

STORIES FROM THE ILIAD

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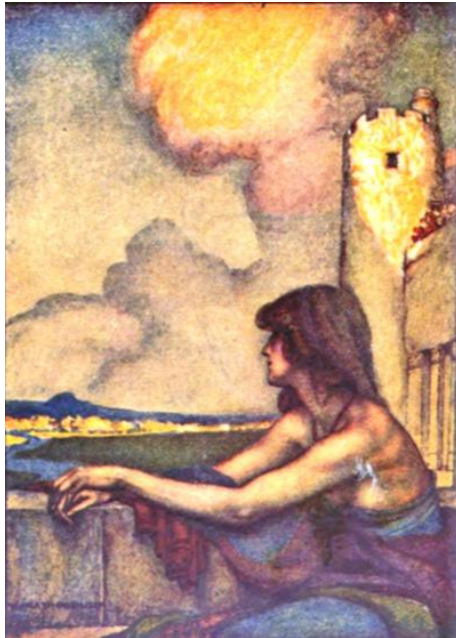
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STORIES FROM THE ILIAD

NOTE

I have to acknowledge my indebtedness to Mr. Ernest Myers, Mr. Walter Leaf, and Mr. Andrew Lang for their translation of The Iliad, of which free use has been made in this little book.

J. L. L.



Into the sleeping heart of Helen there came remembrance

TO
HUGO MEYNELL CYRIL IONIDES
AND
INGRAM AMYAS IONIDES

ABOUT THIS BOOK

For two Greek boys have I made this little book, which tells them in English some of the stories that they soon will read for themselves in the tongue of their forefathers.

But the stories are not only for boys whose fatherland lies near the sunny sea through which ships, red-prowed and black, fared in the long-ago days.

Of such great deeds, by such brave men, do they tell, that they must make the hearts of all English boys, and of boys of every nation under the sun, grow big within them.

And when, in the gallant-sounding music of the Greek tongue in which the tales first were told, these boys read the story of the Siege of Troy, they must surely long to fight as fought the Greeks in days of old, and long to be heroes such as those who fought and who died without fear for the land that they loved.

JEANIE LANG.

THE STORY OF WHAT LED TO THE SIEGE OF TROY

In the deep forest that clothes Mount Ida, not far from the strong city of Troy, Paris, son of King Priam, watched his father's flocks by night.

Suddenly through the dim woods he saw a light, as if the golden sun and silver moon shone both together.

And, lo! in the radiance of this light there stood before him the three fairest of the goddesses—queenly Hera, wise Athene, and lovely Aphrodite.

Like music stealing through the trees came the soft voice of Hera:

‘Of all mortal men art thou the most beautiful, Paris, and to thee do we come for judgment. Tell us which of us is the fairest of all, and to that one whom thou so deemest, give this golden apple.’

So spake Hera, and placed in the hand of Paris an apple of purest gold.

Again she spake: ‘If to me, Hera, queen of goddesses, and wife of mighty Zeus, king of all the gods, thou dost grant the prize of loveliness, Power immeasurable shall be thine. King shalt thou be of the lands where the grey dawn rises, and king even to where the red sun goes down. A hundred peoples shall call thee lord.’

She was silent, and the voice of Athene, fair and pure as a silver moonbeam, broke the stillness of the starless night.

‘To me award the prize,’ she said, ‘and wise as the gods shalt thou be. With me as thy friend and guide, all things will be possible to thee.’

Last of all, standing in a rosy light, as of the dawning sunlight in the spring, spoke Aphrodite.

‘What are Power and Wisdom, fair Paris?’ she pled. ‘Wisdom and Power bring no joy at last. I will give thee Love, and for thy wife thou shalt have the fairest woman in all the world.’

And Paris, the melody of her voice still in his ears, as he gazed spellbound on her face of wondrous beauty, handed to Aphrodite the golden prize.

So was it that the wrath of the gods came upon Paris, son of Priam. For Hera and Athene, filled with rage, vowed to be revenged upon Paris and all his race, and made all the gods pledge themselves to aid them in their vengeance.

