

The Duel of Paris & Menelaus
from *The Iliad* by Homer

Thus by their leaders' care each martial band
Moves into ranks, and stretches o'er the land.
With shouts the Trojans, rushing from afar,
Proclaim their motions, and provoke the war
So when inclement winters vex the plain
With piercing frosts, or thick-descending rain,
To warmer seas the cranes embodied fly,^[68]
With noise, and order, through the midway sky;
To pigmy nations wounds and death they bring,
And all the war descends upon the wing,
But silent, breathing rage, resolved and skill'd^[69]
By mutual aids to fix a doubtful field,
Swift march the Greeks: the rapid dust around
Darkening arises from the labour'd ground.
Thus from his flaggy wings when Notus sheds
A night of vapours round the mountain heads,
Swift-gliding mists the dusky fields invade,
To thieves more grateful than the midnight shade;
While scarce the swains their feeding flocks survey,
Lost and confused amidst the thicken'd day:
So wrapp'd in gathering dust, the Grecian train,
A moving cloud, swept on, and hid the plain.

Now front to front the hostile armies stand,
Eager of fight, and only wait command;
When, to the van, before the sons of fame
Whom Troy sent forth, the beauteous Paris came:
In form a god! the panther's speckled hide
Flow'd o'er his armour with an easy pride:
His bended bow across his shoulders flung,
His sword beside him negligently hung;
Two pointed spears he shook with gallant grace,
And dared the bravest of the Grecian race.

As thus, with glorious air and proud disdain,
He boldly stalk'd, the foremost on the plain,

Him Menelaus, loved of Mars, espies,
With heart elated, and with joyful eyes:
So joys a lion, if the branching deer,
Or mountain goat, his bulky prize, appear;
Eager he seizes and devours the slain,
Press'd by bold youths and baying dogs in vain.
Thus fond of vengeance, with a furious bound,
In clanging arms he leaps upon the ground
From his high chariot: him, approaching near,
The beauteous champion views with marks of fear,
Smit with a conscious sense, retires behind,
And shuns the fate he well deserved to find.
As when some shepherd, from the rustling trees^[70]
Shot forth to view, a scaly serpent sees,
Trembling and pale, he starts with wild affright
And all confused precipitates his flight:
So from the king the shining warrior flies,
And plunged amid the thickest Trojans lies.

As godlike Hector sees the prince retreat,
He thus upbraids him with a generous heat:
"Unhappy Paris! but to women brave!^[71]
So fairly form'd, and only to deceive!
Oh, hadst thou died when first thou saw'st the light,
Or died at least before thy nuptial rite!
A better fate than vainly thus to boast,
And fly, the scandal of thy Trojan host.
Gods! how the scornful Greeks exult to see
Their fears of danger undeceived in thee!
Thy figure promised with a martial air,
But ill thy soul supplies a form so fair.
In former days, in all thy gallant pride,
When thy tall ships triumphant stemm'd the tide,
When Greece beheld thy painted canvas flow,
And crowds stood wondering at the passing show,
Say, was it thus, with such a baffled mien,
You met the approaches of the Spartan queen,
Thus from her realm convey'd the beauteous prize,
And both her warlike lords outshined in Helen's eyes?
This deed, thy foes' delight, thy own disgrace,

Thy father's grief, and ruin of thy race;
This deed recalls thee to the proffer'd fight;
Or hast thou injured whom thou dar'st not right?
Soon to thy cost the field would make thee know
Thou keep'st the consort of a braver foe.
Thy graceful form instilling soft desire,
Thy curling tresses, and thy silver lyre,
Beauty and youth; in vain to these you trust,
When youth and beauty shall be laid in dust:
Troy yet may wake, and one avenging blow
Crush the dire author of his country's woe."

