

Paris and Helena

1 Overture

Act I Scene 1

Seashore ending in a view of the nearby city of Sparta. In the distance ships, boats by the shoreline, tents of the Trojans on the beach. In the middle of the stage is a statue of Venus beneath an arbour of roses in the shape of a small temple. Paris, his followers and Trojan sailors are seen offering a sacrifice to the goddess. Gifts are placed on the altar, perfumes are burned.

Chorus:

Fair Aphrodite, do not disdain these roses and these flowers;
Withhold not thy favour from thy arbiter, thy Paris.

A Solo Voice

As the avid flame that burns upon the tripod consumes the exotic perfume,
So he is all aflame, and his heart is consumed, for Helen.
Do not deny him, fair Aphrodite, thy divinity, thy favour.

Chorus

Do not deny him, fair Aphrodite, thy divinity, thy favour

Paris

O longed-for object of my fond passion, at last I breathe the air that you breathe.
Wherever I turn my gaze, Love paints in my mind your beauteous face,
And my fancy conjures up hopes of the utmost bliss.
And in the yearning that thus fills my breast I seek, call, hope and sigh for you!
O longed-for object of my fond passion, at last I breathe the air that you breathe.

A solo voice

Amorous doves of lovely Aphrodite, from her golden star take your flight,
Wreathed with roses; and beating your delicate wings in the breeze, guide her here
In happiness, she who arouses all creatures to pleasure.

Paris

Beloved shores, where my idol sometimes roams for pleasure,
Streamlets into which she gazes having decked her hair or breast with flowers.
Clear springs in which she bathes, grass on which she sets her feet,
Take pity on a loving heart and tell me what my dear one is doing.

A Trojan

Prince, a messenger from Sparta is approaching you.

Paris

Companions, friends, go to meet him and bring him to me.

(The dancers leave. A few Trojans remain behind, a short distance away.)

Say nothing to him of the great prize on which my mind is set
But begin to prepare my venture.

Scene 2

Cupid (*dressed as a Spartan, under the name of Erasto*)

Stranger, my queen sends me to you to ask who you are, whence you came,
and what brings you to these shores – chance or design.

Paris

I will obey your honoured ruler. I am Paris; I seek neither fortune nor kingdom

Cupid

Then you bring us peace; you aspire to the myrtle, not to win laurels.
And though you seek to conceal from us what brought you here, your enterprise is one of
love and not of war.

Paris

(What do I hear!)

Cupid

I already perceived that your adornments, your costly array, your countenance and your
glances were not those of a warrior. Let him take the field who has not those features,
that urbane, sweet way of speaking, who does not bring grace, good looks and youth to
lovers' meetings. You, gentle Paris, are sighing for love!

Paris

But who are you? And how do you understand the secrets of my heart?

Cupid

Foolish youth! Do you imagine love can be kept secret?

Paris

You confound me, and I know not how to justify myself; I dare not be angry with your.

Cupid

Do not hope to delude or deceive me; I saw you turn pale at the name of Helen.

Paris,

Then you know?

Cupid

Yes, that you adore her and vainly sought to hide it.

Paris

Then what think you?

Cupid

That you should have kept silent longer and blushed less.

(Paris and Cupid together each singing his/her own thoughts)

Paris

Though you wish thus to laugh at me, do no divulge my purpose. Ah, let my blushes suffice you!

Cupid

Entrust your emotions to me; I promise you my support, which can bring you victory.

Paris *(turning to leave, but immediately returning)*

But who are you? And how do you understand the secrets of my heart?

Cupid

You are an innocent! Do you imagine love can be kept secret?

(Paris and Cupid together each singing his/her own thoughts)

Paris

Do not betray my design, ah let my blushes suffice! *(he leaves with the Trojans.)*

Cupid

I promise you my support, which can bring you victory.

Scene 3

Cupid

Lucky man, who shall possess a beauty so rare! In disguise and feigned appearance to aid you in your great conquest. Be joyful, triumph! Helen is yours.

Cupid

I'll inspire him, I'll advise him in the fancy that he turns over in his mind: he'll not see me, but I'll be present; he does not know it, but love is with him.

I'll direct his lips and his eyes, speak through him, reason through him, and all the emotions of his heart will be governed by me.