Across far seas sailed Paris, with Aphrodite as his guide, to Sparta, where Menelaus was king.

A brave king was Menelaus, and happily he lived in his kingdom with Helen, his queen, fairest of all women. One child they had, a little maid, Hermione.

When to Sparta there came Paris, with eyes blue as the sea, and hair that gleamed like gold on his purple robe, gallant and brave, and more beautiful than any mortal man, glad was the welcome that he had from Menelaus.

And when Paris gazed on Helen’s face, he knew that in all the world there was no woman half so fair as the wife of Menelaus.

Then did Aphrodite cast her magic upon Helen.

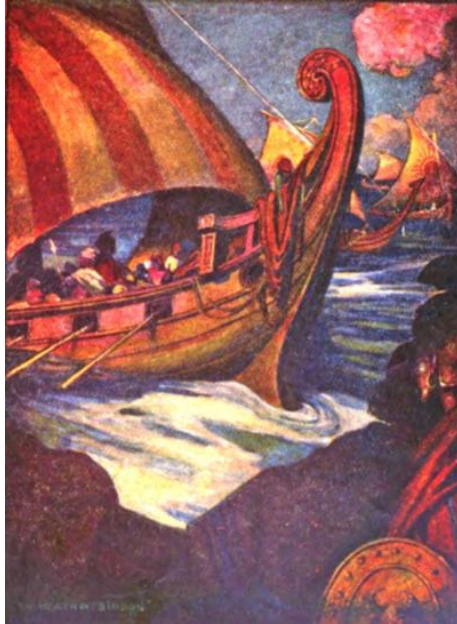
No longer did she love her husband, nor did she remember little Hermione, her own dear child.

When Paris spoke to her words of love, and begged her to flee with him, and to be his wife, she knew only that she loved Paris more than all else. Gladly she went with him, and in his red-prowed ship together they sailed across the green waves to Troyland, where Mount Ida showed her snowy crown high above the forests.

An angry man was Menelaus when he found that Paris had stolen from him the fair wife who was to him as his own heart.

To his elder brother Agamemnon, overlord of all the Greeks, he went and told his grievous tale.

And from far and wide did the Greek hosts gather, until a hundred thousand men and eleven hundred fourscore and six ships were ready to cross the seas to Troyland.



Many were the heroes who sailed away from Greece

Many were the heroes who sailed away from Greece to punish Paris and his kin, and to bring back fair Helen to her own land.

Few there were who came home, for ten long years of woe and of spilling of blood came to the men of Greece and of Troy from the fatal beauty of Helen the queen.

CHAPTER I

HOW ACHILLES AND AGAMEMNON FELL OUT

Before the walls of Troy the Greeks set their camp, and day by day and night by night did they besiege it.

One day would the Greeks win the fight, and the next day the Trojans would be victors in the battle.

And so passed nine long years away. To the city of Chryse one day went part of the Greek host, sacked it, and brought back to their camp rich spoils and many prisoners.

Among the prisoners was a beautiful maiden, Chryseïs, daughter of the old priest of the Temple of Apollo. Her did Agamemnon choose as his part of the spoil, to be his slave.

From Chryse, seeking his daughter, came the old priest. With him he brought a rich ransom to buy the freedom of Chryseïs, and in his hands he bore a golden staff wrapped round with the garland worn by Apollo, to show that the god whose priest he was, was with him in craving a boon from Agamemnon, overlord of the Greeks.

‘Take this ransom, I pray you, and set ye my dear child free,’ pled Chryses, ‘and the gods will grant you to lay waste the city of Troy, and to fare happily homeward.’

Then the Greeks gladly agreed that Chryseis should go home with her father, and that the goodly ransom should be theirs. But Agamemnon, in great wrath, drove the old man away.

‘Let me not find thee, old man, lingering here beside the ships, lest the golden staff and garland of the god help thee naught!’ he cried. ‘Your daughter shall grow old as my slave, and never more return to thy land. Get ye gone!’

