



The following day, his mind whirling with thoughts of Helen, Paris strode off toward Troy. An athletic competition was to be held there that afternoon. His foster father tried to dissuade him but ended up walking with him to the city. It was the first time Paris had set foot in Troy.

He began the competition by entering the boxing contest, and to the surprise of all, defeated Priam's sons. The proudhearted princes were unaccustomed to losing. Yet Paris flew past them in the footrace as well. At once they demanded a second race to be run. Paris left them behind again. Infuriated, they decided to kill him and drew their swords. Paris dashed for his life. His foster father threw himself before Priam. "Stop them, your Majesty!" he cried. "That youth is your own lost son!"

Priam recognized the old man, halted his sons, and rushed up to Paris. He stared into his face. Hecuba followed. The herdsman produced the silver rattle he'd found in the infant's hand years before. The king and queen knew it at once. Both burst out weeping, clutching Paris.

The old herdsman had feared he'd be punished. But that night, Priam invited him to a magnificent banquet to mark his son's return. When the seer Calchas heard the news, he and Apollo's other priests again warned the king to put Paris to death.

"Never!" replied Priam. "Better that Troy should burn than that my precious son should die!"

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Paris exchanged his dirt-floored hut for a room of polished stone in the palace. Soon afterward, Menelaus, king of Sparta, chanced to visit Troy. Knowing that he was Helen's husband, Paris prodded him, heart pounding, to describe his bewitching wife. He so shrewdly cultivated the king's friendship that Menelaus invited the prince to accompany him home and be his guest in turn. Feverish with joy, Paris accepted.

Aphrodite sent their ship fair winds. They reached Sparta and marched up toward the palace. A woman stood in wait. Paris approached, then halted in awe. Flesh bested fancy. She had the grace of a deer and a dewdrop's radiance. He feared that such an earthly wonder would take no notice of a cowherd-prince. Had Aphrodite cast her promised spell? He watched as the queen embraced her husband. The goddess, however, had been true to her word. Helen set her eyes upon Paris and fell instantly, irresistibly in love.

For nine days Paris feasted with his hosts. He yearned to shout out his love for Helen and wrote her name in wine spilled on the table. Menelaus, cast down by the news that his father had just died in Crete, took no notice. On the tenth morning, he departed for the funeral.

The lovers exulted at their good fortune. Paris had first imagined Helen, then beheld. At last he'd be able to touch her. Love-maddened, the two decided to leave Sparta that night and never return.



In darkness the pair carried the palace treasures aboard their ship and set off. They headed for Troy, but Hera, pouncing on the chance to punish Paris for denying her the golden apple, raised a great storm that blew them far off course. Landing at Cyprus, they stayed several months, fearing Menelaus lay in wait off Troy. They then sailed to the city of Sidon, whose king Paris murdered and whose coffers he emptied, adding vast stores of gold to their hold.

At last they reached Troy, welcomed by cheers and celebrations. The Trojans were dazzled not only by the riches but by Helen, more exquisite than any gem. Entranced, they swore never to see her returned. Hadn't the Greeks refused to send back Priam's own sister, carried away from Troy by a band of Greeks years before? As for the priests who'd joined Calchas in urging that Paris be killed, Paris silenced them with generous gifts of gold to Apollo's temple.

Only one voice was raised against Paris. It came from his own sister, Cassandra, a prophetess who'd been doomed by the god Apollo never to be believed. Over and over she'd warned Priam not to let Paris travel to Sparta. Now she declared that a frightful war would result unless Helen were sent back at once. The king listened patiently to his daughter. Then, as he had many times before, he sent her away, ignoring her words.