

The Beautiful Helen

Long ago the god Zeus fell in love with Leda, a mortal woman, and visited her in the form of a swan. Their daughter Helen grew up to be the most beautiful woman on earth. Helen married Menelaus, king of Sparta, but Paris, a handsome young prince, fell in love with her and ran away with her to Troy, his kingdom in Asia Minor. Helen's husband, Menelaus, gathered together other Greek kings and warriors, including his brother, Agamemnon, and they sailed to Troy in a thousand ships to fetch Helen home.

For ten long years the Greeks camped outside the walls of Troy, but they were unable to break down the thick walls of the city. Finally the Greeks tricked the Trojans. They built a huge wooden horse with a hollow belly and hid some soldiers in it. They left the horse on the beach at Troy and pretended to sail away. The Trojans thought that the Greeks had at last retreated and had left the horse as a gift. They wheeled the huge horse into their city. That night the Greeks crept out of the horse, opened the city gate to their comrades, and slaughtered the Trojans. The old king, Priam, was killed. The Trojan women, including Queen Hecuba and her daughter Cassandra, were murdered or dragged into slavery. The queen of Troy had already seen her beloved son Hector killed by Achilles, his bleeding body dragged three times in the dust around the walls of the city.