Silently along the shore of the sounding sea walked Chryses the priest.

Alone he knelt down and prayed to Apollo, his god.

‘Hear me, god of the silver bow!’ he cried. ‘If I have built thee a temple that is fair in thine eyes, and have offered unto thee there the flesh of bulls and goats, hear me! Let the Greeks be paid by thine arrows for my tears!’

High up amongst the peaks of Olympus Apollo heard the prayer of his priest, and great anger filled his heart.

As dark night falls upon the earth, so did the god come to where Agamemnon and his armies lay. A little apart from the ships he sat down, and drew back with a dreadful clang the string of his silver bow.

Mules and dogs fell at first before his arrows of death. Then he smote men.

For nine days did the Greeks fall dead at the will of the avenging god. For nine days did the black smoke from the funeral pyres of the Greek warriors roll out to sea.

On the tenth day Achilles, son of a mortal warrior and a goddess, fleetest of foot and bravest of all Greek heroes, called an assembly of the Greeks.



Achilles, fleetest of foot, and bravest of all Greek heroes

‘War and pestilence ravage us,’ he said. ‘Surely it is time to inquire of a priest or soothsayer why it is that Apollo is so wroth.’

Then Chalcas, wisest of soothsayers, arose and spoke.

‘These woes have come upon us,’ said he, ‘for the wrong that Agamemnon hath done to Chryses, priest of Apollo. With his arrows of pestilence Apollo will not cease to slay until we have given the bright-eyed Chryseis back to her father, unbought and

unransomed, and have taken a hundred beasts and offered them up at Chryse as a sacrifice to the angry god.’

So spake Chalcas, and sate him down.

There uprose then from his seat the great Agamemnon, black anger in his heart, and with eyes flashing fire.

‘Ill prophet art thou indeed, Chalcas!’ he cried. ‘Naught but evil hast thou ever foretold to me! I would not take a goodly ransom for Chryseïs, because I love her even more than I love my own wedded wife. Yet will I give her back, rather than that my people should perish. But another prize must I have! Why should I alone, of all the Greeks, have my prize taken from me? It is not seemly that it should be so.’

‘Nay, nay! most noble Agamemnon,’ said Achilles. ‘Too greedy art thou for gain. We have no common store of treasure with which to repay thee for that thou hast lost. What spoil we got from the cities we have taken hath already been divided. Nay, give back Chryseïs to her father, and when next we sack a city, thine shall be the richest spoil of all.’

‘Dost seek to cheat me, Achilles?’ answered the angry Agamemnon. ‘Wouldst thou rob me of my prize and give me naught instead? If thou wilt not give me the reward my honour seeks, then will I seize it for myself—be it thine, or that of Odysseus, or the spoil of any other; wroth will be he to whomsoever I come. But of this hereafter. Now let us launch a black ship on the sea, and in it embark Chryseïs of the fair cheeks, and with her send an offering of beasts, that Apollo the Far-Darter may have his sacrifice.’

Then Achilles, with black brows, looked at Agamemnon.

‘Shameless art thou!’ he cried, ‘shameless and crafty. For thy sake and that of Menelaus thy brother left I my home and fared across the seas to fight in Troyland. And now thou, dog-face! dost threaten to steal from me the spoil that I have won for myself by weary toil and by hard fighting. Home will I go, for I have no mind to fight for one who is greedy for riches and wealth, and cares not if I am dishonoured.’

‘Flee, then, if thou wilt,’ answered Agamemnon. ‘Others I have as brave as thee, and ready to do me honour. Most hateful art thou to me, Achilles. Ever thou lovest strife and wars and fightings. I care not for thee and thy wrath; and this I tell thee: to thy hut I myself will go and take from thee Briseis, fairest of all thy slaves, that thou may’st know that I, Agamemnon, am thy lord and ruler.’

Mad with anger was Achilles at these words. His hand gripped his sword, and he would have slain Agamemnon, had not the goddess Athene stayed his hand.