(Exit Cupid. The Trojans then enter and set out the gifts intended for Helen by Paris. Meanwhile some adventurous Spartan women have come running in to see the sailors and the exotic pomp. Attracted by the friendly welcome and by the Trojans' gifts, they begin to amuse themselves by dancing with the Trojans, while Paris prepares to introduce himself to Helen.)

ACT TWO

Scene 1

(A room in the royal palace at Sparta with a throne to one side)

Helen (*to a guard, while seating herself on the throne*)
Let him enter: I will see Priam's son.

Cupid
Among us there is no face so handsome. He has brilliant dark eyes, long fair hair, rosy lips, sweet melting glances, a melodious voice, and blushes modestly. Such, O queen, is perhaps the youth (*Ganymede*) who Zeus snatched from his altars on mount Ida'. Thus would a conscientious painter depict Love in mortal form without wings, without blindfold, and without arrows.

Helen
You are too eager, Erasto, to extol him and dazzle me.

Cupid
Oh, if heaven should have reserved you for him, what fairer knot could Hymen have tied? What could make another happier than you, more joyful under the rule of Love?

Helen
Here he comes; be silent.

Scene 2
Paris (*advancing boldly*)
O queen! (Ye gods!)

Helen
(What do I see?)

Paris
(Such beauty!)

Helen
(So handsome!)

Paris
(ah, what cruel stupefaction, what consuming dread assails me?)

Cupid (*aside to Paris*)
Speak, do not falter!

Helen
(What a meeting!)

Paris
If in looking at you, O queen, I hardly dare to fix my eyes upon you or bear the sweet luster of yours, or untie my tongue and make known to you the emotions that agitate my

heart, it is no wonder I was not so dazed when of a sudden the full splendour of the divine revels was offered to my eyes. O queen, it is perhaps because the heavenly beauties that, divided between them, sufficed to provoke them to the proud contest I now find united in one epitome in you.

Helen

With flattering words, prince, you have already made me blush deeply. I do not exalt myself above mortals; the prize that Aphrodite won is not for me; my mind is not affronted by envy of her glories, no do I vie in beauty with goddesses.

Helen

Distinguished guest, the long journey that you made by sea demands repose and peace.

Paris

I have lost repose and peace and expect them no more

Helen

Among us, prince, forget the memory and the customs of your native land and of your father's palace! Accept humble Sparta's welcome; and at least for a while banish from your thoughts the beauties of Asia and their delights.

Helen

Perchance more than one beauty now sadly strays along the shores, calling for you, remembering you, but lamenting and fearful, thinking that on your return you will be either less loving or less true.

Cupid (*aside to Paris*)

She knows you.

Paris (*aside to Cupid*)

Be quiet!

Helen

(How he underestimates me, and how self-confident he is!)

Paris (*aside to Cupid*)

You promised me aid and guidance, but now you too have become a tyrant!

Helen

Their anguish is well founded, for he who thus travels by sea from shore to shore finds entertainment in practicing deception, and little by little becomes inconstant and unfaithful.

(*Helen leaves with Cupid*)

Scene 3 -

Paris

In the throbbing of my fears I see the lovely vision of a sweet love all melt away and disappear.

But if Aphrodite will only lend me courage, my constancy will then revive joyous hopes within me. (*Paris Exit*)

Act III Scene 1

Chorus of Athletes

From thy radiant palace com down to us, great go of Delos, thou who givest life, motion and splendour to the earth, to the stars and to heaven.

Rising in fulgent light, with the energy of thy rays thou dost bring forth in turn the golden harvest, fruit and flowers

Tenor solo Negli strali

Thou prophetic god of Delphi, mighty with bow and arrow, crowned with light and laurel by harmonious eloquent Pindar, come, fair-haired Apollo, attend our noble games, and inspire in hearts the lofty desire for glory and for victory, and the strength and valour of Alcides.

Chorus

From thy radiant palace come down to us, etc.

Chorus of Athletes (*Paris and Helen enter*)

Helen

No more! Distinguished athletes, the Trojan hero admires your vigour and skill in the gymnastics displays. He, who from all was chosen by the gods as judge of beauty, for us shall be the judge of valour. He now will decide your merits and award, as he thinks fit, the prize and crown to the victors in your noble efforts.

(The laurel wreaths are brought to Paris, who confers them on the winners during the following chorus.)

Chorus of Athletes

Praises to the deity of the mighty bow, god of Delphi who can read destiny, god of harmonies, eloquent Pindar, crowned with radiance and laurel, who, rising and traversing the immense course of inexhaustible light, gives life, motion and splendour to the earth, the stars and the heavenly spheres.