His silence here, with blushes, Paris breaks:
"'Tis just, my brother, what your anger speaks:
But who like thee can boast a soul sedate,
So firmly proof to all the shocks of fate?
Thy force, like steel, a temper'd hardness shows,
Still edged to wound, and still untired with blows,
Like steel, uplifted by some strenuous swain,
With falling woods to strew the wasted plain.
Thy gifts I praise; nor thou despise the charms
With which a lover golden Venus arms;
Soft moving speech, and pleasing outward show,
No wish can gain them, but the gods bestow.
Yet, would'st thou have the proffer'd combat stand,
The Greeks and Trojans seat on either hand;
Then let a midway space our hosts divide,
And, on that stage of war, the cause be tried:
By Paris there the Spartan king be fought,
For beauteous Helen and the wealth she brought;
And who his rival can in arms subdue,
His be the fair, and his the treasure too.
Thus with a lasting league your toils may cease,
And Troy possess her fertile fields in peace;
Thus may the Greeks review their native shore,
Much famed for generous steeds, for beauty more."

He said. The challenge Hector heard with joy,
Then with his spear restrain'd the youth of Troy,
Held by the midst, athwart; and near the foe

Advanced with steps majestically slow:
While round his dauntless head the Grecians pour
Their stones and arrows in a mingled shower.

Then thus the monarch, great Atrides, cried:
"Forbear, ye warriors! lay the darts aside:
A parley Hector asks, a message bears;
We know him by the various plume he wears."
Awed by his high command the Greeks attend,
The tumult silence, and the fight suspend.

While from the centre Hector rolls his eyes
On either host, and thus to both applies:
"Hear, all ye Trojan, all ye Grecian bands,
What Paris, author of the war, demands.
Your shining swords within the sheath restrain,
And pitch your lances in the yielding plain.
Here in the midst, in either army's sight,
He dares the Spartan king to single fight;
And wills that Helen and the ravish'd spoil,
That caused the contest, shall reward the toil.
Let these the brave triumphant victor grace,
And different nations part in leagues of peace."

He spoke: in still suspense on either side
Each army stood: the Spartan chief replied:
"Me too, ye warriors, hear, whose fatal right
A world engages in the toils of fight.
To me the labour of the field resign;
Me Paris injured; all the war be mine.
Fall he that must, beneath his rival's arms;
And live the rest, secure of future harms.
Two lambs, devoted by your country's rite,
To earth a sable, to the sun a white,
Prepare, ye Trojans! while a third we bring
Select to Jove, the inviolable king.
Let reverend Priam in the truce engage,
And add the sanction of considerate age;
His sons are faithless, headlong in debate,
And youth itself an empty wavering state;

Cool age advances, venerably wise,
Turns on all hands its deep-discerning eyes;
Sees what befell, and what may yet befall,
Concludes from both, and best provides for all.

The nations hear with rising hopes possess'd,
And peaceful prospects dawn in every breast.
Within the lines they drew their steeds around,
And from their chariots issued on the ground;
Next, all unbuckling the rich mail they wore,
Laid their bright arms along the sable shore.
On either side the meeting hosts are seen
With lances fix'd, and close the space between.
Two heralds now, despatch'd to Troy, invite
The Phrygian monarch to the peaceful rite.
Talthybius hastens to the fleet, to bring
The lamb for Jove, the inviolable king.

Meantime to beauteous Helen, from the skies
The various goddess of the rainbow flies:
(Like fair Laodice in form and face,
The loveliest nymph of Priam's royal race:)
Her in the palace, at her loom she found;
The golden web her own sad story crown'd,
The Trojan wars she weaved (herself the prize)
And the dire triumphs of her fatal eyes.
To whom the goddess of the painted bow:
"Approach, and view the wondrous scene below!^[72]
Each hardy Greek, and valiant Trojan knight,
So dreadful late, and furious for the fight,
Now rest their spears, or lean upon their shields;
Ceased is the war, and silent all the fields.
Paris alone and Sparta's king advance,
In single fight to toss the beamy lance;
Each met in arms, the fate of combat tries,
Thy love the motive, and thy charms the prize."

This said, the many-coloured maid inspires
Her husband's love, and wakes her former fires;
Her country, parents, all that once were dear,

Rush to her thought, and force a tender tear,
O'er her fair face a snowy veil she threw,
And, softly sighing, from the loom withdrew.
Her handmaids, Clymene and Aethra, wait
Her silent footsteps to the Scaean gate.

