



# THE TRIAL OF PARIS



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*by*

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IN THE NAME OF GOD,  
THE MOST GLORIOUS, THE MOST PURE.



PART ONE

# THE HYPNAGOGIANS



## HYPATIA

IN THE WALLED GARDEN far from the city's noise and dust, I came upon two masters, Ibn Ganas and al-Doushu, engaged in spirited argument. I heard only a little of what they were saying, and gave no thought to their discussion since they both had strong opinions and were passionate debaters, though excellent friends and companions to one another. My own opinions I kept as my own since it is not wisdom to share the bread of one's thought with those who feast at better tables. Ibn Ganas was a scientist in the tradition of the ancient Greeks. Al-Doushu was a philosopher of renown. I was not fit company for them. Both were teachers, whose teachings I cherished, though I found myself not always in agreement with them. Younger than they, I knew I could not command the respect they reserved for one another.

Yet on this day, they took me aside, pausing their discussion, and Ibn Ganas said this to me: "Stay a moment, Ibn Tamam. Perhaps you are acquainted with the story of Hypatia of Alexandria, her extraordinary gifts and her shameful death at the hands of Christians."

I knew the story of Hypatia, having heard Ibn Ganas recount it before. Her city was a wonder of the ancient world. Historians recalled this wonder as the lighthouse at Alexandria, that magnificent beacon standing on the island of Pharos; yet it was for other lights that Alexandria is better remembered.

Alexandria was a garden of knowledge cultivated by scholars like Hypatia, an unbarred treasury of learning and arts, a beacon of spiritual and intellectual light kindled by wise rulers and tolerant people. But during Hypatia's life, the light of that city failed. Though the lighthouse stood another thousand years, the city was plunged in darkness. Ignorance and fanaticism blighted the people, spreading like fever among them. They burned the great library of Alexandria in the name of Truth and murdered its keepers in the name of Salvation.

When their thirst for blood had been slaked, the tired rabble shambled to their homes. Their shadows vanished in the faltering light of a bonfire fueled by precious scrolls, manuscripts and tapestries. That fire left only cinders, like constellations of dying red stars, scattered among Hypatia's blackened bones.

Early in the afternoon, they had dragged her from her carriage. In the church they called holy, they fell upon her like animals, tearing at her with jagged pieces of broken tile, cutting at her flesh until the tiles cracked and chipped on bone.

Days after, they spread rumors that Hypatia, facing death, embraced the Christian faith, embraced the religion of those who murdered her, even as she stood naked, a blood offering at their altar. The Christians believed this lie, violating her twice to assuage their consciences for complicity in her murder. Still it was a lie.

Ibn Ganas continued, “The life and terrible death of Hypatia is the best illustration of my point. Science and religion share no ground, have no concourse together, and are unalterably opposed to one another. To accept one is necessarily to reject the other. The side I take is evident to anyone who knows me and I’m prepared to defend that side, which is easy when, under the banner of science, one is armed with facts against which any army of faith is broken.”

Al-Doushu said, “Would you attach the brutal act of a mob of so-called Christians to the faith of Christianity, or to belief in other faiths, or even any faith? Hypatia herself was a believer in the divine, never renounced paganism, surely accepted the existence of the Deity, and that on a rational basis. And would you say that science has no concourse even with natural religion when such a religion is based on the simplest and most evident proofs?”

Ibn Ganas said, “This is a poor rejoinder. I know only that Hypatia was a scientist and scholar and, for these reasons, Christians murdered her and burned down the library. Her personal religious beliefs are not relevant to my point. I am not arguing that Hypatia rejected religion, though surely she would have entertained such rejection in the last minutes of her life, murdered in the name of the Prince of Peace, the Son of God.”

Al-Doushu said, “It was the failure of the people, Christian or not, and not some failure inherent in Christianity. I will say again that those who murdered Hypatia, those fanatics

calling themselves Christian, exchanged the Jesus of truth for the Barabbas of ignorance. While Jesus called out to them for water, they substituted vinegar as they diced away his belongings. They butchered Hypatia; they extinguished Alexandria's light; they abjured the faith they thought murder could defend, disowned by the God this murder meant to please. Some of her students were Christians, and she was aware of the tenets of that young faith. She did not denounce it; but she also did not embrace it. Yet that mob also did not embrace it, though they professed it; they rejected it by their actions."

Ibn Ganas said, "I agree that the failure was not inherently Christian, but that it was a failure inherent to all religion. Whatever name a particular faith goes by is of no concern to me. I know only that faith itself is a form of unquestioned tribalism, a way of breaking the world apart and justifying, in the name of one's own faith, that any other faith is a lie, and anyone who believes differently should be exterminated."

Al-Doushu said, "So you admit no difference between the child sacrifices of Moloch and the celebration of Easter?"

Ibn Ganas said, "I admit a difference in degree. But I believe the outcome is the same, in the end, that when men substitute absurd fantasy for reality nothing good can ultimately come of it. So let me ask you—how can you admit a difference between the child sacrifices of Moloch and the murder of a woman to please Christ?"

Al-Doushu said, "This is unfair. You still confuse the followers of a faith with the faith itself. The ideals of Christianity were betrayed by ignorant Christians, but this is not proof against those ideals."

Ibn Ganas said, "It is certainly proof against them. The ideals of their faith did nothing to save Hypatia, nor did it make her murder more palatable to those who might esteem human life more than abstract, unprovable, untenable metaphysical absurdities.

"Why do you insist on a meaningless distinction between the Christian religion and its adherents? If you're caught in a flood, it is reasonable to fault the water for drowning you. What use has faith if it attracts followers who in their actions abjure it? The tree must be judged by its fruits, and all faiths, without exception, have produced bitter fruits. If men act barbarously, it makes no difference if they worship the lamb or sacrifice to Baal."

Al-Doushu said, "Your analogy betrays you. Yes, the waters of a flood may drown you. But water is not only in the deluge. If you are thirsty, water is a blessing. If you are covered in dust, water cleanses you."

Ibn Ganas replied, "I will concede my analogy is flawed, for religion drowns men in misery, but won't quench their thirst for truth, nor cleanse them of ignorance. Such are the waters that flow from the portals of your heaven. Such are the blessings of a false God."

Al-Doushu said, "It isn't ignorance to acknowledge the existence of God. It is the beginning of Truth. The miseries you describe are purely man-made."

Ibn Ganas said, "On this we can agree. But I concede only because I consider religion itself to be man-made."

Al-Doushu interrupted, asking Ibn Ganas, "So you deny the existence of God?"

Ibn Ganas said, "I know nothing of him, and anything men claim to know of him is purely imagination or lunacy. But since you are convinced otherwise, please persuade me that I might acknowledge my error and correct it."

Al-Doushu said, "Let me speak, uninterrupted for a moment, then you may reply and attack what you will. But no attack is valid except that there is something to oppose. I think you will find little to oppose in my statements and that if one plank or beam or column is weak, still, the edifice stands, for its other supports are strong. God's existence may be known both *a priori* and *a posteriori*.

"By observation, we know that God exists. Everywhere we are surrounded by His signs. Unalloyed by faith or dogma, reflect for a moment on the nature of the universe. That God *is* is certain, clear, easily perceived. The proof is laid out plainly in all that we see and sense.

"While reasonable men may disagree about God's nature, God exists, and even if not called God, the Supreme exists



and that by whichever name you know Him, His names are the attributes of perfection. But first, let us consider this proposition: that God *is*. The wise have formulated an analogy of the watchmaker, with which you are both familiar. The universe, governed by its laws, regular in its movements, is a magnificent design, perfectly ordered and suited to life. Such a design, by virtue of its beauty, its suitability, its complexity, its unyielding order was brought into being. We may argue whether it came into being *ex nihilo* or was fashioned from chaos, but in either case, a Creator is the necessary explanation.

“The universe could not come into being by some random process or some accident any more than a watch may, from nothing, or from various unattached parts, spring into existence without a watchmaker. The watch is a complicated device, assembled by a watchmaker who preconceived the watch in his mind and intentionally constructed it. Consider the universe, vast, of an order far more complicated than a watch; its Designer necessarily, in proportion to its complexity, must be vastly intelligent to preconceive this universe, to call it into being.

“That you, Ibn Ganas, are able to penetrate this wondrous creation, and are able to affix explanations to it, and are able to divine its laws and order, that itself is an admission that the order and complexity of the universe is conceivable and therefore was conceived. It establishes that one whose mind and will were bent to the exigencies of order and regularity necessarily created it. Only an architect can raise the vault

of heaven. Only an alchemist can transmute lead into gold. Only a watchmaker may make a watch.

“This certain proof having been established—that the universe is a complex and ordered design, and thus that any design must admit of a designer—then we may look upon the universe and say without hesitation that there is a God. Our daily experiences are everywhere and at all times proof of Him. The *religio perennis* allows us to acknowledge the proof of the watchmaker, but need not rely upon it, since the *religio perennis* is a manner of achieving knowledge of God intuitively through experience of Him.

“The analogy of the watch is well-known and has from time to time fallen into disrepute. But I’ve never heard an elegant or convincing refutation of it.”

Ibn Ganas shook his head at this, and said, “I am familiar with the argument from design. Still I won’t dispute these points now or interrupt your thought. But explain this second proof, the *religio perennis*. What does it postulate? What questions does it answer?”

Al-Doushu replied, “In the original scriptures of the great faiths, you will find a core of sacred principles shared by all, cherished alike by monk and mullah, by fakir and rabbi, by priest and parson. Although these sacred principles appear against the backdrop of diverse cultures and varying traditions, take unnumbered forms expressed through local histories and languages, still this *religio perennis* arises,

transcending all narrow limits, offering a way out of ignorant tribalism. These principles are simple, evident in every great faith.

“Consider the confusion of faiths. Most of their contradictions are man-made. But their differences are inessential. Each faith possesses validity to the faithful. These are many straight paths to the same destination, which is the city of God’s unity. But often men of one faith war with men of another over what is inessential. These conflicts are entirely man-made and show no relation to the key teachings of any faith. Such conflicts are not proof against faith. When men of faith act barbarously, they violate and betray faith.

“These faiths, arriving at the same destination, likewise spring from the same source, which is divine revelation through the great founders of faith, whether Krishna, Zoroaster, the Buddha, or Moses, Jesus, Muhammad. They are six roads to the same temple, six doors to the same shrine. Because they spring from the same source, they transcend the grasp of human reason and cannot be judged by the measure of the human mind.

“Consider and reflect on notions of heaven and hell. Though many earthly analogs can be found for these two states, still neither heaven nor hell may properly be said to exist in the material cosmos. They are otherworldly. They are spiritual states lacking material existence. Yet they are keenly felt, though they cannot be apprehended through human reason, which after all knows only of the material cosmos and of no

other states. Yet, intuitively, we know these two states are real. When a man commits a crime, and guilt is upon him, he knows the reality of hell. When another loves and is loved, he knows the truth of heaven.

“Before I go further, let me be clear about the meaning of the word intuition. By intuition I do not mean knowledge attained without effort. By intuition I mean insight of the divine gained by deep contemplation of the infinite, and by the grace of the Most High. This insight manifests itself sometimes in gradual awareness, but more often by epiphany, by flashes of sudden and unbidden illumination. This insight is attained beyond logical reasoning and cannot itself be judged by logical reasoning. The experience of intuition is deeply personal and the source of that experience transcends the existent world and the material cosmos. Insight is therefore beyond rational proof and is exempt from rational analysis, but it is no less true. You will not find Him in the temple of empiricism, if by empiricism we mean proof by experiment, for neither He nor knowledge of Him is contingent on anything in the material cosmos. Rather, the cosmos itself is contingent on Him. Therefore, in this sense, intuition as I define it is superior to discursive reasoning.

“This intuition is what gives rise to the *religio perennis*, which is the divine essence found in all religions. It is not dependent on any one faith, but is the wellspring of all faiths.

“Likewise, this intuition provides a discernment of the Real, in contrast to the seemingly real, and between the Changeless

Absolute, and the contingent ephemeral cosmos. To discern what is Real is immeasurably exalted above even the greatest mysteries of the material universe and in contrast to those mysteries this discernment is impossible through human reason. Finally, this discernment reveals that, despite the sects, the divisions, and contradictory dogmas of individual systems of religious belief, such virtues as compassion, altruistic love, generosity, kindness, justice, mercy, and uncounted others are shared without exception among all religions.

“Here it is evident that no single faith in this world possesses exclusive access to Truth. If believers in their actions depart from these essential teachings, they have in fact departed from their faith altogether.

“This immediate apprehension of the divine transcends even faith. If I were to draw a symbol of the religio perennis, I should place before you a wheel with unnumbered spokes. At the center, where these spokes meet, you will find God.”

Ibn Ganas said, “All that you say may be true. I can’t disprove a word of it. But what you say isn’t carefully reasoned, or obvious on its face. No, I can’t disprove what you say because your conjectures admit little consort with reason; they are not built upon reason, but upon imagination. Your very definition of ‘intuition’ removes the possibility that God’s existence can be logically or reasonably determined. Intuition is irrational if it cannot be verified. You have exempted it from rational analysis. Such are the supports of all religions,

of all absurd doctrines generally. Yet since men are capable of being deluded about anything, I can't help but think that they are deluded in this matter above all others. My response must be, as my father once taught, that the burden of proof for those making extraordinary claims rests with those who make them.

“When demolishing a temple, it is best to start at the apex, tearing out the pediment, then toppling the columns, and only then breaking up the foundation. You consider the existence of God to be the inescapable conclusion of your arguments. But God's existence is instead the assumption upon which your arguments are built. So allow me to respond first to your claims for this religio perennis, then on the question of God's existence, then on the validity of intuition as a means to prove or disprove anything.

