In ancient times, the great city of Troy was located on the northwest coast of the land now known as Turkey. The city stood at the foot of Mount Ida, near the shores of the Aegean Sea. Strong walls protected the city from its enemies.

In the years before the Trojan War began, the city enjoyed peace and prosperity under the rule of King Priam and his wife, Queen Hecuba. They had many children, among them a beautiful daughter named Cassandra.

The god Apollo loved Cassandra so much that he offered to grant her any wish. Cassandra asked for the power of prophecy, the ability to see into the future.

Apollo gave her this gift, but then she angered the god. Apollo could not take back his gift, but
he proclaimed that no one should ever believe Cassandra or pay any attention to her predictions, even though they were true. And so when Cassandra predicted the evils that were to come upon Troy, even her own people did not believe her.

The eldest son of King Priam and Queen Hecuba was Hector, the noblest of the Trojan heroes. A younger son, Paris, would bring sorrow and disaster to Troy.

**The Queen’s Dream**

Just before Paris was born, a strange thing troubled the family of old King Priam. Queen Hecuba had a dream in which she saw her newborn babe turn into a flaming torch that burned up the walls and the high towers of Troy. She told the king her dream. When the child was born, they called a soothsayer and asked him what the dream meant.

“It means,” he said, “that if this babe lives, he shall be a torch to turn the walls and high towers of Troy into heaps of ashes.”
“But what can be done to prevent this terrible thing?” asked Priam.

“The child must not live,” answered the soothsayer.

In great sorrow, Priam called his master shepherd and told him to take the child into the thick woods, leaving him alone on the slopes of Mount Ida, where he would not live long without care and nourishment.

The shepherd did as he was commanded. He laid the infant by a tree and then hurried away. But the spirits who haunt the woods and groves saw the babe. They pitied and cared for the babe. Some brought it honey from the bees, some fed it with milk from the goats, and some protected it from the wolves and bears.

After five days, the shepherd, who could not stop thinking about the babe, came back to the place where he had left him. Fearing the worst, he glanced toward the foot of the tree. To his surprise, the babe was still there. It looked up and stretched its plump hands toward him.

The shepherd’s heart would not let him turn away. He took the child in his arms and carried it
to his own humble home in the valley, and there he brought it up as his own son. The boy grew to be tall and brave, and a great help to the shepherds around Mount Ida.

One day, as young Paris tended his sheep, he met Oenone, a river nymph of Mount Ida. Day after day he sat with her near her woodland home. Soon, Paris and Oenone were wedded. Neither of them dreamed that any sorrow would come their way. But sorrow would come, and its cause lay in a quarrel among three goddesses, Hera, Aphrodite, and Athena.

*The Quarrel of the Goddesses*

The quarrel among the three goddesses began during the marriage between Peleus and Thetis. Peleus was the king of the land called Thessaly in Greece. Thetis was a beautiful sea nymph, one of the immortals. Although Thetis did not want to marry a mortal man, she at last consented. Kings and queens from near and far came to their wedding feast, and all the gods were invited—all except one.
The one exception was Eris, the goddess of **discord**. Eris had once lived on Olympus, but she caused so much trouble that Zeus **banished** her forever.

Angry that she had not been invited to the wedding, Eris decided to disturb the marriage feast. She suddenly appeared and threw on a table a beautiful golden apple, on which were **inscribed** these words: *For the fairest*.

Just as Eris planned, the wedding feast broke into loud arguments. Athena, goddess of wisdom, claimed the prize, but Hera, wife of Zeus and queen of the gods, refused to listen. Aphrodite, goddess of beauty, said that the apple obviously belonged to her.

Discord had indeed come to the wedding feast. Who should have the apple “for the fairest”? Not one of the gods dared to decide so dangerous a question—not even Zeus himself.

Zeus knew that whatever he might decide, he would be sure to offend two of the three goddesses. And so the task of judging which goddess was the fairest was given to a mortal, the handsome young shepherd of Mount Ida, Paris.