

The Wooden Horse

THE PLAY

Cast of Characters In Order of Appearance

Odysseus, king of Ithaca
Diomedes, nobleman
Menelaus, husband of Helen
Neoptolemus, son of Achilles
Epeius, master craftsman
Deiphobus, Trojan warrior
Antenor, Trojan warrior
Aeneas, Trojan warrior
Sinon, cousin of Odysseus
King Priam, king of Troy
Laocoön, priest
Cassandra, daughter of Priam
Helen, wife of Menelaus
Aphrodite, goddess of love and beauty

SCENE 1. In the Greek camp.

Present are Odysseus, Diomedes, Menelaus, and Neoptolemus.

[curtain]

Odysseus: Give a cheer! Let's hear it!

Men: Yea! Yea! [loud shouts of joy]

Odysseus: It is true that we were able to seize the palladium, the most sacred image of Pallas Athena. We have new hope.

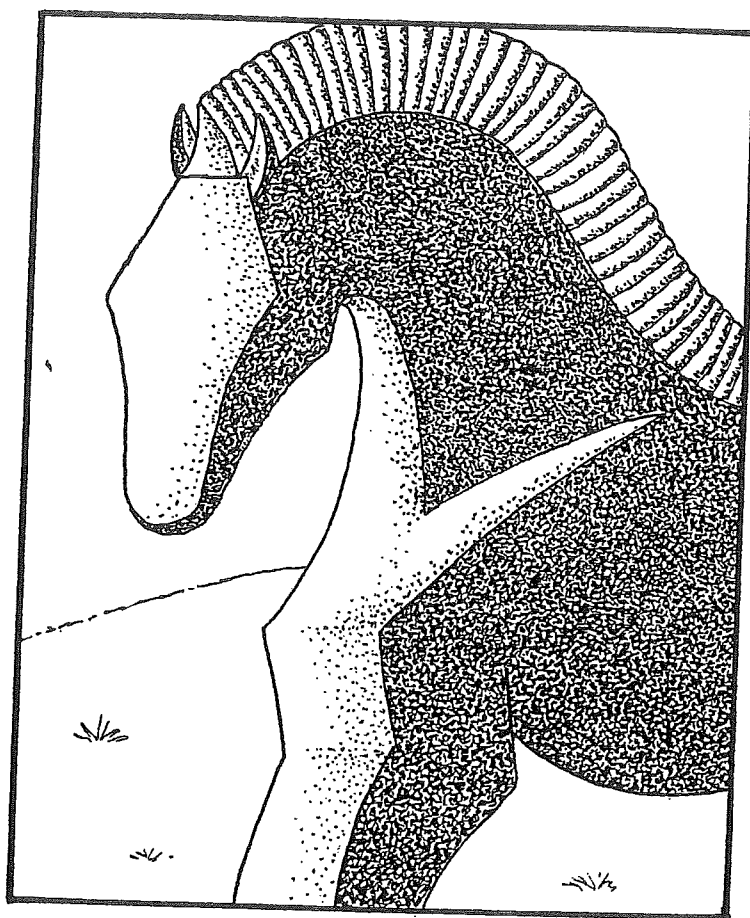
Diomedes: While the Trojans had this image inside their walled city, we were doomed. We could never have conquered them. This is a new beginning.

Menelaus: Yes, I feel revitalized. We should all rejoice. We should put our heads together and think this out. The stalemate has been going on too long. We must capture Troy.

Diomedes: All our fighting leads to nowhere. We must get inside the city of Troy. [all men shake their heads in agreement and then all look at Odysseus] You, Odysseus, the sharp-witted, can come up with a plan. Surely you can.

Odysseus: Yes, you are correct in saying that we must get inside, but whether you are correct in saying that I can come up with a plan is another story. Still, I'll give it a try. The city seems as strong as ever. The walls stand intact without injury. In fact, all the fighting has taken place some distance from the city. This makes it imperative that we get inside the walls. All the fighting of the past nine years and more has not won us victory.