“Much that you have said is demonstrably true. The several world religions, and even others very small and others yet extinct, share with one another common principles. But this isn't any proof that these religions are founded on more than human imagination. You contend that these shared principles, I will not honor them with the word verities, show their divine origin and sanction simply by being shared. Yet this does not follow. These common principles are like the similar words for mother and father in languages throughout the world. Similar words do not make for a universal language any more than similar beliefs make for a universal faith. Since human beings are constituted similarly, have similar needs, hopes, and desires, I would be surprised if these disparate

faiths didn't share at least this much in common. This is not a sign of divine imprimatur.

“Examining the principles you've listed, I'm inclined toward tolerance and friendship with those who embrace the religio perennis. But there are other things common to faith, which you haven't listed in your philosophy. You take as universal principles those mildest, most sweet-sounding notions of love, justice, and mercy, of divine self-discovery, of union with God. Yet the many faiths of the world share other characteristics together like intolerance, persecution, infallibility, ignorance, bloodshed, and jealous exclusivity. Do you exclude these because you find them distasteful, because they do not adhere to your expectations? Even if you can prove that the principles you've enumerated are divinely ordained, I wonder if you can prove that those principles I've added are not also sanctioned?”

Al-Doushu said, “I would argue that the principles you've added of intolerance and ignorance are common to all faiths only in that they are common to all men, and that faith is simply the excuse men make to indulge them. Those who murdered Hypatia certainly alloyed faith with purely human motivations. Only the principles you've enumerated are motivated entirely by base human desires. The rest, these are the markers of true faith.”

Ibn Ganas said, “If these blessings of your philosophy are true, if these 'markers of true faith' are valid, why do we see so little evidence of them among mankind? The many faiths

you use to draw out this philosophy, men use these same faiths not for any reason you've described, but as an excuse to commit their crimes. With religion, their crude tribalism is now amplified, first by the sheer number of adherents to these faiths, second by the certainty they feel, which is the very definition of faith, that God approves their fanaticism. If your philosophy is true, perhaps mankind is constitutionally incapable of enacting its precepts. On this basis alone, I may question the wisdom of the *religio perennis*, and its supporters.

“Even the notion of a *religio perennis* is proof against itself. Your attempt to bind all faiths, to yoke them together is admirable, but demonstrates that the various beasts of faith prefer to gore and devour one another than to live in amity. If it were otherwise, the *religio perennis* would be firmly established, would require neither explanation nor defense. But the more these faiths war with one another, the more loudly and frantically you expound upon their ‘universal truths,’ and their ‘essential sameness.’”

Al-Doushu said, “Again you confuse the adherents of the faith with the faith itself.”

Ibn Ganassaid, “And again, you insist upon an inconsequential distinction. What is a faith, after all, if not the belief and the actions of its adherents? The *religio perennis* is not a fact, but a hope, a wistful dream. It isn't what religion is, but what it ought to be.”

Al-Doushu said, “I will not concede this point. For the *religio perennis* must surely follow if God exists.”



Ibn Ganas said, "Ah! At last you reveal that the assumption, which underlies your arguments for the existence of God, is the existence of God. But if my arguments will not disabuse you of the futile hope of the *religio perennis*, then let me address the second statement, whether God, by such proofs as you describe, can even be said to exist.

"A watch necessarily has a watchmaker. Very well. Yet nature, when a species changes, whether by deliberate human action or by changes in environment that suit some traits and militate against others, is fully understood by any student of biology. Such changes, whether inaugurated by nature or by deliberate human action, undermine your analogy. Environmental changes are sometimes by conscious design; but human consciousness is part of the natural world.

"That the watch has a watchmaker, when examined, is not proof that the world was made by God. It is, instead, proof that a man, who is himself a product of the world, has made a watch, itself also a product of the world."

Al-Doushu said, "The question of evolution does not trouble me, nor does it undermine God's role as creator of the cosmos, for God is responsible not merely for the creation of the objects of the cosmos, but likewise the processes and laws that govern the cosmos. Biological adaptation is surely so governed."

Ibn Ganas said, "Then you would argue that creation is not a single act, but a continuous one without end."

Al-Doushu said, "I agree with that statement."

Ibn Ganas added, “And God likewise sets the worlds in motion and maintains them by His continuous intervention, which we call ‘laws’ as you and I know them to exist.”

Al-Doushu replied, “This is indisputably true.”

Ibn Ganas replied, “Therefore, if I were to drop a stone from a great height, from a tower, it will fall until it strikes the ground, not by natural law, but rather by the intervention of God. Why not say instead that gravity, the natural law sufficient in itself, that we know exists, which can be explained and described and fully understood without reference to a deity, is responsible for it? Why add a mysterious designer or maintainer to this explanation? It isn’t necessary and adds mystery to gravity that undermines understanding. This talk of a creator, of a designer, of a maintainer does not lift the veil of nature. No, it conceals nature behind thicker cloth. The result is a misunderstanding worse than mere ignorance. Ignorance is not error, but faith often is.”

Al-Doushu said, “Then how do we explain the beginning of the universe, which science describes as the original emanation of all matter and energy? You have not pierced it with science; science cannot explain its source with your theories or with all the accumulated learning of the ancients. You must admit that the creation of the material cosmos surely was the act of one creating it.”

Ibn Ganas said, “I need not make any admission at all. I will concede, however, that science in its current state does not explain it. I’ve no conjectures on the matter. But I could

invent a hundred in which no reference to God is made. And even if science cannot pierce this mystery and never provides us understanding, why not simply admit that the beginning of the universe is a mystery, rather than asserting that we have 'solved' the mystery of the beginning of the universe by referring to something even more mysterious, something we have never seen, to which many have referred but none can ever prove, the 'creator' that you call God?

“And even should I concede that the creation of the cosmos may be credited to your creator, who then created this creator? Must we begin an infinite regression of cause to explain a single act of creation? How does this add to understanding? And, if you define God as the first cause, with no cause behind him, why can I not define the cosmos as its own first cause with no cause behind it? And if this is not satisfactory, perhaps the cosmos is infinitely old, has always been, and will always be and has no initial cause at all?”

Al-Doushu was stunned, and took a moment to speak. But he regained his composure and replied, “Neither an infinitely old universe nor a self-created universe is consistent with natural laws, for nothing in the material cosmos exists except that a cause precedes it. Therefore, by extension, the cosmos itself cannot have always existed, for its existence is not infinitely sustainable nor can it have self-assembled from nothingness. I therefore believe that God, who I would define as the First Cause, Who is Himself the beginning of all things yet who Himself is without beginning, created the material cosmos.”

Ibn Ganas said, “So you would honor the distinction of infinite existence to an unprovable deity, but would not honor the material cosmos with the same distinction merely because you exist within it and it is ‘merely’ material? I concede that we have no evidence for either conjecture. However, I know at least that the cosmos exists, but am not so certain about God. I am more comfortable attaching attributes of self-creation or infinity to something that demonstrably is, rather than to something about which I know nothing.”

Al-Doushu said, “I disagree. The observable material universe definitively does not possess the traits that one could ascribe to an infinite or self-created existence. However, God by definition possesses the trait of infinite, with neither beginning nor end.”

Ibn Ganas said, “But again, how is this any kind of substitute? How is God a better explanation? Consider when thunder rocked the hills, our ancestors, knowing nothing of the cause of thunder and having not yet any way to discover its cause, called upon the explanation that this was the work of Zeus, the Thunderer. Yet now, after uncounted centuries, those who were not content with divine explanations for natural events long credited to the gods, have themselves mastered such powers that our ancestors would take them for gods. We did not know. We discovered the truth of it. Likewise, with the beginning of the universe, we remain ignorant of ‘reasons’ for it, yet this is no proof that God is the reason.

“The advancement of our civilization was made possible only by rejecting, either expressly or implicitly, the belief that the

beginning and end of all knowledge is that 'God' did it. This God of yours for too long has sunk men in misery and willful ignorance. This God surely loves poverty, for belief in him has impoverished us all.

“Allow me to conclude that if belief in God is truly no different than belief in a watchmaker, then those who admire the watchmaker know nothing of how a watch works or what purpose it serves. This is a poor way to appreciate the passage of time. You would declare that those who study the watch, who discover how it works, would never deny a watchmaker made it. Yet consider also that belief in a watchmaker tells us nothing! It does not lead, as you state, necessarily to a religio perennis. Look upon the watch. Tell me the name of the watchmaker. Tell me his politics; tell me how many children he has; tell me anything at all, beyond that he exists. And even this you cannot prove. I look upon natural organisms vastly more complex and intricate than a watch, which admit nothing of a maker, and I find no 'watchmaker' there.”

Al-Doushu interrupted, “A child grows older, is educated, becomes an adult, her prejudices formed, her notions bounded by experience. She becomes scholastic, a logician. She defines the world and her place within it. She solves problems rationally and with the lessons of prior experience. This is all useful and practical, but the adult also loses something precious. She's lost the child's powers of imagination, of direct and immediate apprehension, of innocent receptivity to experience. She's lost the child's intuitive perception of the world. The child, cradling her doll, knows love in ways that

you and I have forgotten. Our hearts and minds are sealed against that which we don't understand, about that with which we have no experience. It isn't that the door to that other world is locked; we are simply blind to its existence. But love is the key to the door, and the door itself. It is map and road and destination. Through love's intuition, we see beyond the world and its worthless material trappings. This world that you study is a springe.

“If I look too long on tiny script, my view of a distant horizon is blurred, becomes even invisible to my perception. If I attentively study scratches in sand, I put out of my mind the roar of the ocean, the smell of the sea, the taste of salt on my tongue. You are a scholar surpassing me; you have achieved and attained knowledge of great mysteries, but they are merely worldly mysteries. You've trained your vision to take in these mysteries, but have closed the *urna*, the third eye through which you'll see that everything I say transcends logic and worldly discrimination. Through the urna you might still see something of the *religio perennis* and acknowledge the truth of it.”

Ibn Ganas said, “When I was a child, I was precocious and read many works of astronomy. Intellectually I became acquainted with the current knowledge of the immense age of the universe, its countless spinning galaxies, the lives of the stars, the formation of worlds, and the planets of our own sun. My father saw some use in this knowledge and he loved me and purchased for me, at considerable expense, a brass spyglass with which I might survey the heavens. On

sultry summer evenings, I carefully affixed the spyglass upon a wooden tripod and trained it at a particular star or region of the sky. Yet with all my knowledge, I had not mastered my fears and was afraid sometimes to look within the lense, afraid of some unimagined terror in the skies or that, setting my eyes upon so distant an object, I might hurtle from the face of the earth and be cast into nebulous darkness. These fears were, of course, absurd. I knew them at the time as absurd. Yet still I hesitated. So don't speak of a child's imagination and intuition. I remember well enough how often these were false.

“You fetishize childhood and imagine that children possess insights that we do not. But I doubt the value of any such insights, except those that conform to reasoned judgment and rational discrimination. A child possesses imagination and lacks preconceptions. But believing that something is true, without any way to verify that truth independently of imagination, has no practical value. No wonder that children grow out of it. Adults certainly possess such imagination, which you define as intuition, just as children do. Yet for adults, this is called delusion. In extreme forms it is mental illness.

“You call upon love as a key, or a map, a door or a road. It is none of these things. My father had no quarrel with love, if it anchors men, we specks of dust, and comforts us. But it is a spell. I cannot imagine an emotion less constant. Passionate emotionalism is faithless and fickle. Love turns its back on

lovers, and melts away like snow in spring, or evaporates like steam, changes shape and form more quickly than clouds. Love is no friend to science. Any concession to emotionalism is an enemy of reason and sound judgment. It bears us to such heights, and throws us to such depths, yet has nowhere a mark of truth in it. It is a form of delirious imagination, a fever that burns the mind. Yet you would cling to such emotion, and to love, that most false and faithless emotion, as the surest way to the mysteries of the divine.

“I’ve come to understand such great mysteries, as you call them, only because I dispensed with metaphysics. I am no respecter of mysteries and have penetrated them without recourse to shamanism. Yet if I took passionate emotion as my instrument, discerning the cosmos through what you call the third eye, I might have been awed, but I would never have understood. And I am more in awe of true discovery than I am of any priestly fantasy. The great truth of the universe, that you and I are the very consciousness of the universe, a way in which the universe knows itself, I can establish scientifically. Isn’t that truth enough? Why go chasing after ecstatic visions founded on emotionalism or childish intuition when science opens the door to true understanding?

“You talk about the *urna* as though the word has real meaning. This is absurd. You don’t have a third eye that sees as well as the two eyes you actually possess. What you spy through the *urna* is the very coinage of imagination and wishful thinking. From an educated man like you, I have no fear of your religious sensibilities, but in the hands of



the ignorant, the fearful, or charlatans, such sensibilities are the source of terrible harm. This is why I told the story of Hypatia. I recounted her death not to vilify Christianity, but to expose the dangers of all unreasoned beliefs founded on 'insight' and 'intuition' and the consequences of believing things that are immune to verification. I might be wrong. I might be persuaded if you can tell me who possesses direct spiritual knowledge and how he comes to possess it."

Al-Doushu said, "A man like me can only speak a little of direct experience with the divine. But many have, in past faiths, fulfilled the obligations of faith and had immediate knowledge of the nature of Reality, through the prism of the truths embraced within the religio perennis. These exponents of Truth are the prophets and the saints, the founders of the great faiths."

Ibn Ganas said, "The practice of science requires training. But any man can learn to become a scientist. Tell me what training or qualification a prophet possesses?"