There sat the seniors of the Trojan race:
(Old Priam's chiefs, and most in Priam's grace,)
The king the first; Thymoetes at his side;
Lampus and Clytius, long in council tried;
Panthus, and Hicetaon, once the strong;
And next, the wisest of the reverend throng,
Antenor grave, and sage Ucalegon,
Lean'd on the walls and bask'd before the sun:
Chiefs, who no more in bloody fights engage,
But wise through time, and narrative with age,
In summer days, like grasshoppers rejoice,
A bloodless race, that send a feeble voice.
These, when the Spartan queen approach'd the tower,
In secret own'd resistless beauty's power:
They cried, "No wonder such celestial charms^[73]
For nine long years have set the world in arms;
What winning graces! what majestic mien!
She moves a goddess, and she looks a queen!
Yet hence, O Heaven, convey that fatal face,
And from destruction save the Trojan race."

The good old Priam welcomed her, and cried,
"Approach, my child, and grace thy father's side.
See on the plain thy Grecian spouse appears,
The friends and kindred of thy former years.
No crime of thine our present sufferings draws,
Not thou, but Heaven's disposing will, the cause
The gods these armies and this force employ,
The hostile gods conspire the fate of Troy.
But lift thy eyes, and say, what Greek is he
(Far as from hence these aged orbs can see)
Around whose brow such martial graces shine,
So tall, so awful, and almost divine!
Though some of larger stature tread the green,

None match his grandeur and exalted mien:
He seems a monarch, and his country's pride."
Thus ceased the king, and thus the fair replied:
"Before thy presence, father, I appear,
With conscious shame and reverential fear.
Ah! had I died, ere to these walk I fled,
False to my country, and my nuptial bed;
My brothers, friends, and daughter left behind,
False to them all, to Paris only kind!
For this I mourn, till grief or dire disease
Shall waste the form whose fault it was to please!
The king of kings, Atrides, you survey,
Great in the war, and great in arts of sway:
My brother once, before my days of shame!
And oh! that still he bore a brother's name!"

With wonder Priam view'd the godlike man,
Extoll'd the happy prince, and thus began:
"O bless'd Atrides! born to prosperous fate,
Successful monarch of a mighty state!
How vast thy empire! Of your matchless train
What numbers lost, what numbers yet remain!
In Phrygia once were gallant armies known,
In ancient time, when Otreus fill'd the throne,
When godlike Mygdon led their troops of horse,
And I, to join them, raised the Trojan force:
Against the manlike Amazons we stood,^[74]
And Sangar's stream ran purple with their blood.
But far inferior those, in martial grace,
And strength of numbers, to this Grecian race."

This said, once more he view'd the warrior train;
"What's he, whose arms lie scatter'd on the plain?
Broad is his breast, his shoulders larger spread,
Though great Atrides overtops his head.
Nor yet appear his care and conduct small;
From rank to rank he moves, and orders all.
The stately ram thus measures o'er the ground,
And, master of the flock, surveys them round."
Then Helen thus: "Whom your discerning eyes

Have singled out, is Ithacus the wise;
A barren island boasts his glorious birth;
His fame for wisdom fills the spacious earth."

Antenor took the word, and thus began:^[75]
"Myself, O king! have seen that wondrous man
When, trusting Jove and hospitable laws,
To Troy he came, to plead the Grecian cause;
(Great Menelaus urged the same request;)
My house was honour'd with each royal guest:
I knew their persons, and admired their parts,
Both brave in arms, and both approved in arts.
Erect, the Spartan most engaged our view;
Ulysses seated, greater reverence drew.
When Atreus' son harangued the listening train,
Just was his sense, and his expression plain,
His words succinct, yet full, without a fault;
He spoke no more than just the thing he ought.
But when Ulysses rose, in thought profound,^[76]
His modest eyes he fix'd upon the ground;
As one unskill'd or dumb, he seem'd to stand,
Nor raised his head, nor stretch'd his sceptred hand;
But, when he speaks, what elocution flows!
Soft as the fleeces of descending snows,^[77]
The copious accents fall, with easy art;
Melting they fall, and sink into the heart!
Wondering we hear, and fix'd in deep surprise,
Our ears refute the censure of our eyes."

