

Troilus and Criseyde Summary

Writer: Geoffrey Chaucer | Generated: Jan 26, 2026

Plot Summary

The Epic poem, Troilus and Criseyde, is divided into five separate books. In the first two books, the writer introduces Troilus and persuades Criseyde to fall in love with him. In the third book, the couple celebrates their love. In the fourth book, they are separated. The fifth one sketches their fates while they are apart.

About Trojans and Troilus: The story happens during the siege of Troy. A Trojan soothsayer named Calchas predicts that Troy will soon fall. Fearing this, he flees from the city and goes to the Greek camp, promising his loyalty to the Greeks. He leaves his daughter, Criseyde, behind. The Trojans did not like this and hated her because of her father's actions. The Trojans worshipped Gods. Even during war, they did not stop celebrating festivals. In April, when the fields were full of flowers, they held a feast at the temple of Palladium or Pallas Athena. The hero of this poem, Troilus, was a young warrior but indifferent to love. He always made fun of lovers and enjoyed seeing their pain. The God of love, Cupid, did not like this and became angry.

Troilus and Criseyde's Meeting and Love: On the day of the festival, like everyone else, Troilus went to Palladium. There he saw Calchas's beautiful daughter, Criseyde. He liked her at first sight and fell in love. He felt he could not live without her. Criseyde's uncle Pandarus told Troilus to regret for his previous outlook against love and advised him to stay loyal to the God of love. He also helped him write a letter to Criseyde. Meanwhile, Pandarus met his niece and told her about Troilus's love. He made her happy by saying a knight like Troilus had fallen in love with her. He also said that if she did not love Troilus, both he and Troilus would kill themselves. When Troilus returned from war, Criseyde saw him through a window. She thought about her weak state. She realizes that she needs social security.

To refresh her mind, Criseyde went to the garden with her nieces Flexippe, Tharbe, and Antigone, and listened to Antigone's love songs. At night in bed, she dreamed that a white eagle was taking her heart from her chest and replacing it with its own. Then they started writing letters. Pandarus helped them in writing letters. He even told them what to write in the letters. Criseyde was a bit indifferent about writing the letter, but her uncle insisted her to write.

Pandarus planned to have the two meet at Deiphobus's house. He brought Troilus to Deiphobus's house and advised him to pretend to be sick. Troilus did as promised and met Criseyde for the first time. Pandarus advised him to talk respectfully with Criseyde. Troilus promised he would. Then they started exchanging letters again. One afternoon, Criseyde came to Pandarus's house, and when it started raining, Pandarus asked her to stay at his house. Troilus secretly watched this. Pandarus took Criseyde to a secret room in his house. Then Troilus met her there. This was the first time they physically united.

Criseyde's Enter to the Greek Camp: Meanwhile, the Trojans exchanged prisoners because their famous warrior Antenor had been captured by the Greeks. Calchas became very popular in the Greek camp for his future predictions. He contacted King Agamemnon and arranged for his daughter to be brought to the Greek camp in exchange for Antenor. Although Troilus initially vetoed this exchange, thinking of Antenor, he agreed. He consulted with Pandarus. Pandarus advised him to find someone new. But Troilus rejected this idea. Then he advised Troilus to elope with Criseyde. But Troilus told him that since he was a brave warrior, it would not be right for him to do something that would ruin his honor. Troilus and Criseyde met again.

Criseyde reassured him that she did not want to ruin the honor of their love. She would rather betray her father. She promised to run away and return within 10 days. Three years passed since Criseyde went to the Greek camp. After going to the Greek camp, Diomedes took charge of her security. Meanwhile, Pandarus brought Troilus to Sarpedon's villa. Everyone came there to have fun. Troilus was alone. Troilus spent his days remembering past happiness.

Criseyde's Love for Diomedes: Meanwhile, Criseyde was looking for security, so she accepted Diomedes's love proposal.