Al-Doushu said, "They possess insight and intuition, and this by their efforts and by the grace of God."

Ibn Ganas said, "It's strange that whenever you utter the words 'insight' and 'intuition,' I hear the words 'madness' and 'imagination.'"

Al-Doushu said, "But come, friend. Although there is not a word you have said that I can effectively counter, likewise

there is not a word I have said that you can disprove. You are a fine debater, but I think this argument cannot be won, cannot be lost.”

Ibn Ganas said, “The burden of proof for those making extraordinary claims rests with those who make them. In proportion, the more extraordinary the claim, the greater is the burden of proof. You have brought to this debate many arguments, and I have refuted each of them. In this tournament you have shot all your arrows and nowhere hit the mark. With an empty quiver, you cannot claim a draw. You have lost.”

## SOPHIA

I LINGERED IN THOUGHT throughout the night. I was troubled by the conversation between Ibn Ganas and al-Doushu, whose arguments I have recounted. Ibn Ganas's argument, which was in agreement with the world as I perceived and understood it, was superior to al-Doushu's. Though both had strong and valid points, it seemed to me that both could not be correct. I wondered how I might embrace Ibn Ganas's view and yet remain faithful to my religion. And I searched my memory of their exchange to find an answer, but found none. Ibn Ganas's words resounded in my mind: *The burden of proof for those making extraordinary claims rests with those who make them.*

As the moon set, and as dawn alighted softly in the east, my thoughts turned to Hypatia. She was a pagan. To al-Doushu, this was irrelevant, for his religio perennis embraced all faiths equally. Yet I could not reconcile degraded paganism with Christianity. Of course, Hypatia's murderers did no credit to their faith, but it seemed to me that Christianity was nearer the universal truths of the religio perennis than the wicked morals and twisted beliefs of the pagan Greeks, Romans, or Egyptians. But al-Doushu's religio perennis made no such allowances. It seemed inconsistent with God's justice and mercy that He should allow a proliferation of faiths, except that the religio perennis might bind them. Yet even the religio perennis had nowhere a way to distinguish one faith from another or to reconcile their great many differences. The

Egyptian Book of the Dead, with its spells and incantations, bore scant resemblance to the scriptures of the Jews, of the Christians, or of the Muslims. Again, these thoughts troubled me and pressed me further into doubt.

I returned to the walled garden, not having slept, and sat near a fountain whose waters glowed with the reflection of the sky's morning colors.

As I listened to the flowing waters, I became aware of a woman approaching me. I recognized her at once. Her name was Sophia. She was a master of learning no less than al-Doushu and Ibn Ganas and herself was an instructor of unnumbered students. The Roman philosopher Boëthius had famously commemorated her as he awaited execution. She was thin and not tall, but stood in a manner that conveyed greater height. Around her neck she wore a black cord from which hung an amber-colored bulb. Her eyes were dark but shimmered as though capturing moonlight. Her hair, which partly concealed her face, was fiery and rolled across her shoulders in thick waves. She had the blossom of youth in her form and figure, though I knew she was very ancient. Her dress was modest, though her slender arms were partly bared. Her delicate clothes were dark red, decorated with purple and yellow flowers. Upon the hem of her skirt appeared very faintly the letters Pi and Theta. She was a daughter of gods, a favorite of the heavens, the brightness of the Pleiades, beloved by all whose eyes caught a glimpse of her.

In her hands she held a book that had golden foil in the shape of an apple stamped on its cover. I greeted her. She sat beside me and opened her mouth, saying, "When you've passed beyond the end of reason, as at the end of a road, you've reached your destination. There is no more road to take, nor anywhere better to go. You've attained your goal. But there are unnumbered roads. Many, though diverging, will lead you to truth. Others with an arrow's straightness may lead you astray. And you may discover that the quality of the journey and its destination is the quality not of the road, but of the traveller. Many a saint has wandered on crooked roads, while many a scoundrel has not diverged on his path for an instant."

I said, "I don't understand."

She smiled patiently and said, "I have in my possession something to ease your mind, to allay your troubles, and a way out of false choices." She then held out the book she carried, handing it to me. "Do you recognize this book?"

I took the book from her, saying, "I don't."

She said, "But you see it clearly enough. You feel the heft of it in your hands, smell the scent of leather and ancient pages. You know it's real, that it exists as surely as the hands in which you hold it."

I said, "Of course."

She said, “Then describe it for me. You know something of how books are made. Describe it.”

I nodded and turned the book over in my hands, opened the cover, flipped through the thick pages. The paper was heavy, printed on both sides with black ink. The edges of the paper were gilded. The leather cover was stamped with its golden apple, and beneath this apple were delicately etched the Greek letters καλλίστη. The cover was sewn delicately to the folios. These things I described, and other finer details. When I had finished, I handed the book back to her.

She smiled again, her half-hidden smile. She said, “You have fully described the craft, the artistry, and the materials of this book. Having done so, now tell me what the book is about.”

I answered, “I didn’t read the work, nor do more than glance at the title.”

She said, “Then what purpose does this craft serve?”

I said, “Just as a frame holds the painting, this book holds its words. It is a beautiful presentation; it is a pleasing form by which the words are suspended and preserved.”

She said, “In this work, what does the author say about paper, printing, and binding?”

I replied, “I haven’t read the book, as I said.”

She said, “But you might conjecture.”

I said, "I doubt the author says anything about it. The writing of the book surely preceded its manufacture. And most authors, while interested in the form in which their books are published, rarely think of the process when writing."

She said, "Yes. I have read this book and nowhere do the author's words reveal anything about the artistry and craft of fashioning the book in which these words reside. Nowhere does he speak of gilding, or leather, or stamping or binding. The author might explain the origin of the work, even the moment he decided to write it, but nowhere would this align with its physical manufacture. If he discusses other books, still he does not describe this one. So is it fair to conclude that the artistry and craft of creating the physical book and the author's art in writing it barely align?"

I answered, "Yes, this is so. But these are different spheres; the writer of the book and the one who manufactures the book have different objectives. The manufacturer seeks to build the book's physical manifestation; this is not often the author's objective in writing the book."

She said, "Ah, but the book containing the author's words must be made, or the author's purpose fails. Yet you are right; these are different spheres, even if the author and the binder are the same person, even if the author directs the form the physical book will take. Still these spheres, the book I'm holding and the words it contains, are inextricably linked together."

I said, "This is indisputable."

“So would you agree that the words of the book inhabit the book’s physical form and, in fact, the physical form itself was created solely to cradle those words?”

I said, “I would completely agree.”

She said, “And further, would you agree that the words of the book transcend the book’s purely physical construction?”

I answered, “Of course. The book may be a treatise on geometry, on the movement of the heavens, on the depth of the seas, or a history of a people. Reading it, I may be transported to a thousand places in ages past or yet to come. But the physical form of the book itself might convey mere hints or nothing at all.”

She said, “The book in my hands would not exist except that the words appear within it. If the words were not written, the book is not made, though you may have at hand all the materials and the technology to make it. It can never serve its true purpose except that words alight within it. It is equally true to say that the words are exalted above the book in which they appear. The reading of the words is a superior form of knowledge than the craft of the binding, however beautifully made. The words when comprehended wholly transcend the book in which they are printed. Likewise, God’s word is both immanent in the world, yet transcends the world utterly.

“Those who describe the universe mechanically are not mistaken in their conclusions. Yet if they say that within



creation, 'God' is not a necessary explanation, then they have overstepped their expertise. They weigh the book in their hands, denying the words, even as they detail the texture of the pages and the chemical composition of the inks.

“When you described the book to me, everything you said about the artistry and craft that went into the manufacture of this object was true. Your observation and your experience made this possible. You may know every physical aspect of the book, yet you may have no knowledge of why it was called into being; you may be completely ignorant of the reasons why it was written. You can only possess such knowledge when you have read the book. In the words are mysteries of the author’s mind, the very contents of a mind that transcends the book and cannot be grasped by merely describing and explaining the book’s physical attributes. Inextricably linked, still knowledge of the characteristics of the book and knowledge of the words, the author’s intent, are different kinds of knowledge completely. Would you agree then that these two aspects of this book are separate spheres of knowledge?

I said, “Yes, I cannot disagree.”

She said, “Then you understand what neither Ibn Ganas nor al-Doushu understand. Science and faith may be reconciled as the moon may be reconciled with the sun. These are different spheres, made of different matter, serving different purposes. That the moon sometimes eclipses the sun is no testament to the moon’s greater size; it only seems so because the moon

is so close, so immediate to us. It is in fact the sun that is of vastly greater size, which transcends the bond between earth and moon, yet whose light and heat are everywhere present. But the sun and the moon are not in conflict; they are in perfect accord with the purpose of the heavens. They do not war with one another; one does not dispute the other. And one may even declare that in the light of the moon you see the very proof of the sun. So whether science explicitly confirms the bond between God and creation, or merely implies it, these are ways of knowing that enhance the other.

“Calligraphy is lovely scribbling without meaning, except as the means by which the words are made evident. The ink does not prove the words, or their truth. But without it, the words cannot be revealed. Likewise, the physical characteristics of creation are the means through which Truth is ultimately revealed to men.

“When I first handed you the book, what did I say?”

I replied, “You said that I felt the weight of it, that I could catch the fragrance of leather and old paper, that I knew the book was as real as I am, real without doubt.”

She said, “Yes. But now you know what is more real than that; the words within the text gave existence to the book’s physical form and did more than that. Those words gave the book a reason to exist at all. The author inscribed in this book the letters B and E. And therefore it came into being.”

I said, “This is all very true, and well-argued, though I can argue, using the same analogy, something other than you have argued. The author of the book and the book’s binder are different people; would you say that another than God created the world?”

She shook her head and said, “You misunderstand the purpose of analogy by making such an argument to undermine it—like the snake devouring its own tail. Leave the proofs to Ibn Ganas and al-Doushu. You know where their argument went. An analogy is never proof of a thing; it is merely an illustration of it, a way of perceiving it. Were the parables of Jesus literally true? Did Aesop’s fables recount actual events? Must a hare actually run a foot race with a tortoise to prove the maxim that slow and steady wins the race?”

“What I’ve described is not a proof. If you gaze upon the sun, use a dark lens, reflect the image on the floor. But never think the floor contains the sun. You know that you perceive the sun only indirectly. This is the nature of analogy.

“I’ve tried to illustrate this point—science and religion are qualitatively different forms of knowledge. The standards by which religion is judged should not be applied to scientific inquiry. It is as al-Doushu described it; science is knowledge acquired by means of discursive reason; religion is driven by insight. He must shun literalism in religion and reject finality in science. To say that the world’s origin according to current science conflicts with the world’s origin according to ancient faith is to understand neither science nor faith. To claim that

man's origin according to science contradicts man's origin according to religion betrays an assumption of unassailable finality in scientific inquiry and literal truth in religion. Such assumptions undermine science and mutilate faith.

“If I had said these words at the beginning of our conversation, you would not have risen out of doubt and uncertainty, for the way in which these spheres of knowledge touch and the way in which they diverge would not be immediately evident without analogy.”

I said, “This is true. And you've brought me a gift, a way out of the labyrinth of false choices, a way to accept the advantages of science without denying the values of faith. Yes, everything you've said is beautiful and true; I can at this moment testify to the truth of it. Yet this truth is dreamlike. However perfect this dream, however wondrously constructed, however delicately fashioned, when I wake, its beauty fades, its perfection is washed from my mind, its excellence drained. In its place, there is a mere phantom; if still faintly alluring, it is soon forgotten. The dream is dissolved in the acid of ordinary life, by plain and worldly troubles. Tell me, Sophia, how can I hold onto the magic of what you say?”

She said, “O dreamer, are we not ourselves always between waking and dreaming? Asleep, do we not dream of the waking world? Awake, are our thoughts not the coinage of vivid imagination? We are all hypnagogians. We possess both the attributes of the scholar, rational and logical, and the spirit of the ancient gods, passionate and capricious.

“The conflict you describe is not between waking and dreaming perception. It is, instead, an excuse to set aside what is essential, allowing the inessential to take its place. When you dream, how often do you doubt you are awake? Rarely. The world is a veil; pull it aside. Its comforts are snares; do not be caught. Its sorrows are fires; breathe none of their smoke.

“Beyond waking and dreaming, there is another intelligence. There is an elusive reality, glorious, overpowering, pervasive, changeless, and incorruptible. Yet we fall to disputing a single beam of light. Through the prism of self, we describe different colors with different words. We assume certainty and finality imagining that red contradicts violet, that green opposes blue. How far this is from the truth of things. From within this dream, you doubt what is real. In the waking world, you put aside your dreams. Yet asleep or awake, the world is false and fleeting. Shake off the sleep that you have called life, and the magic of these words will never diminish, the bowl of their excellence will never be drained.”

When she said these words, I was silent and my heart was eased a little. Yet still some doubt remained, and I said, “Nowhere here is there a way to understand what happened to Hypatia, to grant her death any meaning. The Christians who murdered her were unworthy of their faith. Yet Hypatia’s faith was an inferior sort, much as the science of her age is inferior to current science.”

She said, “I disagree on both points. Hypatia’s faith was perhaps more primitive, as was the science current in her

time. But as science has progressed from that state, so too has religion. This progression is not a denial of what came before, but advancement upon it. Our current science required past inquiry and false starts. And the faiths of the world likewise required simpler antecedents.”

I said, “On the point of science, I agree. But are you arguing that the paganism of the Greeks, the Egyptians, and the Romans was the result of God’s revelation to man and that belief in Zeus or Osiris must precede belief in God? Surely Hypatia would have achieved enlightenment more fully if she were Christian. The paganism of her era lacked the concepts and vocabulary necessary to achieve any reasonable understanding beyond the most banal of beliefs. She might explain the coming of spring by remembering the story of Persephone and Demeter, but what kind of understanding is this?”