Helen

Now, if I may presume to ask so much, with your masterly hand strike me stretched strings of your lyre, and also join to the sweet sound of the vibrating notes your melodious voice.

Paris

I am honoured to obey you.

Paris (*passionately, to Helen*)

Those lovely eyes, those dark eyes, why do you turn them so severely?

Ah, if rigour is discovered in them, Love, who created their beauty, is to blame.

Helen

(He goes too far, and I foresee that his meaning is such that I should not stay and listen.)

(*aside to Cupid*)

Is he addressing me?

Cupid (*aside to Helen*)

To whom would you have him speak?

Paris

Love gave you bright sparkling eyes, brilliant adornments of beauty. He lit for you those dear soft lamps eloquent indications of mercy.

Helen (*rising, as if to leave*)

That is enough!

Cupid

If you wish for silence, I will enjoy it. (*aside to Helen, detaining her*)

Stay here!

Helen

No, I am going. My modesty will not allow me to remain here longer. (*She is about to go*)

Paris

A cruel torment . . . suddenly . . . an oppressive agitation . . . Help!

Helen

Ah! Fly, Erasto!

Cupid

(This is the moment.) (*He hurries off*)

Helen

What am I doing, what thinking? . . . Ah, what cruel force of unknown emotions keeps me here? . . . I hardly know myself, I know not how to utter a word . . . I cannot; despite myself I feel sighs heaving in my bosom . . . and an unwanted tenderness fills my eyes with tears. Alas!

Paris

Cruel, unfeeling one!

Helen

Thank heaven, he is recovering the use of his senses . . . I will go. (*She is about to go but halts*)

Helen

Ah, perhaps he has discovered and approves, my weakness! Oh, that this war of doubts, remorse and torments would only end! (*Coming to a decision, she make to move off*)

Paris (*impetuously leaping up, stops her and kneels before her*)

Ah stay! . . . Ah, listen! I can feign no longer: see, I languish and die; I love you, no, adore you. I left my native shore, crossed the treacherous sea, and came, my idol, for you.

Helen

(Courage!) What do you want of me? What do you rashly hope for? Silence; I want no wooing: go, vain is your hope that my virtue will yield all its triumphs to a senseless feigned love!

Paris

And my grief?

Helen

It is useless.

Paris

And my lamenting?

Helen

It annoys me.

Paris

Look at me!

(*Helen and Paris singing together*)

Helen

Keep away from me: speak to me no more! (I am weakening!) Silence, go! Vain is your hope, etc.

Paris

See, I languish and die; I love you, no, adore you.

(*Helen exits indignantly.*)

Paris

Implacably she flies from me, tyrannically she spurns me! So ungrateful Aphrodite cheats me thus! The sole relief for me now is death, if heaven, fate and Love have betrayed me!

Act IV Scene 1 (*Royal apartments with a writing table*)

Helen (*Holding a tablet folded together in the form of a letter*)

How brazen! Sternness and rejection do not suffice to curb this impetuosity! Not content with declaring himself, in a letter he adds yet greater affronts to my honor!

(*reads*)

“Aphrodite guides me in my purpose: you were promised to me as a prize . . . I offer you a kingdom, power, riches . . . Troy awaits you . . . This poor land, this barren soil is unworthy of your beauty!:

I tremble with rage! Ah, let this disgraceful letter be trampled under foot and disdain be his reply . . .

(*she is about to throw down the letter, but retrains herself.*)

Helen

No, silence will not do! The danger is too great: let my outraged honour reply and confound him!

(*She sits down at a small table and writes*)

“As a stranger you came here, as a guest were received, as a seducer declared yourself. You are laying traps for my honour, and dare to abuse the laws and customs of men and of gods.

Seek other loves, and go” Ho there!

(*she closes the letter.*)

I have said enough; he should understand me.

Scene 2

Cupid

I come at your behest, O queen.

Helen (*giving him the letter*)

Take this letter, and give it to the son of Priam

Cupid

I?

Helen

Yes

Cupid

But I have no wish so to intervene in the secrets of monarchs.

Helen

Why not?

Cupid

One day I could perhaps receive scant thanks for it.

Helen

Your doubts do me wrong: do what I say!

Cupid (Paris appears)

(The prince's appearance is timely!)

Paris

(Disheartened, where can I go?!

Cupid (*pretending to wish to leave*)

I will carry out your order.

