



## Prologue The Judgement of Paris

LONG, long ago, there was a rich and splendid city called Troy. Surrounded by high walls like a fortress, it commanded a great stretch of the country known to us as Turkey, and was famous throughout the ancient world for its wealth and power.

Old King Priam was its ruler. He and his Queen, Hecuba, had many children, but among them was one who was fated to destroy them all.

The warning came even before the child was born. Queen Hecuba dreamt that she had given birth, not to a human child, but to a blazing torch, a firebrand. In a terrifying instant she saw the flames leaping over the whole city of Troy. She awoke, screaming, to a safe, calm world, and gave birth to a healthy boy. They called him Paris.

Paris was a remarkably pretty baby, but his elder sister, Cassandra, shrieked when she saw him and flung herself savagely on his tiny body. "Kill him!" she cried. "He will burn down all of Troy! Kill him, before he murders us!"

Everyone knew about Cassandra, but no one spoke of her much, except in whispers. Some said the god Apollo had robbed her of her wits. Everyone pitied her, soothed her rages, and ignored her words.

This time, however, Hecuba could not dismiss her

daughter's fearful warning, for she remembered her own nightmare of the fiery torch. She spoke urgently to King Priam.

"We must know the will of the gods. Let us consult the oracle, my lord."

The message was sent. Queen Hecuba waited, knowing the answer in her heart.

"The oracle advises you to expose this child without delay. He must die, abandoned on the mountainside, or he will bring death to Troy."

The baby was bundled up at once, and a servant was instructed to leave him in the woods. But when the man came back a few days later to see what had happened to the child, he found Paris alive and happy, being licked and nuzzled by a family of bear cubs.

"The gods want this child to live," thought the servant; and he took Paris home to his wife.

So Paris grew up as a humble country lad, and became a handsome youth, popular among his fellow villagers. His daily task was to mind sheep and goats on the hillsides, and his greatest pleasure was playing his shepherd's pipe. He never gave a thought to the royal house of Troy.

On one such carefree day a strange young man appeared – from nowhere – and declared that he was Mercury, the messenger of the immortal gods. Paris believed him: his skin shone silver, his shoes and cap were winged, and a living snake twisted about his staff.

"By the will of almighty Jupiter, king of gods and men, lord of thunder and lightning, you must judge the fairest of three goddesses and settle the quarrel that disturbs the peace of Olympus, home of the gods."

Paris had no time to collect his thoughts. Somewhere



behind him, a female voice proclaimed loudly, "Of course, the prize is mine. I am Juno, the Queen of the gods!"

"No! I am the loveliest by far!" said a second, softer voice.

"You are just empty-headed, Venus," a third retorted, in deeper tones. "No one could call you fair."

Paris spun round. Three ladies, all astonishingly beautiful, hovered just above the grass before him. The sheep were huddled in frozen panic by the stream.

"Choose me, Paris," said royal Juno, "and I will make you king of a mighty empire."

"Choose me," said grave Minerva, "and I will make you the wisest man on earth."

"Choose me," Venus only murmured, "and I will give you the loveliest woman in the world to be your wife."

Paris did not hesitate. He told himself later that the bribe had nothing to do with it; Venus was, in any case, the most beautiful goddess of all.

So Paris won the loveliest woman in the world. Unfortunately she was already the wife of another man. Her name was Helen, and her husband was Menelaus, King of the city of Sparta, far away in Greece.

Paris did not remain a shepherd for long. An athletic contest was held in Troy, and Paris, like hundreds of other young men, went up to the city to take part. His looks and his skill at sports would have attracted attention in any gathering, and no one was surprised when he was selected for presentation to the King and Queen. Shy and conscious of his rough clothes, he was led into the royal presence.

"Ah, the young man from . . .," Priam began. Someone rushed through the crowd, flung herself on Paris, and

scratched his face, howling, "Kill him! Kill him! He brings death to Troy!"

Embarrassed servants pulled Cassandra away. King Priam fussed around the astonished youth, wiping the blood from his cheeks, repeating explanations and apologies. The Queen sat very still. But when the commotion was over she rose and approached the young man. Calmly, with resignation, she kissed him. "You are my son, Paris," she said in a clear voice for all to hear. "The gods have willed that you should live. Welcome home."

So Paris was restored to the royal house. He did not take long to learn the ways of princes, though his elder brother Hector found him too gentle for the warlike arts of sword and spear. He took his share of royal duties, entertaining foreign visitors and hearing embassies from overseas.

The day came when he sailed to Greece, to visit Menelaus, King of Sparta, in a royal party which included his cousin, Aeneas, and many other high-born Trojans. Menelaus and his Queen, Helen, welcomed them with splendid hospitality.

A few days after the arrival of the Trojan embassy, Menelaus was called away to Crete, where his grandfather had died. When he returned home, the Trojans had gone, taking with them much treasure, and Helen, Queen of Sparta.

Menelaus was beside himself with fury and hurt pride. He went at once to his brother, Agamemnon, the mighty King of Mycenae. Together they sent messages to the kings of every city in Greece, urging them to gather their armies and prepare for a great war against Troy.

The war raged for ten years. It ended with Troy sacked and in flames, Priam, Hector and Paris dead, and Hecuba

and her daughters dragged off to miserable slavery.

A small group of survivors, led by Aeneas, whose mother happened to be the goddess Venus, escaped from the burning city. This book tells the story of their adventures.