She said, “What you argue is not sensible. If God were to deny intellectual capacity to all except those who understand God as He should be known, not a single intellect would remain in the world of men. Hypatia’s paganism was not a barrier to enlightenment. Hypatia was aware of the reasons for seasonal change; she was a mathematician and an astronomer. You wouldn’t say that Jews are limited to understanding the rainbow by the story of the Flood.”

I said, “But surely paganism is error. Would you agree?”

She said, “Did Hypatia worship pagan gods? She was born in a pagan culture, so you conclude *a priori* that she was a pagan. Yet

she was a scientist, and therefore was indisputably suspicious of the gods. If she did not know, she surely suspected as we do that these gods were fictions. The gods were the peculiar personifications of frightening and mysterious natural events. As a scientist, Hypatia observed and reasoned and discovered the true causes of such events. She called upon no anthropomorphic explanations—causes made human. She struggled to understand both how and why such events took place, what natural mechanisms acted to make worlds round, or rain fall, or heavens blue. She struggled to cast science out of the pagan shrine, out of the hands of priests, leaving only the philosophies to their care. This you can assert *a priori*. Her vocation was her faith. She had no use for false gods and votive idols. By her vocation, she threw these idols into dust. She worked to cast out superstition from faith. But because she herself had not adopted the faith of the Lamb, an ignorant mob, led by wolfish priests, put her to death. Had she lived, this argument between Ibn Ganas and al-Doushu would never have taken place, and all I've said would have been accepted as an ancient truth beyond dispute.”

I said, “You claim that Hypatia wasn't pagan because in her work she disputed the worship of false gods and adherence to foolish superstition. Yet she did not openly denounce them, though surely she saw no value in those beliefs. Why did she hesitate?”

She said, “Her pursuit of science was itself an open denunciation. But I suspect she saw some value in those pagan beliefs. Once superstition was cast out, she left theology to the priests.”

I replied, “But it was a vain and useless theology. The stories of the Greek gods do not lend themselves to any deeper understanding than their obvious meaning, if, in fact, there is any meaning at all in them.”

She answered, “Many stories of Greek mythology are simply that—mythology—and possess no deeper meaning than what is obvious. I won’t argue this evident truth. But you imagine that because Hypatia did not openly and explicitly denounce paganism and did not embrace Christianity she was incapable of spiritual insight. This is unfair.

“There is much truth in Christianity, but fundamentally it serves as a shared language in which our spiritual obligations are revealed. But there is more than a single language. What language possesses virtues unmatched by any other language? While some languages are superior to others in mode of expression or nuance of meaning, what tongue is spoken better than the tongue you understand best? There are as many ways to approach faith as there are men and women who walk the paths of faith.”

I said, “I see no use in pagan religions. Unsanctioned by God, they are mere imaginings and their teaching should be expunged from the curriculum; they are useless except to those historians who delight in the strange and obscure features of long-dead civilizations.”

She said, “Would you strengthen a house by knocking out the foundation? Would you roll the stone by breaking the lever?”



Did the image of Helios not become the image of Christ? Did the holidays of the pagans not become the holidays of Christians? Hypatia did not seek to overturn paganism by attacking it on philosophical grounds. Her pagan religion carries within it enough truth to have real meaning, even if the religion itself is burdened with false gods. The stories themselves aren't useless. The mythology of her religion is still well-known, even though the religion has no adherents."

I said, "It deserves death, as all false religion does. What other use could it possibly possess?"

She said, "Like the Christians who murdered Hypatia, some worship correctly yet are wicked and hypocritical. Others also worship in error who are decent and trustworthy. Consider this if you would be enlightened.

"He is merciful and His light fills the world. Knowledge of Him comes to us by direct revelation of Himself to His creatures, through His messengers who inevitably overturn, abrogate, refine, and reaffirm past revelation. They establish the law; they speak with His voice and in His authority, transcending all earthly bonds and defying all earthly expectations. Each messenger is the first and last proof of direct revelation. But the effulgence of God, contained in these few chosen exemplars of His authority, shines from the lanterns of their lives and works. This light, even unperceived or unacknowledged, fills the world and cannot be unaccepted, even if denied. It falls upon all living creatures, even inspiring those who know nothing of the messenger of the age and have read not a word

of His revelation. Still, this light has its source in Him. And the one is attached to the other, as by invisible threads, as Earth is bound to Sun, and Moon to Earth.

“God’s mercy is inexhaustible and His bounty without limit. He gives life and love alike to the wise and the foolish, to the virtuous and the wicked, to the friend and the foe, though each shall receive his measure of justice and shall collect the wages he has earned. Likewise, among the many religions of the world, some are born of men’s imagination and have no authority, while others are God’s and He has revealed them at their appointed times. Still, even among the religions of men that He has not founded, could you deny His influence upon them? You may find that from these faiths, not established by His authority, still the light of His bounty may be seen even if dimly, as the stars fill the sky when the Sun has set. Excepting those practices—I will not call them faiths—that are born of human perversity and deranged imagination, God has power over all things, and His friends may belong to any faith.

“Krishna speaks of the pantheon of Hindu gods, saying that men should not worship them. Yet he also declares, *If men worship even devas with humility performing rites to obtain what is best for them, whatever they obtain comes from God’s hand.*

“The Sufis tell the story of the pagan who worshipped his gods so sincerely and with such love that God fulfilled his prayers completely. While one must not be a pagan and must obey the messenger of the age, still His mercy outstrips His

anger and His love encompasses all. Thus, even among the pagan religions, you may catch a glimpse of Him, however fleeting.”

She said, “There is a story of Jesus. While still a boy, Jesus was helping his father, Joseph. Joseph had received an order from a rich man to construct a bed of specific proportions. When Joseph placed the wood in pairs before him, he found that one plank was shorter than another and that the bed could not be built. Seeing this, Jesus placed the planks next to each other. He grasped one end of the short plank and stretched it so that the length of the plank was now identical to the one beside it. Joseph wondered at this miracle.

“In the workings of the world, men have specific expectations of God and fall into disbelief when God does not work in ways that they imagine He would or should. We are all of us subject to these expectations, yet we must detach ourselves from them to see the truth. We expect, for example, Christ to heal the blind and raise the dead just as the Jews of his time expected Christ to become king, raise an army, and drive out the Romans. But this story, that he stretched a plank, seems odd and unnecessary; surely another plank could be found of the correct size. Yet the story, though it may be literally true, makes sense from a particular perspective.

“Christ does not seek the permission of the plank, nor even acknowledge its fault. He simply stretches it. Such is the operation of God in the world and within the disparate faiths of the world, and this story is a parable of it.

“When you have flown above the clouds to far off lands, the familiar comforts of home still beckon. The further you have gone, the more you have longed for that easy familiarity. Even ancient men at last return to ancient tales to remind them of their youth. If returning to such tales, the warm and welcoming couch of memory, is not praiseworthy, still it is human and deserves little censure. So if I speak of Homer and recollect those ancient tales to remind you of what you know already, I do so to speak a common language with those inclined to listen. In a friendly voice I touch your arm and tug at your sleeve, saying, ‘Remember, friend, the stories of our youth, the stories upon which, from infancy, we were reared. Although such stories are untrue in fact, they are no less valuable.’ Before Christians could light candles in worship, Prometheus brought them fire.

“While my friend Boëthius languished in prison, awaiting his execution at the hands of the emperor he served, he wept tears of grief and rage. I came to him. He welcomed the one from whose breast he had been nourished, from whose hand he had taken instruction, through whose eyes he had discovered true beauty in an inconstant world. He sought consolation in my words. I found him in this state, admonished him, and strove to cure him of his mad and shameful behavior. I would cure him, not with pretty words or quick relief, for this was no cure but a curtain to hide his illness from view. He said, ‘Cure me please, at once!’ I said, ‘I will restore your mind to health and balance, but I must deliver this remedy in doses—a little at first to strengthen

you, much more at length, and again more. But were I to deliver this dose but once and in full strength, you would die. As Jesus said, *You cannot bear it now*. But He is patient with you. Be also patient with yourself. You are pregnant with yourself; but the child, once conceived, is not instantly born.’

“In his example, see how such tales have value and how they may yet instruct, as they instructed your ancient fathers and as our tales may instruct sons and daughters not yet born. Such tales are not unalloyed truth, but all take some form of truth, though less in ancient tales, more today in scripture, and more again tomorrow, as you may discover. Yet the fastest runner cannot deny his clumsy first steps.

“What did I say when we first began to speak? There are unnumbered roads to take; many, though diverging, will lead you to truth, and others with the straightness of an arrow may lead you astray. The quality of the journey and its destination is the quality of the man, and not the roads he has taken. Many a saint has wandered on crooked roads, while many a scoundrel has not diverged in his path for an instant.”

She paused for a moment in speech. She stood before me, and handed me the book again, which fell open to the first page. Pointing at the page, she said, “So do not renounce Hypatia because her faith was not yours. In the stories of the Greek immortals, you may catch a glimmer of something true and wondrous if you look to the myth of the golden apple, upon which is inscribed the word *καλλίστη*, *For the fairest*.”



PART TWO

**KALLISTI**





## FOR THE FAIREST

AT THE WEDDING FEAST of Peleus, king of the Myrmidons, and the goddess Thetis, all the celestials were in attendance, except Eris, the goddess of discord. She was not welcome at the lucky marriage of the mortal Peleus and his immortal bride. Eris was offended, nursed her wounded heart, and said with malice, "Though I am unwanted, I will give these happy newlyweds a gift even their son, the noble Achilles, will treasure when he dies at the walls of Troy." So she fashioned an apple of unalloyed gold without blemish. She etched upon it the letters, "For the fairest." On the day of the wedding, Eris cast the apple in the midst of the gods and goddesses. Hermes took the apple in graceful hands and carried it to Thetis.

Thetis, who was wise, said, "This is not for me. Bring it to Zeus and he will award it to whomever he pleases."

Hermes gave the apple to Zeus. When Hera, Zeus' beautiful wife, and Zeus' two daughters, Aphrodite and Athena, saw the apple, they each claimed it. Zeus, like Thetis, was also wise and said, "I am not fit to stand in judgment between my wife and my daughters. If I were to judge I would declare all three fit to receive this apple, for they are fairest each in their way. Yet even should I secretly prefer one to the others, I would, in gaining the friendship of one, only stir up the anger and enmity of two and this is not fit for a king of gods. Some other must award this prize to the fairest of these three."

Hera said, "Then choose one who is fit to judge." But not wishing to offend any of the three contending goddesses, none of the immortals stepped forward.

Athena said, "Only a mortal, one who has never before angered the gods or ever before been favored by them, may make this choice. Only such a mortal could be impartial in judgment. Yet he must be of noble birth to be worthy of judging between us."

Hera said, "What noble child is not favored or cursed by the gods? Yet if there is one on the face of the Earth, surely my husband knows of him."

Zeus said, "I know of one, a prince in exile, the descendent of gods, but mortal. He is Paris, the son of Priam. But will you three accept him as judge?"

Aphrodite said, "I accept since no living man will find fault with me and the prize is as good as mine whomever you name."

Hera said, "Will you subdue him with threats of your beloved Ares?"

Aphrodite said, "Unlike those clumsy in the arts of allurements and desire, I have no need of threats. I will leave those to you."

Zeus said, "This judgment must be fair and the one who judges must not be threatened, for you three have terrible

power over him. If the goddess who wins does so by threat, she is by this single proof not the fairest.”

Hera and Aphrodite agreed to these terms, but Athena did not speak. At last, Zeus turned to her and said, “Dearest daughter, what do you say?”

Athena said, “I accept your choice of Paris to judge between us and won’t threaten him with my power. Yet he is by judgment judged and by trial of beauty himself tried.”

Zeus then whispered to Hermes, “Take this apple and these three goddesses to the shepherd Paris, the exiled son of King Priam of Troy. You will find him with his herds in Phrygia, near a summit of Ida. Let him judge between these three, but see to it that the terms to which all agree are kept. Give the apple to whomever the boy chooses.”

At once Hermes conducted the three goddesses from Olympus to the earth far below, which was shrouded in mists. They alighted not far from Paris who, with crook in hand, watched over his herds. On foot the four celestials approached him, the ground trembling beneath them. When Paris saw them, he was dazzled by their radiance and, averting his eyes, he took them for gods.

Hermes called out to the astonished youth, “Good day to you, shepherd.”

Paris replied, "And to you and to these ladies. I've no strength to resist gods; for you are surely immortals. Tell me why you've come and how I may serve you."

Hermes said, "The son of Cronus was right to appoint you." Hermes handed Paris the golden apple and said to him, "Look upon this apple and read the inscribed letters." Paris wondered at the object, heavy and warm in his hand. He read the letters upon it. Hermes said, "These three goddesses each claim this apple as their own. But only one may possess it. Zeus has appointed you to judge between them and to decide to whom this apple belongs."

Paris did not like the sound of this and, looking at the three goddesses, said, "I am a man of no importance; I am a simple herdsman. I am mesmerized by the form, face, and figure of these three goddesses. How can I say that one or the other is more beautiful when I have never seen their like before? I can judge between cattle and sheep, even among mortal women or the nymphs of forest and river. But who am I to judge goddesses?"

Hermes said, "You are chosen by the king of gods. You yourself are descended from the gods. You are also a prince of Troy, the son of King Priam and Queen Hecuba."