- **Troilus's dream of a Wild Boar:** Meanwhile, when his beloved had not returned, Troilus dreamed that a wild boar was taking his beloved away. He wrote a heart-touching letter to Criseyde in the morning. He asked why she had not returned yet. Then Troilus went to Cassandra to understand the meaning of his dream. Cassandra said the wild boar was Criseyde's new lover. Troilus could not believe that Criseyde could have a new lover. Then Troilus wrote her more letters. But the reply came in a very brief form. However, she had said she would return.
- **Troilus's Discovering the Brooch:** Once a garment of Diomedes fell into the Trojans' hands. There Troilus found a brooch that he had given to Criseyde. Troilus then lamented. Because he still loved her. And he could understand that Criseyde had betrayed him.

Troilus's Final Fate:

For the first time, Pandarus could not give him any advice. He also felt a lot of pain inside. Troilus wanted to kill Diomedes in battle. They even faced each other on the battlefield, but Troilus could not kill him. And Troilus was eventually killed by Achilles. After his death, Troilus's soul went up to heaven. From heaven, he laughed at those lovers who were still involved in romantic relationships. The narrator then briefly ends about Troilus and reminds us that human life is very short.

Detailed Summary

Book I: Troilus Falls in Love with Criseyde

At the start of Book 1, we find Chaucer as the narrator. He asks for help from the Greek Fury named Tisiphone. The Furies are powerful goddesses who punish those who do wrong. Tisiphone's name means "the voice of revenge." In Greek stories, people sometimes call on Tisiphone to take revenge on others. The narrator asks Tisiphone to help him narrate the sad story of Troilus and Criseyde.

The story is set in the ancient city of Troy during the Trojan War. The Greeks are at war with the Trojans. They are camped outside the city. They are getting ready to attack. Inside the city, a Trojan priest named Calchas has a vision. He sees that Troy will be destroyed by the Greeks. Because of this, Calchas leaves Troy and goes to the Greek side. Thus, he betrayed his people. He leaves behind his daughter, Criseyde. So, she is now alone and in danger. When Criseyde hears that her father has betrayed Troy, she becomes scared. She seeks help from Hector. Hector is a brave warrior and the son of the Trojan King Priam. Hector is also Troilus's brother. He agrees to protect Criseyde.

Time goes by, and the war between the Greeks and Trojans continues. Life inside Troy goes on, even with the war happening. The people of Troy still honour the Gods with sacrifices in April at the Palladium (Temple of Athena), a special temple. Criseyde goes to one of these ceremonies, wearing black clothes to show she is sad about her father's betrayal. Troilus is also at the temple with some of his knight friends. He tells his friends not to let love control their lives. He also laughs at the people who are in love and are there asking for the gods' blessings.

Cupid, the god of love, sees Troilus making fun of love. He decides to teach him a lesson. When Troilus sees Criseyde, Cupid shoots him with a magic arrow. This makes Troilus fall deeply in love with her right away. Troilus feels embarrassed for laughing at the lovers earlier and leaves the temple. His heart is now full of love for Criseyde. This love makes Troilus act recklessly in battle. Soon, he is so obsessed with Criseyde that he can't sleep or eat. He becomes very sad and miserable.

Troilus's friend Pandarus, who is also Criseyde's uncle, notices something is wrong. He visits Troilus and asks him why he is so upset. Troilus doesn't want to talk at first, but eventually, he tells Pandarus that he is in love, and it is ruining him. Pandarus gives Troilus advice about love. Pandarus has been through tough times before, so Troilus trusts him. Pandarus promises to help Troilus because he knows how important friendship and honesty are. He believes he can help Troilus feel better.

Pandarus asks Troilus to tell him the name of the woman he loves. Troilus tells him it is Criseyde. Pandarus is happy to hear this because Criseyde is his niece, and he knows she has a good heart. He is also glad that Troilus has finally fallen in love. Pandarus agrees to help Troilus win Criseyde's heart. Troilus feels grateful and starts to feel a bit more hopeful.