The king then ask'd (as yet the camp he view'd)
"What chief is that, with giant strength endued,
Whose brawny shoulders, and whose swelling chest,
And lofty stature, far exceed the rest?
"Ajax the great, (the beauteous queen replied.)
Himself a host: the Grecian strength and pride.
See! bold Idomeneus superior towers
Amid yon circle of his Cretan powers,
Great as a god! I saw him once before,
With Menelaus on the Spartan shore.
The rest I know, and could in order name;

All valiant chiefs, and men of mighty fame.
Yet two are wanting of the numerous train,
Whom long my eyes have sought, but sought in vain:
Castor and Pollux, first in martial force,
One bold on foot, and one renown'd for horse.
My brothers these; the same our native shore,
One house contain'd us, as one mother bore.
Perhaps the chiefs, from warlike toils at ease,
For distant Troy refused to sail the seas;
Perhaps their swords some nobler quarrel draws,
Ashamed to combat in their sister's cause."

So spoke the fair, nor knew her brothers' doom;^[78]
Wrapt in the cold embraces of the tomb;
Adorn'd with honours in their native shore,
Silent they slept, and heard of wars no more.
Meantime the heralds, through the crowded town.
Bring the rich wine and destined victims down.
Idaeus' arms the golden goblets press'd,^[79]
Who thus the venerable king address'd:
"Arise, O father of the Trojan state!
The nations call, thy joyful people wait
To seal the truce, and end the dire debate.
Paris, thy son, and Sparta's king advance,
In measured lists to toss the weighty lance;
And who his rival shall in arms subdue,
His be the dame, and his the treasure too.
Thus with a lasting league our toils may cease,
And Troy possess her fertile fields in peace:
So shall the Greeks review their native shore,
Much famed for generous steeds, for beauty more."

With grief he heard, and bade the chiefs prepare
To join his milk-white coursers to the car;
He mounts the seat, Antenor at his side;
The gentle steeds through Scaea's gates they guide:^[80]
Next from the car descending on the plain,
Amid the Grecian host and Trojan train,
Slow they proceed: the sage Ulysses then
Arose, and with him rose the king of men.

On either side a sacred herald stands,
The wine they mix, and on each monarch's hands
Pour the full urn; then draws the Grecian lord
His cutlass sheathed beside his ponderous sword;
From the sign'd victims crops the curling hair;^[81]
The heralds part it, and the princes share;
Then loudly thus before the attentive bands
He calls the gods, and spreads his lifted hands:
"O first and greatest power! whom all obey,
Who high on Ida's holy mountain sway,
Eternal Jove! and you bright orb that roll
From east to west, and view from pole to pole!
Thou mother Earth! and all ye living floods!
Infernal furies, and Tartarean gods,
Who rule the dead, and horrid woes prepare
For perjured kings, and all who falsely swear!
Hear, and be witness. If, by Paris slain,
Great Menelaus press the fatal plain;
The dame and treasures let the Trojan keep,
And Greece returning plough the watery deep.
If by my brother's lance the Trojan bleed,
Be his the wealth and beauteous dame decreed:
The appointed fine let Ilion justly pay,
And every age record the signal day.
This if the Phrygians shall refuse to yield,
Arms must revenge, and Mars decide the field."

With that the chief the tender victims slew,
And in the dust their bleeding bodies threw;
The vital spirit issued at the wound,
And left the members quivering on the ground.
From the same urn they drink the mingled wine,
And add libations to the powers divine.
While thus their prayers united mount the sky,
"Hear, mighty Jove! and hear, ye gods on high!
And may their blood, who first the league confound,
Shed like this wine, disdain the thirsty ground;
May all their consorts serve promiscuous lust,
And all their lust be scatter'd as the dust!"
Thus either host their imprecations join'd,

Which Jove refused, and mingled with the wind.

The rites now finish'd, reverend Priam rose,
And thus express'd a heart o'ercharged with woes:
"Ye Greeks and Trojans, let the chiefs engage,
But spare the weakness of my feeble age:
In yonder walls that object let me shun,
Nor view the danger of so dear a son.
Whose arms shall conquer and what prince shall fall,
Heaven only knows; for heaven disposes all."
This said, the hoary king no longer stay'd,
But on his car the slaughter'd victims laid:
Then seized the reins his gentle steeds to guide,
And drove to Troy, Antenor at his side.