Paris said, "I know my ancestry, but I was raised a simple shepherd here in the mountains. Born royal, I am still rustic."

Athena said, “Son of Priam, you are a prince. In the morning when you rise up from sleep, you shake off your dreams. Now we have awakened you to your true state; don’t hesitate and don’t put us off.”

Hera said, “You’ve been chosen, now you must choose. Don’t shy away from this task. Though one of us at least will protect you from the other two after you have decided, if you make no decision, none will protect you from us three.”

Aphrodite said, “Don’t bully him, queen of gods. Don’t nag him as you nag your husband.” She then turned to Paris and said, “But Athena is right. You have imagined yourself something that you are not. All your friends and those you love are beneath you. Rise up, prince of Troy, and accept this appointment and choose between us. Enjoy the fruits and flowers of your true self. Do not linger in thistles.”

Paris said, “Beautiful goddesses. I’m in awe of you and can’t think clearly or make rational judgment.” Paris then said to Hermes, “Son of Zeus, guide me. How may I fulfill the terrible obligation Zeus has placed on me? Help me find a way to award this prize.”

Hermes said, “You are clever, prince of Troy, and not the least of your family. As together these three are overwhelming in beauty and radiance, you should judge them individually. Ask to see them without their ornaments and in privacy. Have Hera put aside her crown, Aphrodite her cestus, and

Athena her armor. Let them be revealed to you fully and without shame, and discover which of them is fairest. Look upon them one at a time and speak to them to perceive beauty both of body and of mind. Then you may make your judgment. If you judge this way, Zeus himself will feel bound by justice to uphold your verdict.”

Paris then said to the goddesses, “I must see you each alone and without your ornaments. Let me see Hera first,” and, at once, all disappeared from sight, even Hermes. Hera stood alone with Paris in the fields where his herd was grazing.

Hera lifted her small crown in two hands. She held it before her. When she let it go, it took the form of a silver bird and perched on a nearby tree. Hera’s tresses were partly covered by a silken brocade, which depicted the gardens of Olympus with delicate images of Hera herself and Zeus together in amorous embrace. This too she removed, and the fabric slipped from her ivory fingers and floated to the ground as red and orange leaves. Her golden hair fell upon her shoulders and cascaded across her back like ambrosial waters, and Paris gasped as he peered for a moment into Hera’s dark eyes.

As the queen of heaven carefully removed her robes, her skin glowed softly like bronzed clouds on the morning horizon. Paris averted his gaze, but Hera scolded him. “Look upon me, son of Priam.” When Paris lifted his eyes to her, from her legs, like perfect columns, to her hips and slender waist, to her breasts, upon which Zeus himself every night rested his head, to her broad shoulders, he said, “All things of mortal beauty fade to dust and ash beside you.”

Hera said, "I am the first of three immortals you will see today. Lest the beauty of the second bewitch you, or the third cause, by mere proximity to your decision, a judgment in her favor, consider also the beauty of what I may offer the man who is my friend.

"You are a herdsman, but you were born a prince, and you ought to be a king. On the night before you were born, Hecuba dreamed that she gave birth to a flaming torch. When she told this dream to Aesacus, who had the power to interpret dreams, he said, 'The child you bear will bring ruin to Troy.' When Hecuba told Priam the meaning of her dream, they determined to kill you once you were born. But when she delivered you, they could not bring themselves to murder their newborn son. So Priam gave you to Agelaus, a Trojan herdsman, and instructed him to abandon you on Mount Ida. But you did not die, prince of Troy, and Agelaus brought you up as his own son. Now you are a herdsman, but truly you are a prince and my gift to you is kingship over the entire world, over Greeks and Trojans. Let the prophecy come to pass! It need not harm you! If that city is destroyed by you, what of it? I will make you king of all cities."

Paris said, "Your offer is enticing, but I must see the other goddesses before I pass judgment and award the apple." With these words, Hera vanished from sight, though the memory of her majestic beauty remained with him.

Paris' mind still wondered at the gift Hera offered, when Aphrodite appeared suddenly before him. Wearing only a single sheer robe fastened across her chest with golden clasps,

Aphrodite smiled at Paris. Her carnelian lips parted, showing rows of teeth whiter than freshly fallen snow. She moved her beautiful hands to the clasps that held her robe in place. Upon each clasp, in perfect workmanship, were engraved scenes of two lovers in passionate embrace. Looking more closely upon these images, Paris perceived motion in them and was able even to distinguish the faces of these depicted lovers. The woman's face was as beautiful as the goddesses themselves, and her body a marvel of womanly charm. To his astonishment, the man's face was his own.

Undoing each clasp, Aphrodite let the sheer fabric fall at her feet. She stepped over it, presenting herself to Paris wearing nothing but a beautiful cestus with a hundred tassels. Paris said, "I've heard of your girdle, and how it bewitches men. You must remove it, or I will judge you the winner simply by its spell."

Aphrodite said, "Of course." She turned and bent a little back as she unclasped the girdle from her body. She held it out in her hand, and Paris took it from her.

Aphrodite's body, like her face, was less beautiful than Hera's. Yet her manner beguiled him. She stood before him completely revealed, unashamed and alluring. She was not the greater beauty, but the expression on her face, her smile turning up on the left side of her mouth, her easy laughter, and her soft eyes, both passionate and playful, filled his heart with desire. What man could resist love's goddess? Even without the girdle, she bewitched Paris. She moved toward him, her hands upon him and her breasts pressed against



his chest. She traced a delicate finger along his ear and Paris could not move. She whispered slyly, still smiling, "Am I not beautiful?"

He said, "You are."

She said, "Let me give you a woman who is equally beautiful, whose only fault is her mortality, but whose wit and charms surpass any alive. Let me give her to you. I will fill her heart with love for you and she will be your perfect companion, better than the nymph Oenone."

Paris said, "Oenone loves me and I am her husband."

Aphrodite said, "She loves you, but she is beneath you. She can never be your equal. She is a rustic, unsophisticated, simple in her pleasures. How can she ever understand you or fulfill you? Your destiny surpasses hers. She is a trifle to a prince like you. Put her aside. Let me give one to you who is worthy of you and your station. This is a fitting gift to a prince from a goddess."

Paris said, "I would accept the gift, except that Hera too has offered me a gift and I expect I may redeem only one gift, since there is only one apple."

Aphrodite's face grew cold and she said, "Then choose the better gift." But at once her manner became friendly again and she pressed a soft hand against his chest. "Son of Priam, I know what is best for you. Give me the apple and you will have unrivaled joy in life. Forget the poor blandishments of Hera.

She offers power and riches; but even now you are comfortable and want for nothing. What she offers is perishable and those who grasp at such things are greedy for something else and simply lack that thing all men seek. When the king's court flatters him, when his soldiers obey him, when his people follow him, what is it this king seeks in them? Love! Love is all and nothing beyond love possesses value. To love and be loved, these are the signs of a life worth living. Commanding, judging, and taxing; these inspire something akin to love, but it is the desperate cringing love of a beaten dog that will strike when the master is careless. People love the king who is proud and strong, and who makes them proud and strong. But people love the king best when he has fallen. To humiliate a king is the secret wish of those subjected to kings. But true love is higher than this. It is not mere loyalty or devotion, though these are its hallmarks. Even love of family pales beside this and is exposed as fake and hollow. The mother loves her child by affinity of blood and nothing else. Even such affections that are beyond this bond alone are but false accretions and have no firm foundation. What love did Hecuba have for you? What love did Priam have for you? They wanted you dead to preserve their doomed kingdom. But you, shepherd, did not desire Priam's place, nor do you want Troy's ruin. Still what are a crown and a city? For Priam these have deprived him of sense, of decency, even of love for family—he would murder an infant. What slanders they will hurl at wise Odysseus while they themselves commit such crimes even against kinsmen!

“So put aside power and riches and kingdoms and even familial love. Consider only what all men crave—to be loved, to be desired passionately by a beautiful and cultured woman. I have the power to bring you such love, and there is no power greater in the world than this, even compared to my father’s power. As many men see, in the woman they love, the greatest beauty, I can bring you one whom all men agree is the most beautiful and desirable of all women. I will plant in her heart the seed of love; its blossoms will take a thousand forms. This love for you will break all bonds, even of duty and propriety, and she will give herself to you willingly, casting away all other things only to be with you. Consider such power and how command of armies, crowns and cities pales as the sister beside the brother, as the moon beside the sun. There is no earthly or heavenly power to compare to love. Even among the gods, love is master and to be loved by the one you love is better than immortality and mastery of all the world and all its creatures, men and gods alike.”

Aphrodite continued speaking, but knew she had persuaded Paris and the apple would be hers. But Paris said, “This offer pleases me, even more than Hera’s offer. Yet there is one more goddess to judge and I have not seen her beauty completely revealed, nor has she had an opportunity to speak sweet words to me.”

Aphrodite frowned, and her eyes became dark. She said, “Athena can offer nothing better than what I offer. Be warned that she is a master of trickery, better even than Odysseus,

her student. She will beguile you with talk. Do not be taken in by her prattle. She cannot give you what I can give you. She will talk you into something less, less even than what Hera offers, and she will pride herself on fooling you. She is not the goddess of wisdom, but of shopkeepers and tricksters. And she is not beautiful or alluring. She has the body of a boy to match her boyish nature and her mannish hobbies. I was born naked, as you see me now. She was born wearing armor. I have shown you all that I am; but she hides herself.”

Paris said, “Still, I must see her and judge only then. But I’ll remember your promise, if you pledge that, winning the apple, you’ll honor it.”

Aphrodite’s eyes brightened, even as she rebuked him, “I am a goddess and the child of the king of gods. My word isn’t to be doubted. But I pledge to honor my promise to you if you will grant me the apple.”

Aphrodite vanished from sight, as did her gown and her girdle. At once Athena stood before him, holding the Aegis in one hand, a bronze spear in the other. She wore armor some with which she was born, the rest fashioned by Hephaestus in the forges of Olympus. Upon her head she wore a golden helmet. She said, “I will show you myself fully, as I have shown myself before only to those who love me and whom I have loved.” She set down her shield upon a stone on her left. On her right, she lay down her spear. She removed her helmet, and her long hair, in curls and tightly coiled, black as a raven’s wing, fell around her shoulders. She looked at Paris

and fixed him in her gaze, and he felt as though, in those grey eyes, he was drowning. She removed her armor, placing that beside her helmet on the ground between them. She stood then before him completely disrobed, and her beauty, which though not of a kind with Hera's or Aphrodite's, nevertheless shook him. Her skin was white as alabaster and, were her slender shoulders not rising and falling with every breath, and were her arms not trembling a little in the cold air, he would have thought her a perfect statue. Her breasts and her belly were perfectly proportioned. In her figure, her hips were not too wide, and her waist not too thin and she had the appearance of a girl not quite a woman. The hair of her body, like that of her head, was black. And in the air he caught the sweet scent of her skin and became intoxicated. Paris said, "You are beautiful. How will I judge? I can't judge according to physical desire. Passion and desire are fickle and will change with my mood. Yet you are desirable, as are your father's wife and your sister."

Athena said, "I am the goddess of wisdom and I know the other two have offered you gifts beyond the appearance of beauty. Hera has surely offered you a kingdom, perhaps all kingdoms, power and riches. Aphrodite has offered you one who is more beautiful among mortals than any other, and who is also royal and more akin to nobility, more than Oenone, the nymph who loves you. Yet what may I offer? I'm not a friend to the wealthy or powerful, for they dispense with me when their worthless goals are attained. I am not loved by those who love and who seek their highest satisfaction

in physical passion and pretended intimacy. Those who know me and who profit by me are unmoved by riches and kingdoms and have no need for the embrace of those who love them, though all these things are desired by mortal men. But what I offer transcends the value of this seeming world and all its passing warmth and false glory.”

Paris said, “Tell me what I’ll gain from the gift of your wisdom, under the aegis of your friendship.”

Athena said, “I will show you something neither Hera nor Aphrodite will show you. I will tell you now, without expectation of reward, where each of our gifts will lead you, knowing that your fate is fixed, and how each gift will draw you to that fated end.”

Athena then became wrapped in veils of mist, grey as her own eyes, and through this mist, as through her eyes, Paris saw a vision of himself, caparisoned as a king, surrounded by lieutenants, sitting upon a throne greater even than his father’s throne. Athena said, “See with my vision, through my eyes. Here are Hera’s gifts. Let me tell the tale of Paris, when Paris awarded the apple to the wife of Zeus.”

## THE GIFTS OF GODDESSES

IN THE DARKNESS OF a moonless night, Hera placed Paris, in tattered clothes, on the shores of Argos, in the kingdom of Agamemnon. And in the guise of Zeus, her husband, Hera came to Agamemnon in a dream. When Agamemnon saw the king of gods floating ghostlike just above his bed, he said, “Why have you come to me in dream, O thunderer?”

Hera, with Zeus’ voice, said, “King of Argos. Your house is cursed, but I have blessed you with many blessings. Tonight I give you the greatest of these blessings. On the shores of your kingdom there is a prince without home, without friend, without companion. Exiled unjustly from fabled Troy, he is pursued by Trojans who, at their king’s command, would put him to death. Find this stranger, offer him the gift of guest friendship, for I am the protector of strangers. Bring him into your home; through him your house will be restored.

“Go find him, treat him as a son, as a friend, as a confidant, and your affairs will prosper. Withhold nothing from him, nothing for which he asks. Through him, the curse of Tantalus, the curse of Pelops, these both will be lifted from the House of Atreus, the House of your father.”