Book II: Pandarus Brings Troilus and Criseyde Closer

The narrator starts Book 2 by asking Clio, the Greek muse of history, for inspiration. Pandarus has made up his mind to bring Troilus and Criseyde together. He goes to visit Criseyde at her house. He tries to make her feel better by talking about happier things. As part of his plan, he tells her about the success Hector, her protector, and his brother Troilus have had in their recent battles. Then, Pandarus begins praising Troilus. He tells her about his good qualities. He talks about Troilus's bravery, kindness, and strength.

When Pandarus thinks that Criseyde is ready to hear more, he tells her that Troilus is in love with her. He urges her to accept Troilus as her partner. Criseyde is unsure and hesitant, but Pandarus keeps pushing her to think of it as a good opportunity. He tells her that Troilus truly loves her. He argues that she is lucky to have such a strong man care for her. Criseyde admits that she feels lonely and sad, but she is not ready to get into a romantic relationship. Pandarus becomes frustrated and tells Criseyde that she would be responsible if Troilus and he both die because of her refusal. Feeling pressured, Criseyde agrees to be kind to Troilus.

After Pandarus leaves, Criseyde thinks about what he said. She finds it strange that Troilus could love her so deeply when she does not feel the same way yet. Criseyde starts thinking about what it would mean if she accepted Troilus as her partner. As a widow, she has a certain level of freedom that she enjoys and does not want to lose. But at the same time, she acknowledges that Troilus is a good man and could provide her with protection, maybe even more than his brother Hector. She decides that there is nothing wrong with seeing where things go. Just then, she hears a noise outside and sees Troilus and his soldiers passing by on the street. To her, Troilus looks like Mars, the god of war. She feels an attraction towards him.

To refresh her mind, Criseyde goes to her garden with her nieces, Flexippe, Tharbe, and Antigone. While they are in the garden, Antigone sings a song about love. That night, Criseyde dreams of a large white eagle. In the dream, the eagle takes her heart, which is in pain, and replaces it with his own heart, which heals her sorrow. Criseyde believes that the eagle in the dream represents Troilus.

After this, Troilus and Criseyde start writing letters to each other, with Pandarus watching over everything. Troilus writes the first letter, telling Criseyde about his true feelings, his fears, and his hopes. Pandarus encourages Troilus to seal the letter with his tears to show how sincere he is. The next day, Pandarus delivers the letter to Criseyde. She reads it in private, in her room, before having dinner with Pandarus. Criseyde is moved by the words in Troilus's letter. Pandarus asks her to write a response. She is reluctant, but she finally writes back, thanking Troilus for his kind words. However, she does not make any promises. Instead, she suggests she could be like a sister to him.

After she finishes her letter, Criseyde gives it to Pandarus. Soon after, they see Troilus walking down the street. When Troilus waves, Criseyde feels a strong attraction toward him. Pandarus again urges her to consider accepting Troilus as a partner. Then, he leaves to deliver the letter to Troilus. Troilus is not discouraged by Criseyde's hesitation. Instead, his love for her only grows stronger.

As their relationship starts to become more serious, Pandarus makes a plan for Troilus and Criseyde to meet secretly. He visits the house of Troilus's brother, Deiphebus, and arranges everything. Pandarus tells Troilus to pretend to be sick and stay in bed. Then, he invites Criseyde and her sisters to come and visit the "sick" Troilus to comfort him. When Criseyde arrives, Pandarus takes her to Troilus's room, where they finally meet face-to-face for the first time.

Book III: Troilus and Criseyde's Growing Love

The narrator begins Book 3 by asking for the help of Venus, the goddess of love. He wants to tell the story of Troilus's happiness. At this point, Troilus, Criseyde, and Pandarus are all in Troilus's room. Troilus speaks passionately to Criseyde, telling her that his greatest wish is to serve her and be devoted to her. Criseyde, though not as passionate as Troilus, agrees to be with him. However, she warns Troilus that she will not accept any bad behaviour from him. She then hugs and kisses him. Pandarus is so happy to see them together that he drops to his knees, thanking Venus, the goddess of beauty, and Cupid, the god of love.

