched straight up to Aphrodite and gave her the golden apple. The most beautiful woman in the world was called Helen, and she was married to the king of the Greeks. Paris visited the Greek palace. At night, with Aphrodite’s help, he stole Helen away and took her back to Troy. The Greeks sailed over to Troy to try to get her back. But Troy was a strong city with thick walls and brave fighters. Bravest of all was Paris’s brother Hector, who was kind and honourable. The Greeks’ best fighter, Achilles, was the son of Thetis and Peleus. He was fit and well trained. He had a suit of golden armour and some swords made by Hephaestus, the smith of the gods. And he was no ordinary warrior. When he was a baby his mother took him down to the River Styx, the river of the dead. She dipped him in the water, which made him invulnerable. His skin could not be broken. The only place he could be injured was his heel, because his mother was holding onto his heel so tightly that the water couldn’t get to it.

Unfortunately Achilles didn’t fight much. He sat in his tent sulking because somebody else had taken his slave girl. The other Greeks were very miserable. The war had been going on for ten years and they wanted to go home. The one man who could bring them victory wouldn’t even come out of his tent. At last Achilles’s best friend Patroclus decided to borrow Achilles’s famous golden armour. “Once I’ve got the helmet on nobody will know it’s me,” he thought. “They’ll think it’s Achilles, and we’ll beat those Trojans once and for all.” In the morning as the sun rose a golden figure stepped out of Achilles’s tent. Cheering, the Greeks followed him to the gates of Troy, where Hector was waiting for them. There was a terrible fight. At last Hector slipped his sword inside the golden breastplate and thrust it home. The golden figure fell to the ground dead. Hector took the helmet off. It wasn’t Achilles but poor Patroclus. Hector stripped off the golden armour and took it back to his palace. Next morning he was putting it on when his wife Andromache came in. “Hector,” she said, “don’t go out to fight today, you’ll be killed.”

“Don’t worry, Andromache,” said Hector. “I have this fantastic new armour.”

“If you go out fighting today Achilles will kill you,” said Andromache. At that moment the nurse came in with their baby, Astyanax. She held him up to Hector to be kissed goodbye, but the baby was frightened. Hector’s new helmet had a red plume that swished whenever he moved his head. So Hector took the helmet off and kissed the baby goodbye. “Think of Astyanax,” said Andromache. “Do you want him to grow up fatherless?” “Stop fussing,” said Hector. “I’ll be fine.” Andromache wept and held on to his arm but he took no notice, and he went off to fight the Greeks. When Achilles woke up and found that not only was his famous armour missing but his best friend was dead he was furious. He seized a sword and rushed out of the tent. Outside the gates of Troy stood a figure in golden armour. Achilles hacked his way through the ranks of Trojans until he reached Hector. They fought all day. At last Achilles slashed Hector across the throat. Hector fell to the ground dying. With his last breath he begged Achilles to return his body to his family so that they could have a proper funeral and release his soul. But Achilles tied Hector’s body to the back of his chariot and drove round the walls of Troy three times a day. Not only was Hector dead, but his family couldn’t lay his soul to rest. At last the king of Troy, Hector’s father, could bear it no longer. He slipped out of Troy at night and crept up the hill to Achilles’s tent. He talked about Achilles’s own father and how he would feel if Achilles had been killed. “I will ransom Hector’s body to you for its weight in gold,” said Achilles. Next morning a big set of scales was put up outside the gates of Troy. The Greeks put Hector’s body in one of the pans. The king’s servants came out with the money from the treasury and put it into the other pan. It wasn’t enough. They brought out the crown jewels. It wasn’t enough. The ordinary people of Troy brought out their bits of gold. It wasn’t enough. All the gold in Troy was weighed against Hector’s body. It wasn’t enough. Hector’s sister Polyxena was watching from the walls. She was wearing thin gold bangles, and she leaned forward, slipped them off and dropped them into the pan of gold. It was just enough to tip the balance. Slowly the pan with Hector’s body in it rose off the ground. So Hector’s family could have his body back; but it cost all the gold in Troy. After ten years of fighting the Greeks won, but only by tricking their way into Troy in a wooden horse