When Agamemnon awoke, he thanked the gods and in Zeus’ honor he slaughtered the best of his flock in burnt offering. At once he sent his men to find this prince on his shores, to return him to Agamemnon’s home, to bathe him, to anoint

him, to dress him fittingly as an Argive prince, as an adopted son. Paris told his tale, that he was a prince of Troy but that his father exiled him into the wilderness to die because of a prophecy that Paris would become mightier than his father, overthrow him, and become king of Troy in his place and would, likewise, redeem Argos from the curse upon the House of Atreus. Agamemnon swore a binding oath to protect Paris, and to restore to him the city of Troy.

In time, Paris became Agamemnon's trusted advisor and proved himself able to foretell the future and to interpret dream and vision, all sent by Hera and made real by the queen of the gods. No one doubted his powers, or that the gods favored him. Always Paris was at Agamemnon's side. And when Iphigenia, Agamemnon's daughter, came of age, the king married her to Paris and proclaimed the Trojan prince his son.

But Clytemnestra, Agamemnon's wife, hated her husband and feared that Paris might know what was in her dark heart. She was unfaithful to Agamemnon with his cousin, Aegisthus. She prayed earnestly to Hera: "I am a wronged wife, unloved and betrayed by my husband, the king. His heart belongs to no woman, yet no woman is safe from him. Will you not aid me? As I have been wronged, so too have you been wronged by Zeus, your husband. Avenge yourself upon him; become the enemy of unfaithful husbands."

Hera heard Clytemnestra, and knew what malice was in Clytemnestra's prayer. Hera sent omens to her, portending



success. And she revealed this prayer to Paris, saying, "With this knowledge, I'll make you king of Argos. Do as I tell you." Paris obeyed the goddess and went privately to speak with Clytemnestra and Aegisthus, finding them together.

He said, "Queen, Hera has come to me in dream. She says you called out to her, sought her intercession, prayed for vengeance against the king, your husband."

Clytemnestra became speechless with fear, and Aegisthus drew his sword, though his hand trembled.

Paris reassured them, "I won't tell Agamemnon. The goddess told me instead to come to you, in answer to your prayer."

Aegisthus was still afraid, but Clytemnestra became more calm, composed herself, and said to him, "What does Hera ask of us?"

Paris said, "At the next new moon, Aegisthus must throw a feast in Agamemnon's honor. There, the king will become drunk. And while Aegisthus sacrifices a lamb to the gods, the Queen must take Agamemnon aside, to a place unseen. And as Aegisthus drags his dagger across the lamb's throat, Clytemnestra must do likewise with Agamemnon. Then Clytemnestra must conceal her blade, and cry out that someone has murdered her husband. I'll then deflect accusations against you; I'll tell all those who ask that Agamemnon dreamed that he would be murdered by known enemies; but he hadn't listened. And then, Aegisthus will be

made king in Agamemnon's place, and Clytemnestra will remain queen."

Aegisthus, still suspicious, said, "This is what the goddess told you?"

Paris said, "Yes."

Aegisthus said, "Aren't you Agamemnon's friend?"

"I'm the king's friend, no matter what his name is. And I'm obedient to Hera, in this there is no lie."

The murder happened as Paris promised. At a great banquet in the house of Aegisthus, Clytemnestra deceived Agamemnon, and quietly killed him. Aegisthus still distrusted Paris and marked him for murder, yet Hera swept him away. For many days, Paris remained in hiding, but at last secretly spoke with his wife, and with Electra and Orestes, the three children of Agamemnon. He told them exactly as Hera instructed. He said, "You know that Aegisthus is king, and Agamemnon wanders, mutilated, a shade with no home. I've seen him near the freshly-turned earth where his tomb was constructed in haste. He spoke to me, saying that he could not rest nor be admitted across the black river unless Orestes, his son and true heir, put Aegisthus and Clytemnestra to death."

Electra agreed to this, and persuaded Orestes, who hesitated to put his mother to the sword. She said, "Aegisthus has killed a mightier man than himself, and taken our treacherous mother as his wife. They'll bear children, for our mother is

not so old, and her beauty is irresistible to those who know nothing of her fierce malice. And when they bear children, these will be the heirs of the House of Atreus, and we'll be murdered as shamefully as our father before us. They've already turned against Paris. Dear brother, how long do you think it will take before they turn on you and on your sisters?"

Orestes thought awhile at this, and, while Paris remained hidden away by Hera, the son of Agamemnon slit Aegisthus' throat, and stabbed his mother through the heart. But Orestes was not crowned in Aegisthus' place. Instead, the Furies pursued him, tormenting him for the crime of murdering his mother.

Paris said to Hera, "I've lied and induced murder. Yet I'm no closer to your promise to rule the Greeks and Trojans"

Hera said to Paris, "Do not doubt my promise. I've kept faith with you. Do as I tell you, or I'll hate you as easily and as fully as I've loved you and I'll cast you off and make you despised and rejected. Go to Orestes, and tell him that he must renounce the throne and exile himself from Argos, never to return. Only in this way, by proving that he wished only to avenge his father, and not for any baser motive, did he kill his mother. Once he agrees to leave, I'll intercede with the Furies, and he'll find peace and obscurity."

Paris did as Hera commanded. Praised for his selflessness, Orestes renounced the kingdom, leaving Argos, and was heard from never again. It was then, as the adopted son of

Agamemnon, as the husband of Iphigenia, and as a prince by birth, Paris became king of Argos.

Athena's tale continued much as it is now remembered, except that Paris, not Agamemnon, ruled the Argives, and Paris led the campaign against the Trojans. Paris had gone to Sparta, and stealthily kidnapped Helen, who he turned over to Thersites to do with her whatever he pleased, then to strangle her and conceal the body. When Menelaus could not find his wife, Paris came to him and told him, "This morning, as I went to the shore and was praying to the gods, I saw Trojan ships embarking nearby."

Hera then entered Menelaus' dreams, and told him that the Trojans had taken Helen, that he might have vengeance against them only by obeying Paris, by bringing together those Achaean kings who had sworn to protect Helen, and by bringing Troy to ruin. Menelaus believed this dream, and he called upon the Achaeans to honor their oaths and to go to Troy. They named Paris their commander, a prince of Troy. Once conquered, Paris would rule the Achaeans and Trojans together. In this all agreed, except Achilles. But Achilles pledged to obey until Troy fell.

When the Achaeans reached Troy, nine long of years of battle raged. In that time, Achilles, best of the Achaean warriors, learned to despise Paris. Athena had revealed to him Paris' lies and treachery. Achilles said nothing, though he treated Paris without respect. Achilles likewise knew that he himself must die at Troy. But he remained, telling his comrades,

“It is better for me to face an honorable death than to live a dishonorable life. But before I die, I’ll expose the Trojan prince who rules us. When Troy falls, my sworn allegiance to him is over, and I’ll put him to a shameful death.”

Paris’ spies in Achilles’ camp revealed to Paris Achilles’ threat. Hera told him, “I know a way to avoid death at his hands and still take the city.”

Paris said, “Yet you love Achilles. You would sacrifice him for me?”

Hera said, “I love Achilles, as I loved Agamemnon. But I knew Agamemnon’s fate. Speeding him on his way to that fate is a trifle to win for my beloved Paris a kingdom of his own and friends among the Greeks. Had you never been born, Agamemnon would still have died at the hands of his whorish wife.

“I also know Achilles’ fate. He must die here, in the shadow of Troy’s tall battlements. I cannot intercede on his behalf; and since you and he can never be reconciled, for he hates you and you fear him, I’ll support you according to my promise made on Ida. Go to Priam, who even now comes with your brother to embrace Achilles’ knees and to beg from him Hector’s precious body. Achilles has accomplished both ends for you; he has brought you closer to the throne of Trojans, and now he has brought you the man who will destroy Achilles. Go then to your brother, give him this arrow that I’ve tipped with a potent poison. Tell him to strike at Achilles from the ramparts of Troy.”

Paris did as Hera asked of him. He came to Priam's carriage as it crossed from the walls of Troy to the Greek encampment along the shore. With his face concealed, he stood before Priam and Helenus, his son who accompanied him. Paris said, "I'll lead you to Achilles, to offer your bribe in exchange for Hector's body." Priam was grateful, not knowing the identity of this benefactor. Paris took the reins and drove the carriage through the Greek camp stealthily and directly to Achilles' tent. There Priam stepped down and entered the tent. But Paris took Helenus, his own brother, by the shoulder, still his face concealed, and said, "You are a brave Trojan to come with your father on this dangerous errand."

Helenus answered, "I wouldn't have come, except that a goddess visited me and told me that, if I accompanied my father, I would discover a way to destroy Achilles."

Paris said, "That goddess is my friend and she has smiled on you tonight. Take this arrow. When the battle commences, fire it into Achilles' heel. The arrow is poisonous. A scratch of it would kill a hundred men. Strike Achilles with it and he will die and you'll have saved yourself and your family, and the women and children of Troy from his terrible anger."

Helenus thanked Paris and took the arrow, marked it, and carefully placed it in his quiver. When Priam emerged from the tent of Achilles, Helenus helped his father back to the carriage, quickly and carefully unloaded the cargo, and placed Hector's body, still unbruised, upon the planks of the

carriage. Paris then led them again safely and unseen through the Achaean lines and to the gates of Troy. Priam turned to thank the stranger, but Paris vanished.

On the day that the battle commenced, after all rites were carried out at Hector's byre, Achilles emerged on the field, killing unnumbered Trojans. Helenus climbed the ramparts of Troy to have a sweeping view of the raging battle.

As Achilles paused to cut the throat of another Trojan soldier, Helenus withdrew the poisoned arrow, aimed it carefully and fired it. Thus Achilles fell, in plain sight of Achaeans and Trojans. Fear filled the Greek ranks, and the Trojans rallied to see the Greek hero dead upon the field. The battle ended, and the Achaeans were again pushed back to their ships. Paris, alone in his tent, leaned upon his scepter and bit his tongue in anguish. He said, "My brother has killed Achilles. How will we take the city now?"

Hera appeared to him and said, "Nothing is done well in haste. Now that Achilles is dead, the Trojans expect the Greeks to flee. But seek Odysseus' counsel and things will go better for you."

When Paris spoke with Odysseus, they determined a way into the city by treachery. The Achaeans withdrew their ships, but remained near, though hidden from the Trojans. At the gates of the city, a wooden horse, large enough to conceal many Achaean warriors, was left as an offering of peace. Though

suspicious, the Trojans took the horse within the city. And at night, the warriors escaped into the city and slaughtered the Trojans they found. They then unbarred the city's gates. By morning, the Achaeans in full force entered Troy, put Priam and his sons to death, and installed Paris on his throne. Yet nowhere did they find Helen.

Paris sat, enthroned, in the city of his fathers, surrounded by proud Achaeans and by cringing Trojans who were defeated by the guile of Odysseus. Hera's promise was completely fulfilled.

At that supreme moment, a son of Priam, Deiphobus, who survived the slaughter, emerged from hiding and plunged a dagger between Paris' ribs. The Achaeans struck Deiphobus down. Menelaus dressed the wound, and brought Paris, still alive, to Oenone, the nymph in the forests of Ida. But Oenone would not heal him, and the king of Greeks and Trojans died that day. As darkness covered his eyes, Paris said, "The gods love justice."

As Athena's tale ended, Paris cried out, "Is this what Hera promises me? Murder, and treachery, and ruinous warfare? And then only to die at the end?"

Athena said, "Her promise is fulfilled whether you rule for one day or for a thousand years. Remember the meaning of what you pursue and understand what drives you to pursue it. But let me finish. I must tell you what Aphrodite promises that you may judge fairly between them.



Athena then revealed to Paris the story men know best, for we know which road Paris took, and how he lived and died, how he stole Helen from her lawful husband and took her away to her father's kingdom. You know how the Achaeans banded together, making that rare alliance with each other to bring Helen back and restore their honor and keep their promises to one another. You know how they came to Troy, laid siege to that great city for many years, breached its walls by treachery, and burned it to the ground, restoring Helen to her husband and putting all noble Trojans to death, taking their wives and children as concubines and slaves. You know how Achilles died and how Paris, wounded by Philoctetes, returned to Mount Ida where Helen, still bewitched by love, pleaded with Oenone, his wife, to heal him. You know that Oenone refused and Paris died. And you know when Paris was no more, Helen's heart was cured of love's madness and she was restored to Menelaus, her rightful husband.

When Athena recounted this tale of Aphrodite's gift, Paris was horrified not merely by the manner of his death. Another moment was shameful and equally terrible. Before the fall of Troy, the city gleaming behind the Trojans and Achaeans arrayed for war, Paris declared his willingness to spare the city from the consequences of his crime. He said to his brother, Hector, "You've scorned and despised me for bringing Helen to our city, and for bringing down upon us the anger of the Achaeans. But I'll prove you're wrong about me. Call out to the Achaeans; tell them I'll fight Menelaus in single combat. If I've wronged the bully Menelaus, if I've taken radiant Helen against her will, then Menelaus will slay

me, for the gods love justice. If I'm innocent, if Menelaus has wronged only himself, then I will slay him. Call out to the Achaeans and tell them."

Hector answered, "The gods love justice. But when have you ever fought in the cause of justice? Your boasts are foolish and your bravado false. You're a thief and a coward. But if I'm wrong, fight Menelaus. Whether you live or die, prove to me you're worthy to be called Priam's son, Hector's brother, a prince of Troy."

So Hector called out to the Achaeans, too numerous to count, their ranks without end. Hearing Hector's voice, the Achaeans held their attack and quieted. Hector said, "No more fighting. No more bloodshed. This is our promise. Paris challenges Menelaus to single combat. This is their quarrel alone, not yours or mine. Let them fight for Helen and for Helen's wealth. Let these two fight. The one who loses, his body will lie where he falls, in dust, anointed in blood, a carcass for birds. The one who wins, he may leave with Helen and all that she possesses. Let Paris and Menelaus take the field today, and one will live, the other die, and this will be the end of war."