After Troilus and Criseyde agree to be together, Criseyde leaves. Troilus feels grateful to Pandarus for helping him, and he promises to always be loyal to him. Troilus and Criseyde begin a secret relationship. They grow closer as lovers. Troilus continues to fight in the war during the day, but he finds ways to visit Criseyde at night. Criseyde is happy that Troilus always makes time for her and cares for her.

One rainy evening, Pandarus invites Criseyde to his house for dinner. Criseyde agrees and brings several guests, including her niece, Antigone. Troilus is already in Pandarus's home, but he hides in a closet. From the closet, Troilus watches everything through a small window. The rain outside gets worse, and Pandarus convinces Criseyde that it is too dangerous to go home. He tells her it would be best if she stays at his house for the night. After dinner, Pandarus takes Criseyde to a private room.

Once everyone has gone to bed, Pandarus wakes Criseyde up and tells her a made-up story. He says Troilus has just arrived and is very upset because he heard a false rumour that Criseyde is in love with a man named Orestes. Criseyde is shocked by this and denies the rumour. She speaks out angrily against jealousy and feels hurt that Troilus does not trust her. Pandarus then suggests that she speak to Troilus directly. Criseyde agrees to do so.

Troilus enters the room and kneels before Criseyde, showing his respect and love. Criseyde assures Troilus that she is his "true lady" and promises to stay loyal to him. However, she also questions why he is so jealous. Feeling emotional, she falls onto her bed and starts crying. Troilus lies down beside her to comfort her. Criseyde is touched by his care, and she kisses him. Pandarus encourages them to make peace and resolve their issues. The two lovers agree to move forward. Pandarus then leaves them alone.

Troilus and Criseyde spend the night together in romantic intimacy. They feel very happy and exchange rings as symbols of their love. Criseyde also gives Troilus a brooch, which is another symbol of their commitment to each other.

After their night together, Troilus feels both happy and worried about the future. Criseyde reassures him and reminds him not to give in to jealousy. They then return to their own homes.

Later, Pandarus visits Troilus and warns him that life can be unpredictable. However, for the time being, Troilus and Criseyde do not face any major problems. Troilus expresses his deep feelings for love, saying that love is the source of peace and harmony in life. The couple continues to spend more nights together. Feeling strong and happy, Troilus becomes more dedicated than ever to being a brave knight and soldier.

Book IV: Criseyde's Betrayal and Their Sad Parting

The narrator starts Book 4 by calling on Mars, the god of war, and the three Furies. The Furies are powerful beings that represent fear and shame. Their names are Alecto, Tisiphone, and Megaera. The narrator says that love's happiness often does not last long. He hints that Criseyde will soon betray Troilus but asks the readers not to judge her too harshly.

The war between the Greeks and Trojans continues. The Greeks are slowly destroying the city of Troy. Hector, Troilus's brother, leads a group of Trojan warriors in battle. During the fighting, a Trojan warrior named Antenor is captured by the Greeks. At the Greek camp, Calchas, Criseyde's father, becomes worried about his daughter, who is still in Troy. He asks the Greeks to repay him for his help by saving his daughter. He suggests that they should trade Criseyde for Antenor. The Greeks agreed and presented this idea to King Priam of Troy. Priam agrees to the exchange.

When Troilus hears this terrible news, he is heartbroken. He feels like Fortune (luck) is always against him. He asks why the gods are punishing him with such a cruel fate. Troilus feels hopeless and even thinks about taking his own life. His friend Pandarus tries to comfort him. He reminds Troilus that many soldiers depend on his courage, and he cannot let them see his weakness. Pandarus also tells him there are many other women, and life will go on after losing Criseyde. But Troilus becomes very angry at this advice. He cannot imagine loving anyone else and refuses to let go of Criseyde.

The news of the prisoner exchange spreads through the city. Criseyde is both angry and sad. She knows that she cannot openly show her sorrow because her love affair with Troilus must remain secret. For the sake of their honour and reputation, no one can know about their relationship. She listens to other women offering her advice, but they do not understand her true feelings. Pandarus visits Criseyde to reassure her, promising that they will find a solution to this problem.