Helen

Go then.

Cupid (*pretending not to have noticed Paris until now*)

But . . . here he is himself now.

Helen

(O heavens!)

Paris

(May heaven favour the last effort of a desperate love!)

Cupid (*giving the letter to Paris*)

Helen has written to you; read and answer!

Helen

Ah, I see he plans flattery to deceive me; he is faithless, he is a traitor.)

Paris (*hastily opening the letter and reading*)

(What do I read? She devises a thousand blows to torment me, and imagines me a scoundrel and a liar.)

Cupid

(Vain are both the arts and the weapons in which she trusts to insure herself against heaven and against Love.)

(*Exit Cupid*)

Helen and Paris

Some disaster, fatal to me, seems to be not far distant; my heavy heart has forebodings.

Scene 3

Paris

Yes, Why do you wait? Why defer your fury? Do you thirst for blood? Then appease your fierce longing!

(He draws a dagger and tries to give it to her.)

Take this, stab me, slay me? For one who pines and exists in misery, the end of his torments is a longed-for boon.

Helen

(Ah, I cannot bear it?)

But what do you want from me?

Paris

I want your heart, your hand, and you in marriage!

Helen

But you know that I am promised to another.

Paris

Do you love him?

Helen

I promised.

Paris

Vows are worthless if maiden's hearts also are not given.

Helen

Ah, if it is true that you love me, do not destroy my peace with such art and such weapons! Until now I lived content, but since you came, all my emotions are in ferment. Respect my propriety and my grief. Go back to your kingdom, seek another object for your love. You will have the choice among thousands who will vie in their desire to be happy with you. This is not a command I give: imploringly I plead for compassion from the kindness of your heart?

Paris

No, rather will I die before your eyes than obey that unjust sentence to which, cruel one, you condemn me!

Helen

Pity, prince! (O heaven!) Forget me, and live?

Forget you, and live! Do you think that easy for me? Look at yourself, just see your lovely face!

Look at yourself, just see your lovely face!

Scene 4

Helen

As I feared, face to face with him I do not feel sufficient courage. I could scarcely restrain myself. I was reduced to the point of yielding to him, or revealing all my mind. Ah, he possesses it and ruled there as master, and he know, and cruelly takes advantage of it . . . Where shall I turn? In what thoughts, in what wretched error do I stray? Henceforth I will leave to reason alone the sway which love has shared with it in my heart. I can! I will! I have decided!

Helen

I can! . . . But, unhappy that I am, meanwhile I hate and love, resolve and repent; compassion, anger, fear and pleasure in turn torment me.

I can! I will! I have decided! Ah, I console and delude myself thus, but my distraught and divided heart confuses, with its emotions, what I think and fancy and imagine.

Oh, unhappy that I am, meanwhile I hate, etc.

Act V Scene 1 (*gardens*)

Elena a me s'asconde!

Cupid

Helen keeps aloof from me: the prince avoids me and hastens his departure! Ah, what avails that, when in her heart my perturbation already rules! Her virtue is affronted, her sense of duty undermined; but the struggle will be brief. The deception I am planning for her will fan the flame that she has suppressed within her breast . . . (looking off-stage) Here she is. Oh, how shall I see that proud display humbled! My queen!

Helen

Erasto! Why so sad!

Helen

You still have time for last farewells to your dear friend.

Cupid

I have already carried out those tender offices. He is now setting sail.

Helen

What! The wretch has left!

Cupid

A favourable wind is already bearing him away

Helen

Almighty gods! What deceit! What betrayal!! Black infidelity! How much he said, how much he swore! I saw him pale, half alive, languishing, bathed in tears! So he was

thus feigning love! So thus for sport he changed appearance and pretended grief! Did he not faint before my eyes? Did he not attempt to kill himself? Did he not beg for death? And the . . . What deceit! What perfidy!

Then he flees and leaves me, without a word! Ye gods!

40 Helen

Simple maidens, do not believe those tears that you see spilling from a traitor's eyes. Ah to defend yourselves against that miscreant, simple maidens, let my torment and my shame be an example to you.

Cupid

Do not be angry; Paris is here.

Helen

(what do I see?)

Cupid

You come at the right moment. Helen loves you? Please, you are happy!

Helen

Perfidious servant, you have betrayed and tricked me! Be gone for ever from my presence!

Cupid

Your fury with me, fair queen, is useless and unjust. I am not Erasto!