‘Why art thou come hither?’ angrily asked Achilles, as he looked round and beheld the goddess at his side. ‘Art thou come to see the insolence of Agamemnon? Yea, I tell thee, through pride shall he lose his life.’

Gently then did Athene speak to him.

‘To stay thine anger I came from far Olympus,’ said she. ‘Goodly gifts shall come to thee hereafter, Achilles. Only stay thine hand and listen to me.’

Then said Achilles:

‘Goddess, a man must needs listen to thee and do thy bidding, for the man who obeys the immortal gods will also be heard of them.’

Therewith did he grip his sword by its silver hilt and thrust it back into its sheath; yet again he spoke in wrath to Agamemnon.

‘Thou with face of a dog and heart of a deer,’ he said, ‘never hast thou fought as men should fight for the spoil! Rather dost thou seize the booty for which thy men have risked their lives. Surely these thy warriors are weaklings, else this should have been thy last wrong. But this I swear by my sceptre which was once a tree, but never more shall put forth leaf or twig; as surely as that sceptre shall never again be green, so surely shall the Greeks one day long for Achilles when they fall in heaps dying before the manslaying Hector. Then shalt thou tear thy heart for anger, for that thou didst not honour the bravest of thy warriors.’

So spake Achilles, and dashed on earth his sceptre, studded with golden nails, while near him sat Agamemnon, in furious anger.

With gentle words then spoke Nestor, an old warrior of a hundred years and more, longing to make peace.

But of peace Agamemnon and Achilles would have none.

‘Ye may take back my slave, the fair Briseis,’ said Achilles. ‘The Greeks gave her to me; let the Greeks take her from me again. Yet that moment that thou dost dare to lay hand on aught else of mine, thy dark blood shall gush about my spear.’

Then was the assembly at an end, and on a fleet ship Chryseïs of the fair cheeks was placed, and with her were sent a hundred beasts for a sacrifice to Apollo. With them went Odysseus and a goodly company, and they sailed across the sea to Chryse, to bring back to

Chryses the priest his fair daughter, and to offer a worthy sacrifice to the angry god.

Then did Agamemnon call his heralds to him.

‘Go ye to the tent of Achilles,’ said he, ‘and bring me Briseis, his fair slave.’

Unwillingly they walked along the beach to where the tent of Achilles was pitched. By it he sat, and well, and with a heavy heart, he knew when he saw them what their errand was.

‘Welcome, ye heralds,’ he said. ‘Ye are not guilty in my sight. Guilty only is Agamemnon who sent you to rob me of the fair Briseis. Lead her away, yet be witnesses that when Agamemnon hath sore need of me to save his host from shameful wreck, no help from me shall he have.’

Unwillingly Briseis was led away, and Achilles watched her go.

Then sitting alone on the beach of the grey sea, Achilles wept.

With eager gaze his eyes swept across the waste of water, and holding out his hands in supplication he cried to his mother, Thetis the silver-footed, daughter of the King of the Sea.

Like a mist Thetis rose from the depths of the green sea-waves, and came to her sorrowing son.

Gently she stroked his hand, and spoke to him soothing words.

‘Why dost thou weep, my child?’ she said. ‘Tell me all the sorrow that is in thy heart.’

To his goddess-mother Achilles told the tale of the grievous dishonour that Agamemnon had done to him, and for rage and for grief Thetis wept with her son.

‘Short is to be thy life, my son,’ she said. ‘Would that I had never borne thee, rather than that it should also be full of grief.’

Then did she leave him, but at dawn next day she rose from the sea and mounted up to Olympus.

‘Father Zeus,’ she said to the king of the gods, ‘if ever I have given thee aid amid gods or men, fulfil now my desire. Do honour to my son, whose life on earth is to be so short. Grant victory to the Trojans while Achilles does not draw his sword. Grant that at last the Greeks may do honour to him to whom Agamemnon hath brought such bitter shame.’

Then did Zeus bow his head and grant her prayer.

And Thetis the silver-footed darted like a diving bird down from Olympus, and cleft the green waves as she went back to her father in his kingdom under the sea.

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