Neoptolemus: If we try to go over the walls, we will be targets for their arrows. If we try to sneak in at night, the gates will be locked.



- Odysseus:** I have it. We will build a huge wooden horse—so big that it will hold a large number of men. Come let me show you what I have in mind. [men draw closer to Odysseus and watch him as he bends over table and sketches]
- Diomedes:** All right, so we build a horse. How does this help us?
- Odysseus:** Don't you see? We shall hide in it and think of some way to get the Trojans to bring the horse inside the gates.
- Neoptolemus:** Excellent idea. Now let's get down to details. Who will make the horse?
- Odysseus:** We have with us Epeius, who is a skilled craftsman. We will get him on it right away.
- Neoptolemus:** Epeius is a skilled craftsman? I can't believe it. He is so scared of his own shadow I wouldn't think he could hold a knife or hammer.
- Odysseus:** You underestimate his abilities. He may be middle-aged and actually not the most handsome fellow in the world, but he does have talent. That he seems frightened is true. But there is something in his background which makes him that way, I am sure. But we are not concerned with all that. We want him to build a wooden horse and that he can do. Believe me.
- Neoptolemus:** I believe you, Odysseus. It is just that Epeius just doesn't seem to have it.
- Odysseus:** Youth can be hard on an older generation. Take it easy. Give him a chance. He will be pleased to have his ability recognized and will work with speed and care. Neoptolemus, would you go outside and have word sent to Epeius that I want to see him at once. [Neoptolemus exits left] Once the horse is completed some of us will hide in the horse.
- Menelaus:** I don't want to seem a coward but I don't think this plan is feasible. It will only end in tragedy. If this is so I will never see my wife Helen.
- Odysseus:** Think positively.
- Diomedes:** I, too, think it is risky. Perhaps we should give it more thought. I really wouldn't want to be in that horse.
- Odysseus:** Forget it. You people told me to come up with a plan and now you are backing out before I have even started. Now listen to me. My plan is this: We shall take about eighteen men in the horse with us. All the others will be aboard the ships which the Trojans will see moving out to sea, but the ships will pull beyond the nearest island and hide. They will wait there until the men see that the horse is inside the city. If something goes wrong, the ships can head out to the high seas and home.

Menelaus: But what about those in the horse?

Odysseus: I've thought of that. Sinon will stay behind. He will pretend to be devastated because we left without him. He is most persuasive on any subject. We have nothing to worry about.

Neoptolemus: [entering from left] So what have you decided?

Odysseus: We will have about eighteen men in the horse.

Neoptolemus: Count me in.

Menelaus: Youth! Oh, to be young again! You are your father's son.

Odysseus: Yes, Achilles would be proud of you. You will be in the horse. You are the first one to show enthusiasm for the idea.

Diomedes: My enthusiasm is there, but somewhat dimmed by the thought of the big risk involved.

Epeius: [entering from left] Did you wish to speak to me, Odysseus?

Odysseus: Come in, Epeius, I have a big job for you. Come close while I explain the job and show you my design.

[dim lights for twenty seconds]

Odysseus: Very good. Then it is settled. Epeius, take as many men as you wish to help you. One very important factor is speed. So get with it.

Epeius: Right, royal leader, I will get started immediately, but I beg you not to assign me to be in the horse. I could not bear it.

Odysseus: Do you think it will not be safe? Would your structure be weak? What ails you, man?

Epeius: I live in fear. You know this.

Odysseus: We'll discuss this later.

Epeius: [exiting left] Yes, royal master. I'll get started on the project.

Diomedes: [to Odysseus] So what exactly is our plan? Let us go over it again.