Meanwhile, Troilus goes to the temple to pray. He asks the Gods if his fate has already been decided or if he can still do something to change it. Then, he visits Criseyde, but both of them are too sad and filled with grief. They can barely comfort each other because they are so worried about their future. Pandarus again tries to help. He suggests that Troilus should forget what people think and plan to take Criseyde away from the Greeks by force. However, Troilus refuses. He thinks this idea is too dangerous and could make things worse.

As the time for Criseyde's departure draws near, she and Troilus spend time together preparing for their sad separation. Troilus suggests that they should run away together, but Criseyde refuses. She believes they would regret such a decision later. Instead, she comes up with a different plan. She tells Troilus that she will pretend to go along with the prisoner exchange,

but after 10 days, she will escape from the Greek camp and return to him in Troy. Criseyde reassures Troilus that she will keep her promise and come back.

Even though Troilus has doubts, he eventually agrees to the plan. They spend their last moments together filled with sadness and fear of what will happen. As the sun rises, Troilus and Criseyde say their painful goodbyes, both filled with a heavy sense of fear about the future. However, Troilus returns the ruby-encrusted brooch given by Criseyde as a token of his love and trust, hoping that Criseyde will remain faithful to him.

Book V: Criseyde's Betrayal and Troilus's Fate

The narrator begins by calling upon Jove, the most powerful God, and Lachesis, one of the three Fates who control human destiny. The Fates decide everyone's fate and luck. Criseyde is traded for Antenor, the Trojan prisoner. She is led into the Greek camp by a Greek warrior named Diomedes. Diomedes notices Criseyde's sadness and guesses that she has left someone important behind in Troy. He offers to protect her.

Meanwhile, in Troy, Troilus feels very sad and heartbroken. Pandarus, his friend, advises him to spend time with other people so he doesn't appear weak. They spend a week at King Sarpedon's palace, where there are many fun activities. But Troilus cannot enjoy anything. All he can think about is going home to wait for Criseyde to return. On the tenth day, Troilus and Pandarus go to the city gates, hoping to see Criseyde. But she does not come back. Troilus tries to stay hopeful, thinking maybe there is a simple reason for the delay. But as time passes, it becomes harder to believe that she will return.

Criseyde, now in the Greek camp, is very sad. She realizes that she cannot escape from her father and return to Troy. She worries that Troilus will think she has betrayed him. Diomedes begins to court her, trying to win her affection. Troilus and Criseyde exchange letters and she explains that it is hard for her to leave because her father watches her all the time. Two months go by, and she is still with the Greeks. Diomedes keeps trying to get closer to Criseyde, and eventually, she starts to accept his attention. Even though she is getting closer to Diomedes, Criseyde still writes to Troilus and promises to return to him. However, she gives Diomedes the brooch that Troilus had given her as a sign of their love. This is a betrayal, but Criseyde tries to convince herself that she is doing the right thing.

Eventually, Troilus realizes that Criseyde's promises are empty. One night, he has a dream in which he sees Criseyde hugging a boar with sharp tusks. He tries to contact Criseyde again, but her reply doesn't help. Troilus tells his sister Cassandra about the dream, and Cassandra explains that the boar represents Criseyde's new lover. Troilus gets angry at Cassandra and

refuses to believe the truth.

The Trojans go into battle with the Greeks, and they capture some of Diomedes's belongings. Among the things they take, Troilus finds the brooch he had given to Criseyde. Now, he knows for sure that Criseyde has betrayed him. Heartbroken, Troilus tells Pandarus about Criseyde's betrayal, but Pandarus cannot offer any more advice. He simply apologizes for what Criseyde has done.

Filled with rage, Troilus fights many Greeks in battle and kills thousands of them. He even fights Diomedes but does not manage to kill him. Finally, the famous Greek warrior Achilles kills Troilus in battle. After his death, Troilus's soul rises up to the heavens. From the heavens, he laughs at those who still believe in romantic affairs. From there, he can see that all human activities, like love and war, are empty and meaningless in the end. The narrator finishes the story by asking for the protection of Jesus Christ and the Holy Trinity (Father, Son, and Holy Spirit).