Helen and Paris

Who then are you?

Cupid

Cupid (exit)

Helen

(Ye stars! Oh wonder!

Paris

Ah, kindly Aphrodite, I recognize you in this divine intervention! In vain you sought, my dearest, to oppose her and refuse me; you see, heaven does aid me. Obey its decrees, accept my love, and follow the inclinations of your heart! You sigh? Ah heaven! Ah, reply quickly, and put an end to my suspense! On you, on your adored lips depends my life or my death. With so much love do you think me unworthy to possess you?

Helen

Ah, you have won, I am yours! Take my hand in token.

(as she extends her hand to Paris, thunder is heard.)

What is that sudden thunder?

Paris,
Why is the daytime suddenly obscured?

Helen
Behold Pallas in that cloud

Paris
Then let that proud goddess see you and have new cause to blush!

Helen
She is threatening! She gazes at us grimly.

Paris
Perhaps our love offends her, and envy impels her!

Helen
But what does she want?

Scene 3

You are mistaken; your destiny, foolish youth, unjust arbiter, calls for pity, not envy. That first injustice, of which you are so proud, is the cause of your anguish and my vengeance! The great day of my wrath awaits you; the auguries I pronounce are not to be ignored. I reserve my fatal doom for that day, which you cannot escape. Tremble, vainglorious one!

Pallas
Go with your beloved at your side, return to your father's kingdom; behind your doomed ship you shall see my fury. Rejoice in your dear conquest, display it in proud triumph! Soon your delight shall be changed to sorrow

Chorus
Soon your delight shall be changed to sorrow

46 p 178 Pallas - oh, da quante eccelse

Ah, by now many lofty vessels I see Amphitrite* (Queen of the sea) darkened; the parted waves will tremble beneath a thousand united prows. For all Argos, Sparta and Athens will combine their power to shatter your baleful ties with the faithless woman.

Chorus
Soon your delight shall be changed to sorrow.

Pallas A huge blaze shall ravage and engulf the city, that queen of Asia; Greek flames will roar through fire and smoke and dust. On her vast ruin, amid the crowd of naked dead, let the vanquished mother tend her children; she will weep in despair.

Chorus

Soon your delight shall be changed to sorrow.

(Exit Pallas in the cloud, all her attendants with her.)

Scene 4

Helen

(what did I hear?)

Paris

(What predictions!)

Helen

(Then the cruel oracle was true which declared that I should be the unhappy cause of discord and bloodshed!)

Paris

(Then, as Cassandra predicted to my father, I am the torch that is soon to set Asia ablaze!)

Helen

(But now how to resolve?)

Paris

(Meanwhile what to decide?)

Helen

(Desert him? . . .

Ah, I have not the heart!)

Paris

(Give her up? It shall never be!)

Helen

(I love him!)

Paris

(I adore her!)

Helen and Paris

(With him/her I will not be daunted, no matter what the trial to which destiny may subject me.)

Cupid

Come, I will accompany you. I have already arranged all you need for the journey; the sea is calm, the wind gentle, and I call you to rejoice.

(Cupid takes the hands of both and joins them)

Paris

My life!

Helen

My treasure!

Paris

Let us go!

Helen

Let us go!

Paris

I will always be true to you

Helen

And I will be yours forever!

Helen and Paris

I swear it to you, my treasure, sweet perturber of my heart. Be fate kind or cruel . . .

Paris

. . . it will never be that another being . . .

Helen

. . . it will never be that another love . . .

Helen and Paris

. . . will rule this heart

Cupid, Paris, and Helen

Let kindly Love forever cause to shine bright, among the happy, that flame which aroused so keen an ardour in your/my soul.

Final Scene

Cupid

Such a treasure no other ever brought from a foreign shore. Roses and myrtles encircle your brow; leave empty glory now to others.

Come to sea, happy marauder, the waves are calm. A gentle breeze wafts the ships, and
Love comes with you as pilot.

Cupid

Beauty quickly fades away, age soon destroys it; with it flies all happiness. Youth which
hastens past, neglected, does not return; regret brings no consolation.

(Helen and Paris informed that everything is ready, rise.)

Paris

I will always be true to you!

Helen

And I will be yours forever!

Paris

My hope!

Helen

My idol!

Helen and Paris

My hope, my treasure, sweet perturber of my heart.

(with Cupid, they move to embark.)

Chorus

Come to sea, etc.