Bold Hector and Ulysses now dispose
The lists of combat, and the ground inclose:
Next to decide, by sacred lots prepare,
Who first shall launch his pointed spear in air.
The people pray with elevated hands,
And words like these are heard through all the bands:
"Immortal Jove, high Heaven's superior lord,
On lofty Ida's holy mount adored!
Whoe'er involved us in this dire debate,
O give that author of the war to fate
And shades eternal! let division cease,
And joyful nations join in leagues of peace."

With eyes averted Hector hastes to turn
The lots of fight and shakes the brazen urn.
Then, Paris, thine leap'd forth; by fatal chance
Ordain'd the first to whirl the weighty lance.
Both armies sat the combat to survey.
Beside each chief his azure armour lay,
And round the lists the generous coursers neigh.
The beauteous warrior now arrays for fight,
In gilded arms magnificently bright:
The purple cuishes clasp his thighs around,
With flowers adorn'd, with silver buckles bound:
Lycaon's corslet his fair body dress'd,

Braced in and fitted to his softer breast;
A radiant baldric, o'er his shoulder tied,
Sustain'd the sword that glitter'd at his side:
His youthful face a polish'd helm o'erspread;
The waving horse-hair nodded on his head:
His figured shield, a shining orb, he takes,
And in his hand a pointed javelin shakes.
With equal speed and fired by equal charms,
The Spartan hero sheathes his limbs in arms.

Now round the lists the admiring armies stand,
With javelins fix'd, the Greek and Trojan band.
Amidst the dreadful vale, the chiefs advance,
All pale with rage, and shake the threatening lance.
The Trojan first his shining javelin threw;
Full on Atrides' ringing shield it flew,
Nor pierced the brazen orb, but with a bound^[82]
Leap'd from the buckler, blunted, on the ground.
Atrides then his massy lance prepares,
In act to throw, but first prefers his prayers:
"Give me, great Jove! to punish lawless lust,
And lay the Trojan gasping in the dust:
Destroy the aggressor, aid my righteous cause,
Avenge the breach of hospitable laws!
Let this example future times reclaim,
And guard from wrong fair friendship's holy name."
Be said, and poised in air the javelin sent,
Through Paris' shield the forceful weapon went,
His corslet pierces, and his garment rends,
And glancing downward, near his flank descends.
The wary Trojan, bending from the blow,
Eludes the death, and disappoints his foe:
But fierce Atrides waved his sword, and strook
Full on his casque: the crested helmet shook;
The brittle steel, unfaithful to his hand,
Broke short: the fragments glitter'd on the sand.
The raging warrior to the spacious skies
Raised his upbraiding voice and angry eyes:
"Then is it vain in Jove himself to trust?
And is it thus the gods assist the just?"

When crimes provoke us, Heaven success denies;
The dart falls harmless, and the falchion flies."
Furious he said, and towards the Grecian crew
(Seized by the crest) the unhappy warrior drew;
Struggling he followed, while the embroider'd thong
That tied his helmet, dragg'd the chief along.
Then had his ruin crown'd Atrides' joy,
But Venus trembled for the prince of Troy:
Unseen she came, and burst the golden band;
And left an empty helmet in his hand.
The casque, enraged, amidst the Greeks he threw;
The Greeks with smiles the polish'd trophy view.
Then, as once more he lifts the deadly dart,
In thirst of vengeance, at his rival's heart;
The queen of love her favour'd champion shrouds
(For gods can all things) in a veil of clouds.
Raised from the field the panting youth she led,
And gently laid him on the bridal bed,
With pleasing sweets his fainting sense renews,
And all the dome perfumes with heavenly dews.
Meantime the brightest of the female kind,
The matchless Helen, o'er the walls reclined;
To her, beset with Trojan beauties, came,
In borrow'd form, the laughter-loving dame.
(She seem'd an ancient maid, well-skill'd to cull
The snowy fleece, and wind the twisted wool.)
The goddess softly shook her silken vest,
That shed perfumes, and whispering thus address'd:

"Haste, happy nymph! for thee thy Paris calls,
Safe from the fight, in yonder lofty walls,
Fair as a god; with odours round him spread,
He lies, and waits thee on the well-known bed;
Not like a warrior parted from the foe,
But some gay dancer in the public show."
She spoke, and Helen's secret soul was moved;
She scorn'd the champion, but the man she loved.
Fair Venus' neck, her eyes that sparkled fire,
And breast, reveal'd the queen of soft desire.^[83]
Struck with her presence, straight the lively red

Forsook her cheek; and trembling, thus she said:
"Then is it still thy pleasure to deceive?
And woman's frailty always to believe!
Say, to new nations must I cross the main,
Or carry wars to some soft Asian plain?
For whom must Helen break her second vow?
What other Paris is thy darling now?
Left to Atrides, (victor in the strife,)
An odious conquest and a captive wife,
Hence let me sail; and if thy Paris bear
My absence ill, let Venus ease his care.
A handmaid goddess at his side to wait,
Renounce the glories of thy heavenly state,
Be fix'd for ever to the Trojan shore,
His spouse, or slave; and mount the skies no more.
For me, to lawless love no longer led,
I scorn the coward, and detest his bed;
Else should I merit everlasting shame,
And keen reproach, from every Phrygian dame:
Ill suits it now the joys of love to know,
Too deep my anguish, and too wild my woe."

Then thus incensed, the Paphian queen replies:
"Obey the power from whom thy glories rise:
Should Venus leave thee, every charm must fly,
Fade from thy cheek, and languish in thy eye.
Cease to provoke me, lest I make thee more
The world's aversion, than their love before;
Now the bright prize for which mankind engage,
Than, the sad victim, of the public rage."
At this, the fairest of her sex obey'd,
And veil'd her blushes in a silken shade;
Unseen, and silent, from the train she moves,
Led by the goddess of the Smiles and Loves.
Arrived, and enter'd at the palace gate,
The maids officious round their mistress wait;
Then, all dispersing, various tasks attend;
The queen and goddess to the prince ascend.
Full in her Paris' sight, the queen of love
Had placed the beauteous progeny of Jove;

Where, as he view'd her charms, she turn'd away
Her glowing eyes, and thus began to say:

"Is this the chief, who, lost to sense of shame,
Late fled the field, and yet survives his fame?
O hadst thou died beneath the righteous sword
Of that brave man whom once I call'd my lord!
The boaster Paris oft desired the day
With Sparta's king to meet in single fray:
Go now, once more thy rival's rage excite,
Provoke Atrides, and renew the fight:
Yet Helen bids thee stay, lest thou unskill'd
Shouldst fall an easy conquest on the field."
The prince replies: "Ah cease, divinely fair,
Nor add reproaches to the wounds I bear;
This day the foe prevail'd by Pallas' power:
We yet may vanquish in a happier hour:
There want not gods to favour us above;
But let the business of our life be love:
These softer moments let delights employ,
And kind embraces snatch the hasty joy.
Not thus I loved thee, when from Sparta's shore
My forced, my willing heavenly prize I bore,
When first entranced in Cranae's isle I lay,^[84]
Mix'd with thy soul, and all dissolved away!"
Thus having spoke, the enamour'd Phrygian boy
Rush'd to the bed, impatient for the joy.
Him Helen follow'd slow with bashful charms,
And clasp'd the blooming hero in her arms.

While these to love's delicious rapture yield,
The stern Atrides rages round the field:
So some fell lion whom the woods obey,
Roars through the desert, and demands his prey.
Paris he seeks, impatient to destroy,
But seeks in vain along the troops of Troy;
Even those had yielded to a foe so brave
The recreant warrior, hateful as the grave.
Then speaking thus, the king of kings arose,
"Ye Trojans, Dardans, all our generous foes!

Hear and attest! from Heaven with conquest crown'd,
Our brother's arms the just success have found:
Be therefore now the Spartan wealth restor'd,
Let Argive Helen own her lawful lord;
The appointed fine let Ilion justly pay,
And age to age record this signal day."
He ceased; his army's loud applauses rise,
And the long shout runs echoing through the skies.