

A Story of Troy Polyxena

H.Allenger

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For thousands of years, history has repeated the names Odysseus, Achilles, Paris, and Hector, recounting their glorious deeds in the annals of time. Women in these epics are only mentioned in brief passages, despite their influence. H. Allenger attempts to rectify the historical record by presenting *A Story of Troy Polyxena*, which includes a bold addition to the ancient list of heroes.

Polyxena, the seventeen-year-old princess of Troy, is sent on a mission to convince the mighty Amazon women to lend their aid against the Greeks. During her stay, her ingrained belief in the supreme right of men to rule over women is shaken to the core, since the Amazons rule themselves and don't even keep men in the same village. Polyxena experiences the confusion and sweet chaos of a first romance, only to find herself separated from her lover through battle.

When the legendary Achilles—Troy's greatest enemy, the man who slaughtered three of Polyxena's brothers—offers to escort the princess back to Troy in safety, she has no intention of falling in love with him. But Aphrodite has other plans for the two. The outcome of their affair triggers a series of events that lead to the ultimate downfall of Troy, and to Polyxena's introspective reminiscing about what she could have changed to save her beloved city.

The author demonstrates a brilliant ability to create logical justifications for outrageous actions. For example, the world remembers that the Greeks went to war against Troy in order to rescue Helen from Paris, but Allenger reminds readers that King Agamemnon would have gone to war one way or the other; Helen's recovery was just a convenient excuse. Likewise, a Trojan princess falling in love with a Greek murderer makes little sense, but the circumstances in which it happens are perfectly reasonable. Rather than judging the characters' actions, the reader finds himself sympathizing instead. This would not be possible without Allenger's strong cast of female characters, who are believable, intelligent, and charmingly flawed.

Allenger infuses his tale with the same age-old moral dilemmas as Homer and Virgil, focusing especially on the free will versus fate theme, which invites readers to decide if Polyxena's tragedy was constructed by the gods or by her own naïve but goodhearted intentions. The author doesn't try to guide her decisions by imposing modern ideals; she is very much Trojan, and she thinks and acts as a woman of that era. The resulting conflicts are both realistic and deeply human.

Polyxena should be recommended reading for history courses because it brings vivid energy to dry facts. Though not a history book, it tells the story of a young girl trying to find her way through uncertainties while still balancing her duties to her people and her heart. It has all the elements of a bestseller—intense action, thought-provoking insight, romance, philosophy, emotional dilemmas, and a surprise ending—woven together through meticulous research. Even the cover is eye-catching, as are the decorated chapter titles, which serve to add yet another layer of enjoyment to an already delightful novel.

EMILY ASAD (February 21, 2013)

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