Odysseus: Some of us will hide in the wooden horse which under the cover of night will be set outside the gates of Troy. The others will take the ships and go out to sea, anchoring just beyond Tenedos. We will leave Sinon in the deserted Greek camp to be discovered by the Trojans. He is so persuasive that I feel confident that he will convince Priam that we Greeks gave up and went home. Once the Trojans have pulled the wooden horse into the city, and all the Trojans are quiet for the night, we will lower ourselves from the trap door and charge the unsuspecting enemy.

[curtain]

SCENE 2. The deserted Greek camp.

Enter Deiphobus, Antenor, and Aeneas.

[curtain]

Deiphobus: This place is cleaned out. Burned to the ground. I saw the flames and smoke last night but I didn't dare come out to investigate. I thought perhaps the enemy was deliberately trying to draw us into battle. [pauses, looks around] It rather looks like they left in haste. I see here a cloak and here a quiver.

Antenor: Yes, it looks as though they did absent themselves without much preparation. Here are the remains of a meal. What could be the meaning of this?

Deiphobus: Come over here. This must have been the tent of Odysseus. A spy told me that it was situated right next to the riverbank and set among the trees.

Antenor: I learned too, that his tent had a great view of the sea, and over here I believe was where Agamemnon had his tent. According to my spies, Achilles' tent was here. This is where he did the major part of his sulking. It is a pity that when his mother was trying to make him invulnerable that she held him by the heel. Of course he was an enemy so I shouldn't really care, but I've often wondered if we had met under different circumstances whether or not we would have been friends.

Deiphobus: What circumstances could be more honorable than war?

Antenor: Try not to get into a philosophical discussion. We are out here looking for evidence about the Greeks. One thing is certain. They have left and they left in haste.

[enter Aeneas with Sinon staggering behind him]

Aeneas: We found this fellow behind that huge wooden horse, behaving in a most furtive manner. Stand up straight fellow and tell us who you are.

Sinon: Please spare me. Don't kill me. I beg you, spare my life.

Deiphobus: Why don't you take him to Priam? Let the king decide what to do with him. Mind you, don't let him go.

[curtain]

SCENE 3. Courtyard of Priam's palace.

Present are Priam, Sinon, Antenor, Cassandra, and Laocoön.

[curtain]

Priam: Stop the sniffing. Stand up like a man.

Sinon: But the Greeks all went away and left me. I was chosen to expiate the sins of the Greeks.

Priam: Expiate for what?

Sinon: [sobbing] Pallas Athena was very angry when Odysseus and Diomedes stole the Palladium. She said she had been dishonored.

Priam: So speak up quickly. What happened?

Sinon: Odysseus sent a man to visit the oracle and he came back with the news that one of us must be sacrificed and then the Greeks should head for home.

Priam: Yes, but why are you left alone here?

Sinon: The sacrificial rites were to be held just before they sailed away, but I escaped in the night and hid in a nearby ravine. Please spare me. I meant no harm to you. I have been betrayed by my own. Let the enemy show mercy.

Priam: Your story touches me. [pause] I believe you. Henceforth, you shall have no worries. You will be known as one of us. But tell me, why the wooden horse?

Sinon: That horse was made as an offering to Pallas Athena.

Priam: But why the size?

Sinon: Ah, your highness, that was so that you Trojans could not take it into the city. You see the Greeks hoped you would destroy it and bring down the wrath of Athena upon yourselves.

Priam: So that is it!

Laocoön: I would tread carefully here. Something does not seem quite right to me. I fear the Greeks even when they bear gifts.

Cassandra: I agree with you, Laocoön. There is something not quite right about this story.

Priam: We are not interested in what you have to say, Cassandra. I don't know why you keep offering suggestions when you are well aware that no one will pay attention to a thing you say. Just go to your room and stay there and let the men handle this situation.

[curtain]

Narrator: Poor Laocoön. No sooner had he spoken, when a dreadful serpent came up from the sea and glided straight to Laocoön. Wrapping his huge coils around Laocoön, he crushed the life out of him. The assembly watched in horror as the serpent slithered away, disappearing into Athena's temple.