The Achaeans assented and Menelaus also agreed. His vengeance on the Trojans would be slight, but the vision of Paris, his head struck off, was enough.

The Trojans and Achaeans set down their weapons. They sheathed their swords, set aside their bows, planted the points of their spears into the ground. They swore friendship

to one another. They sacrificed to the gods. And they called upon Zeus to punish, with terrible punishment, whomever might violate this truce.

Their oaths pledged, bound together in friendship and peace, the Achaeans and Trojans watched, still in ranks, as Paris and Menelaus took the field.

They drew lots, and Paris won. He readied his spear and with heroic effort launched it at red-haired Menelaus. The spear struck his shield, but the armor was too thick to pierce, and the tip bent backward.

Menelaus threw next. His arm was stronger. The spear smashed Paris' shield, the tip striking his breastplate. But Paris turned, and the spear glanced away. He stood unharmed.

Enraged, Menelaus drew his sword, swinging wildly, but it broke against Paris' helmet, stunning the Trojan prince, but not killing him, as he fell to the ground. Looming over him, Menelaus threw the broken weapon aside and grasped the horsehair crest of Paris' helmet and dragged him across the field. The chin strap, still firmly attached, gouged Paris' throat, strangling him. Death stood ready, and darkness nearly swept him away, except that Aphrodite intervened.

In an instant, the goddess cut the strap that bound Paris' neck. The helmet flew off in Menelaus' hands. And as Paris gasped, he vanished from sight. Menelaus stood in the field alone, still holding the helmet by the horsehair crest, surrounded by the Achaeans and Trojans, but Paris nowhere in sight.

Turning in circles, Menelaus roared, his vengeance spoilt, his victim gone.

Unseen, Aphrodite gently delivered Paris into his palace. Helen entered their bedchamber and found him in repose, still dressed for battle, but unhurt. She said with scorn, "Back from the war so soon? I saw you fighting Menelaus. But before he could strike off your head or spill your bowels on the dry earth, you fled. Yet I remember, in this room, in your arms, all the times you told me that you were the better man, stronger and more brave than Menelaus."

Paris said, "Athena is his friend; and Ares also. But Aphrodite spared me the wrath of those three together. But forget Menelaus, beautiful girl. Come closer; lie with me. The war will continue, but win or lose, I will not give you up."

Her contempt unsatisfied, still she could not resist Aphrodite's spell. Her hatred alloyed with passion, she removed her clothing without shame, slid beside him, and pulled him into her arms.

As they lay together entwined, the truce between the Trojans and Achaeans was broken, and the war continued to its end, at last to the ruin of Troy.

While Paris heard this tale from Athena's white lips, not cold but tinged with fleshly color, he was in turmoil. He said to Athena, "You've revealed to me the outcome of Hera's promise, and that of Aphrodite's promise. And although

the second gift seems less terrible than the first, it is only by comparison. The rewards of gods are more terrible than curses. A goddess's kiss is a stripe from the lash. What choices are these, to be a coward and thief, or a friendless liar? Tell me then what you would promise, and how I might be spared the shame of treachery or cowardice.

“What better gift do you offer, goddess? If I award you the apple, you surely offer something better. Show me this future in your blazing eyes.”



# THE HYPERBOREANS

PARIS STOOD BEFORE THE naked goddess. She remained silent for a moment, then said, "Your future with me is unwritten and unforeseen."

Paris laughed, saying, "No joys? No agonies? What can you foretell?"

Athena said, "Neither joys nor agonies are in this future. No pains of Hell, no pleasures of Paradise. There is nothing here for the one who delights in ephemeral things. There is nothing here that ends in time."

Paris said, "These words are meaningless. Tell me at least how I die in your gift. Twice I die, both times soaked in blood. Twice, the girl I love turns me away, refusing to heal me. In Hera's gift I am a possessor of kingdoms and a master of kings. In Aphrodite's gift, I possess something that kings would throw away kingdoms to possess. In this third, what am I? How will I die?"

Athena said, "Your fate is unchanged. In all lives Paris may live, Paris dies the same. Consider it. But I will tell you how you will live if you judge me fairest.

"In the forests here, content with your bride Oenone, you live a shepherd's life. You are not famous, and you have no fault in the fall of Troy, but Troy falls just the same."

Athena then revealed the end of Troy.

In the city of Chryse along the shore south of Troy, nine ships of the Myrmidons took refuge in the harbor from storm. Near the roiling sea stood the Temple of Apollo.

Also at port were stout Trojan ships returning from Argos, with Hector in command. The Trojans were friends and allies to the people of Chryse and, again from storm, the Trojan ships sought shelter there. Hector had gone to Argos months before, sent by Priam to visit Troy's allies and, likewise, to make peace with the warlike Achaeans in Mycenae and Sparta. Troilus, Priam's youngest son and his favorite, accompanied Hector. The youth was more beautiful to see even than his beautiful sisters, but young and inexperienced in war and diplomacy.

Achilles likewise disembarked in Chryse. In the city, he saw young Troilus and the boy's beauty snared his heart. Achilles bit the lip of prudence and approached him, saying, "Beautiful boy, come with me to Argos, where I'm making war against Agamemnon. Come with me aboard my black ships. You'll make a better friend to me than Patroclus, my cousin. I'll teach you what Hector cannot."

But Troilus did not share Achilles' desire and mocked the son of Peleus to his face, saying, "Go back to your black ships and sail over the wine-dark sea, far from my father's lands and far away from me. I am Priam's son, superior to any savage Greek. I am not your comrade or friend. I won't share your bed or catch the stink of you on me."



Troilus' companions roared with laughter. Enraged, Achilles pulled his bronze sword from its sheath. In a single motion he opened Troilus' ivory throat with it, nearly severing his head. Troilus grasped at his neck, gushing blood, and fell dead, darkness sweeping over him. But Achilles did not stop his murderous work. He killed Troilus' companions swiftly and without hesitation. Sulking, Achilles returned to the breakers on the shore, to his ships.

When the storm eased and the winds quieted, Achilles commanded his men to prepare to set sail. Patroclus, the companion of the son of Peleus, remained awhile in the city. He and a small contingent of Myrmidons tarried in the Temple of Apollo, sacrificing to the son of Zeus.

The Trojans soon discovered the body of Troilus and his friends. Those who, from doorways or windows, had seen the slaughter told them that an Achaean had killed the prince of Troy. Hector called together the best of his soldiers and made for the Temple of Apollo to confront the Myrmidons still in the city.

The priest of Apollo attempted to bar Hector's way, but the Trojans threw him down. The priest's beautiful daughter likewise stood before them, but was dragged away by her long hair and ravished openly, beneath the sun.

The Trojans entered the temple, their swords drawn, and fell upon the Myrmidons. Giving no warning, the Trojans slaughtered them, including Patroclus. They stripped the

dead Greeks of their swords, spears, and armor, and mutilated their bodies, hoping they would find no rest in the life to come. The priest, through broken teeth, called down Apollo's curse upon the Trojans, but Hector said, "What is that you're mumbling? We are your allies and protectors, but you gave refuge to the men who murdered my brother. Apollo should be satisfied with this fine sacrifice of men we've made. Be grateful that I don't add you and your child to the slaughter for having befriended those who killed my brother without provocation."

The Trojans left, not realizing these corpses had comrades nearby, and set sail while impatient Achilles wondered at the long absence of Patroclus and sent a messenger into the town to fetch him back.

When word of the slaughter reached Achilles' ears, he called out the name of his beloved cousin in anguish. He tore his hair and covered his face in ashes. But soon his grief became anger, and he went to make a sacrifice to Apollo, to honor his dead cousin in the temple in which he'd been slain. The priest of Apollo greeted Achilles. "Greatest of Achaeans, do not ask me who they were. I'm forbidden to reveal those who committed this foul crime. These were our allies who did this. I've called upon Apollo for revenge, and his anger or mercy must suffice me."

But the priest's daughter took Achilles aside and hissed at him, "Leave Agamemnon in peace, but make war with Troy.

The men who defiled this temple were princes and soldiers of Illium. Go there, if you would have vengeance against the ones who killed your kinsmen.” Achilles said, “I will do as you say.” And he and his black ships embarked for Troy.

The priest’s daughter then called down upon the Trojans a curse for defiling the shrine of the god. Again and again the girl supplicated the god she served, saying, “Apollo, god of the bow, of the wolf, of the plague, if we have pleased you in this shrine, sacrificing to you upon this altar, now slick with Achaean gore, pay back the Trojans, an arrow for every drop of blood they have shed in your sacred temple.”

Apollo, lord of the bow, of the wolf, of the plague, heard the girl’s prayer. He came down from Olympus, fiery with anger, and visited the city of Troy even as Hector and his tall ships arrived, even as Hector embraced Andromache and took his infant son in his arms, even as Priam mourned the death of beloved Troilus and carried out rites to comfort the spirit of his youngest son. Apollo’s blazing eyes peered into the city and, stringing his bow, he let loose his shafts, striking Trojans wherever he found them, wherever they stood, in the streets or in their homes. And in the morning, he visited the priest’s daughter in her dreams, promising to deliver terrible punishment to the Trojans and to Hector.

Long days passed in Troy as the plague of Apollo’s anger swept over the city. Each night gigantic pyres of corpses burned, lit by Trojans for their countrymen. Their stench reached the

heavens and the gods were displeased. And Troy groaned as Apollo's plague struck down men, women, and children.

When Achilles and his Myrmidons came to avenge the death of Patroclus, none opposed the arrival of their black ships. No watchmen called out to warn Troy. No soldiers barred the gates. The Myrmidons gained easy access to the ravaged city. Entering Illium unopposed, the Myrmidons set Troy on fire. When Achilles found Hector, confronting him and taking his life, Apollo turned his anger against the son of Peleus for depriving him of his full measure of vengeance. He fired a shaft at Achilles, striking him in his heel, and this was Achilles' end.

Paris wondered at this new story. He said, "What had I to do with the end of Troy?"

Athena said, "It was you, not Troilus, who went upon that journey with Hector when you accepted Aphrodite's gift. It was you, not Agamemnon, who made war with Troy when you accepted Hera's gift.

"Yet accepting my gift you take no part and you share no fault for the destruction of your father's city. One day, in your great old age, you lie down in the forest to rest awhile. Nearby, a hunter, seeing only the color of your skin, mistakes you for a deer. He fires his arrow into your eye. You die from the wound in your sleep, and Oenone, who finds you, cannot revive you. Death comes over you, darkness covers your eyes and you do not wake"

Paris said, "So my choice is to be king, or to possess the most beautiful woman in the world, or to be the obscure shepherd, which I already am. And in all cases Troy falls whether I am present or I am absent."

Athena said, "Come with me to the land of the dead and I will explain these mysteries to you." And Athena donned her armor and took Paris' hand. She led him from the grove in which they stood, along a forest path, down a ravine where the sound of flowing water soothed him, to a cavern Paris had never seen before, from which blew a cold draft.

Paris hesitated and said, "I won't go."

Athena smiled patiently. "I will protect you. No harm will come to you here." She drew him into the cave that led deep into the earth. The goddess and her mortal companion entered a great cavern through which ran five rivers. In the darkness, as his eyes adjusted to the dim light, Paris saw unnumbered figures, ghostly white and translucent, crowding together in the massive cavern, wandering without aim, flitting like phantoms without purpose, with empty eyes.

Athena said, "Take your sword and dig a trench here, not too deep."

Paris obeyed and, when he finished, Athena produced wine, milk and honey and poured this into the trench. This work done, Athena then brought him a black sheep, without spot or blemish. She held back its head and Paris cut its throat,

creating a pool of blood in the trench. The dead, smelling the blood, turned toward Paris and approached the trench. But Athena, glorious to behold in her shining armor stopped them and turned them away, for even the dead, who have nothing left to fear, were overwhelmed by her. She unveiled the aegis to those who came too close, and the gorgon's head turned them to stone. She called out, her voice ringing in the cavern, both beautiful and awful to hear, "Tiresias! Come forward! This offering is for you."

Then stepped forward the ghost of Tiresias, grasping a golden scepter. He said, "Why do you call me, Athena? How may I serve you when I am dead? I haven't strength to serve you."

Athena said, "Drink your fill and find strength in the libation we offer."

Tiresias knelt down on the wet earth and cupped his hands, taking up the bloody offering, drinking a mouthful at a time. At last he stopped and, leaning with his scepter, stood again before them.

Paris, wearing a look of horror, said, "How is it that you speak and seem sensible when all these others seem feckless and speechless?"

Tiresias said, "I have kept speech and mind. I possess even my powers of prophecy, though I am dead. These other mindless ones wander without purpose, troubled but without knowing

what troubles them. Knowing only appearance, they are as much dead to themselves as they are to you.”

Paris said, “What do you know of my death? What does your power of prophecy reveal to you about me?”

Tiresias said, “Your death is fixed, but your life is not yet decided.”

Athena said, “Tell him, Tiresias, what will become of him if he accepts my gift.”

Tiresias said, “He will be blessed beyond the blessing I have received. Like me, he will retain knowledge of himself in the land of the dead, but he shall pass beyond the land of the dead to the land of true life, which is known only to a few.”

Paris said, “Is this land a paradise? A place of heavenly enjoyment and delights?”

Tiresias said, “That you expect it to be is a barrier to it. The road to the land I speak of is blocked even to immortals if they are not purified of worldly desire and foolish expectation. Give up all knowledge of heaven and earth and cleanse yourself that you may attain that station and may enter the House constructed for you in worlds yet to form, under stars yet unborn, in skies not yet raised. Only then is the road open to you, if you accept Athena’s gift and turn away all other gifts. If not, then join these dead here today, for you already wander among them.” Tiresias then fell silent

and slipped, like mist, back into the unnumbered crowd of the dead, disappearing among them altogether. And, at once, Paris was again in the grove, smelling the sweet mountain air, the goddess naked before him.

Paris said, "I have no taste for Hera's glory, but that vision of death might be forgotten in the arms of Aphrodite's promise, drinking of love's nepenthe."

Athena said, "You may take some comfort there, but at last you face death. And when you are dead, Helen will betray all things, even the city in which she found protection, even the king who offered her sanctuary, to save her precious life. And when you are buried, rejected by Oenone and cast into an earthen pit, Helen will forget her tears for you and remember her affection for Menelaus. To his bed she will go again while you roll and couple with dust. Those who speak of 'deathless' love speak in code of something else, or else they have no sense. Mortal love, like martial glory, like all worldly things, has an ending in time. Do not put your faith there. Unwisely men spend their lives bartering one useless thing for another and consider themselves great negotiators.

"Seek a cunning superior to Odysseus', a strength greater than Ajax's, an authority higher than Agamemnon's, a glory better than Achilles' and claim your birthright, higher than Hector's. Follow Tiresias' prophecy for you and fight at my side, not against men, or in hollow ships, or on fleet horses on the plains of Troy, but against your passionate self. Become my kinsman, closer even than my father.



“I am truly the daughter of the Thunderer Zeus, that lover of lightning; but he is only display beside the power I serve. Zeus is my father, but he, like me, and like his fathers before him, is but a creature. He is neither the font of wisdom nor the source of the cosmos. He is not the highest in heavenly glory, nor the best of his kind. He is king now, as Cronus was king before him, and as another will be king in his place. He is my father, from whom I have sprung. But consider your own father, who would have you murdered in the crib. There is One greater than the king of Troy, and there is One greater than the king of gods. From Zeus I have sprung, but I serve the One beyond singleness, the Man beyond men, the God beyond gods. There is no God but Him. Become like me, and serve wisdom and let wisdom serve you and what I say will be clear to you. The immortals themselves will honor you. You have nothing to fear in life and in death and in the life yet to come. Do not accept Hera’s bribe and resist Aphrodite’s allurements; these are not gifts but springes. To live in service to your desires is a snare; it is not life, nor is abjuring such desires death.

“Transcend this book. From what is read become the one who reads, for the reader has no doubt that the author exists. Discard all arguments of watchmakers and designs; for this reasoning is petty and absurd. Abjure doubt and uncertainty. Rise up from sleep, and the dreams of life will become unreal. Give up your worthless pursuit of worldly power and faithless beauty.

“This calling is for few, and I offer it to you if you judge me the fairest of the three. Have you heard of the race, north beyond north, called the Hyperboreans?”

Paris said, “Yes, I have heard of them. They live in a land of warmth, of plenty, of eternal sunshine both day and night. They are worshippers of Helios.”

“They do not worship Helios; Helios worships them, does obeisance to them. *Neither by land nor sea shall you find the road to the Hyperboreans. They are beyond north, beyond ice, beyond death.* Yet none of that tribe goes a moment without the Muse at his side, without celestial music in his ears, without the warm sun on his skin.

“No wind can parch him, for he is beyond winds. No darkness can blind him, for he wears the diadem of the sun. Neither hunger nor thirst can reach him, for always he is filled with what sustains him; he drinks deeply of the waters of true knowledge. Though to you, he may seem poor, beyond your sight he is caparisoned like a king. Though to you, he may seem without friend, immortals vie for his companionship. Though to you, no sun shines upon him, but in his sight the sun shines at all times, in all places. He is beyond worldly riches, for his treasury overflows. He has no need for love’s passion, for he loves beyond passion. He has no craving for power; power is powerless before him. The storm of sorrows and joys do not trouble him, for he is beyond all earthly tempests. Men say he is from the north, where winds do not rule. Yet he may be in any place. He is unmoved by any earthly

power. His life even the gods cannot possess, for he is beyond all gods and goddesses. His mind is stillness, quietude, peace. His goal is not happiness, for contentment rests on his brow. What no living man perceives, the gods envy.

At last, Athena said, "Become Hyperborean and rise above all things. Be detached from all that is in heaven and on earth. Abstain from the lures of the world, for the one who desires the world shall always be reborn to desire. Go beyond life and death, beyond all things that have an ending in time.

"This is what I offer the one who counts me the fairest of the three."

Athena fell silent for awhile, and Paris could not speak. At last, she said, "I have revealed to you the manner of these prizes and their consequences. You know the meaning of power, of love, and of wisdom. You know the truth of three goddesses. You have seen us before you naked, exposed as we truly are. Judge then between us and receive what you have earned."



# THE JUDGMENT OF PARIS

WHEN ATHENA DISSAPEARED FROM his sight, Paris spoke to Hermes, promising the goddesses to make his decision in the morning. He lay down that night to sleep against a water-softened log, but was inwardly in turmoil, for none of the prizes seemed desirable to him.

But Aphrodite knew his manner had changed and that Athena's persuasions might prevail. Therefore, as Paris slept, she came down secretly from the heavens to speak with him.

She pressed her lips to his, and breathed into his mouth, and she entered his dreams. She said to him, "You have your time, a moment, then no more, and drink from cups that bore you wine but once. How little time you have, O noble son of noble kings. Will you follow Athena's path and linger here among the obscure? Abandon this; embrace passion and love, for there is nothing else like love in the world or ever after. The rest is empty and meaningless. Why do you turn away from love, which surpasses all other things in power and beauty? Take what I offer. Award the apple to Athena if you must; but take what I offer."

Paris said, "I saw a vision of your reward. I saw the woman Helen, and felt nothing of this love or passion; she was beautiful but that beauty had no power over me. She is lovely, as you say, perhaps even the loveliest. But the most beautiful amphora may hold dust as easily as oil, vinegar as fully as

wine. I am Oenone's and she is mine. If this isn't great passion or immortal love, still she is mine and I am hers. No woman's momentary beauty, not even Helen's, has enchanted me as much as Oenone's warm flesh, her soft skin, and her singing in the morning."

Aphrodite said, "You saw Helen through Athena's eyes; you saw only by her vision, and knew only by her knowledge. But Athena has no passion in her; she drains the world of color. As for love, I know nothing of her heart, but I imagine much. She has no interest in or perception of love. You saw her wearing a body like a young boy's, with hardly the shape of a woman. And if she loves at all, she loves as a young boy does, concealing such love with a mask of disdain or disgust, as though love were a fault, a shameful blemish on perfect skin. See Helen through my eyes, through love's eyes, and you will at once accept the gift I give and will award me the apple. Give me the apple, and I will grant your fondest wish."

Paris said, "I don't wish for love."

Aphrodite rose up before him, "Love is not a choice, nor the ones we love summoned by any earthly power. Love comes and you are powerless. And when it comes, it will wish on your behalf, overwhelming all other wishes. And I will grant what you will wish, union with the woman you must love."

In one hand, the goddess held a small arrow tipped with liquid, thick as blood but dark blue. In the other, she held a small mirror set in a frame carved of rosewood. She held the

mirror to his face, and said, "Look upon the one you love." His own reflection stared back at him. But as he gazed, Aphrodite stung him in the chest with the arrow, and a feeling of warmth filled him as the poison entered his heart. He cried out, and clutched at his breast. His eyes, at last, returned to the mirror. He no longer saw his own face, but the face of Helen, more beautiful than any other, a sun eclipsing the moon. She was just as she appeared when Athena had revealed her, but his reaction was now wholly different. Had she been disfigured, he would have loved her no less; she was both beautiful and dazzling, she was his heart's one wish and he would cut his own throat to capture even a momentary glance, or the slightest smile from her carnelian lips. He was elated but also in despair that this creature, who was fashioned by the gods for him, could live yet not be his.

Crying out, Paris awoke. The three goddesses stood before him in their full glory, but they no longer cowed him. He said, "Now I know this choice was never choice at all and this trial fixed. Love is master, and I obey, knowing how it will end. For though I know, I do not care."

Aphrodite took the golden apple in her hand, her face radiant with delight. Hera said nothing, but her countenance became terrible to see. Athena said only, "You are by judgment judged, and by trial of beauty, tried." And before his eyes, the goddesses vanished.

Paris, the prince of Troy, abandoned his herds, left his home on the slopes of Ida, and came down from the mountain. He returned to Troy, and then sailed to Sparta, to the house of

Menelaus, and abducted Helen. He returned to Troy with her, bringing war and ruin.

With those words, the book ended and I looked up from the pages. The sun had now risen and bathed the garden in a sweet glow. Sophia said, “Between reason and passion, passion is the stronger. Passion may be for good; but it is often not. In passion, men lose reason, in worldly love they surrender good sense, in zealous ardor, they seek the highest good even as they commit monstrous crimes. No man does evil who does not think there is some good in it, but it is the good of a child. Good and bad are not to be confused with right and wrong. Paris knew the right path, and knowingly rejected it. You know his end, and you know what the mob did to Hypatia. They loved Christ, the Prince of Peace, but when passion overcame them, look what they did to her in the name of peace. The choice seems simple. The goddesses offered love, power, and wisdom. Of these, Paris chose love, and you know how it ended.

“From me, hear Athena’s voice. From me, hear Hypatia’s. Now you have understood me, and understood Hypatia. She was the best of my students. Speak with her, if you will. The story of the apple was the story she told me, a single scroll saved from the burning library when her spirit ascended into the heavens.”

Saying farewell to Sophia, I walked the few miles from the garden to the center of the city, drawn as though by vague memory to the steps of the library. The air was cool, with the first taste of winter on its breath, and the sky was a clear



blue. She heard me approach and turned a little to face me, shielding her face from the sun with her left hand. She was fully clothed, the garments of a scholar, yet still I could see the cuts in her flesh, and she seemed a living mosaic. She smiled and said to me, "I've heard that you're a ghost haunting me. Here I am."

She stood and walked the few steps up to the library. I followed her and together we surveyed an empty field, a few ancient broken stones, and dry earth. She smiled at me, but this time sadly, and gestured toward the field. "What most deserves love is not often what men choose. What you and I cherish is rare and fragile. What wise men build, a single fool can tear down. In a world of fools, what can we build? I'm at least dead, having given my life on the altar of their Lamb, even as they mutilated me. I don't pity myself nor should you pity me. The punishment of Sisyphus is self-imposed. Leave the rock to the rocks."

I said, "I'm not dead, even if nothingness tugs at my shirt. And I won't give up hope. Like me, you have hope for men and even for yourself. This is why you recounted the story of Paris. We mumble our despair, but hold our secret, Pandora's secret, both sweet and bitter."

Hypatia said, "I'm embarrassed by hope and ashamed to be in possession of it."

I said, "But in that tale of Paris you were right and everything you say is true. What other option do men have? Where this field grows wild once there stood a library. And once

again another may stand in its place and yet another after that. Women like you will be born again and again in the world and all the fools and fanatics cannot band together to stop it. I would gladly be Sisyphus pushing that rock up a hill, watching it roll down again and again, for this isn't hell, not even punishment. Surely he says, on each try, 'This time I'll succeed.' He makes it hell if he says, 'I'll fail again' and therefore tries no more and hell is his reward."

Hypatia smiled at this, covering her mouth with two fingers. She said, "If I chose not to believe, still He gave me a choice. When I lived I rejected Jesus; see why in the twisted faces of those who said they followed him."

I said, "With bits of broken tile, they mutilated you, they killed you. They made you in their own image. You may yet reject them and embrace Him. Don't imagine that in their fanaticism they represented Christ. By their fanaticism for Him, they abjured Him. Don't allow yourself to judge the One through the medium of the many. Porphyry declared, 'The gods have proclaimed Christ to have been most pious, but Christians are a confused and vicious sect.' Yet this declaration does not prove Christ false. Not in the many faces of the mad and witless crowd will you ever find Him, but only through Him is He known. In the frantic shouting of lunatics you won't hear the voice of the Most High. Let Ibn Ganas and al-Doushu quibble. The words of the Ageless are among us, through His Messenger of the Age."

In answer to this, she rose up before me. She ascended from the ground and became radiant with a dazzling light.

She lifted the hem of her veil and revealed her hair, sandy-colored hanging in ringlets across her shoulders. She hung there, suspended. I fell to my knees, onto the earth warmed by the radiance of her face, perfumed by the wind in her hair, and said, “In the name of God.”

She opened her mouth and words, like rays of light, issued from between her soft lips. She said, “Wake up dreamer. Wake up. You found Him in the world; will you not acknowledge Him within yourself? O Paris, if you but looked within you might see. Am I not Athena? Am I not Sophia? Am I not the murdered Hypatia?” She opened her gown and bared her chest, radiant as her face, and in the shrine of her body I saw Him enthroned. She held out her arm to me, with her hand beckoning to me.

I wept without shame and said, “In the name of God, the Most Glorious.”

May God’s favor fall upon this work. May God’s forgiveness encompass its author and whomsoever shall read it. May the prayers of the believers comfort them. I seek shelter from God in God, from His justice in His mercy, from His wrath in His love—for there is neither justice nor mercy, neither wrath nor love, except in Him. There is no power but His, no love but His, no wisdom but in Him. In the name of God, O Thou Glory of the Most Glorious!

*Yá Bahá’u’l-Abhá*