SCENE 4. Inside the horse.

Present are Odysseus, Diomedes, Neoptolemus, Epeius, and Menelaus.

[curtain]

Odysseus: [speaking in stage whispers] Can you hear anything from the outside?

Diomedes: [ear to the trap door] Just barely. They seem to be arguing on how to move us.

Odysseus: That is news. That tells us that the Trojans believed Sinon's story and that we are going to be brought inside the gates. I feel some movement now. Hang on, men.

Neoptolemus: Shh-shh, I hear them now. They are trying to decide how to get us through the gate. It is too narrow.

Odysseus: Where is Epeius? I told him to sit by the trapdoor. I can't believe this. That fellow is impossible.

Diomedes: He is hiding over in a corner. Why did we bring him anyway? He is such a coward, but I suppose he cannot help it.

Odysseus: Since he designed the trapdoor, I thought it better for him to work it. Epeius, get up here and be a man.

Epeius: Sir, if you please, I can hardly move, I am so full of fright.

Odysseus: Don't stand. Just crawl over by that trapdoor and stay there.

Neoptolemus: [putting his ear to wall] The Greeks have decided to take the gates off and shave a small portion from the wall and then rehang the gates.

Odysseus: Get as comfortable as you can men. We will be here awhile. Pass the pouch of water around. I am sure we could all use some. It is mighty hot in here.

Diomedes: Did anybody bring any wine? Well, what a pity. Did anybody think to bring food? Food is an important part of my lifestyle.

Menelaus: Talking about it will not help.

[dim lights for a few seconds]

Odysseus: All right men! This is it. The horse has not been moved in many hours. The sounds of revelry have ceased. Any time now Sinon will give the signal to open the trapdoor.

Menelaus: I am still worried about the outcome of all this. My mind drifts from thoughts about Helen, long held captive by the Trojans, to problems we face right now.

Odysseus: I hear a faint rap on the trapdoor. Epeius, open the trapdoor slowly. (Epeius reluctantly opens door and Odysseus peers out) Yes, it is Sinon. Rejoice!

Narrator: The Greeks slipped out of the horse and immediately opened the gates of the city. The Greek army moved in silently and lit fires all over the city. Troy was almost completely destroyed before the citizens were fully awake. The Trojans had celebrated too much too soon.

[curtain]

SCENE 5. Helen's sitting room in the Trojan palace.

Present are Helen and Aphrodite.

[curtain]

Helen: [weeping] My dear husband will be killed. It is so many years since I have seen him. I don't know what to do. [wringing her hands]

- Aphrodite:** You must stop carrying on in this manner. You did the best you could under the circumstances. I do not think Menelaus will be killed. The war is almost over. In fact, it is over and very soon you will be reunited with your husband. I am sure that he knows you still love him and that your being here was not of your doing.
- Helen:** Do you think he knows I tried to help the Greeks? Odysseus, when he sneaked in here for the Palladium, knew that I recognized him. But I said nothing.
- Aphrodite:** Menelaus is not stupid. However, he is angry, but he will get over it. So stop this crying.
- Helen:** You are right. I must get myself together.
- Aphrodite:** Now quickly get your things. Get a cloak; it will be cold outside. Come quickly.
- Helen:** Thank you for helping me. I know my husband will repay you when all is over.
- Aphrodite:** Your husband always thanks the gods. And Helen, you must not forget to worship at my temple.
- Helen:** I will not forget, gracious goddess.
- Narrator:** And so Aphrodite helped in the reunion of Helen and Menelaus. When the morning came, what was once the glorious city of Troy lay smoldering from fires set by Greeks. The stories differ as to how many Trojan men survived the massacre, but we do know that Aeneas and Antenor did escape. The Trojan women were taken into captivity as slaves. The Greeks left victoriously but not without problems. Odysseus, as you already know, took ten years to reach Ithaca.
- [curtain]