



Virgil

The Essential
AENEID

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AENEID FOUR

But the Queen, long sick with love,
Nurses her heart's deep wound
With her pounding blood, and dark flames
Lick at her soul. Thoughts of Aeneas—
The man's heroic lineage, his noble character—
Flood her mind, his face and words transfix
Her heart, and her desire gives her no rest.

When Dawn had spread the sunlight over earth
And dispelled night's damp shadow from the sky,
Dido, deeply troubled, spoke to her sister:

"Anna, my nightmares would not let me sleep!
This guest who has come to our house—
His looks, the way he carries himself, his brave heart!
He has to be descended from the gods. Fear
Always gives away men of inferior birth.
What the Fates have put him through at sea,
The wars he painted, fought to the bitter end!
If I were not unshakable in my vow
Never to pledge myself in marriage again
After death stole my first love away—
If the mere thought of marriage did not leave me cold,
I might perhaps have succumbed this once.
Anna, I must confess, since my husband,
Poor Sychaeus, fell at my brother's hands
And stained our household gods with blood,
Only this man has turned my eye,
Only he has caused my heart to falter.
I recognize the old, familiar flames.
But may the earth gape open and swallow me,
May the Father Almighty blast me
Down to the shades of Erebus below
And Night profound, before I violate you,
O Modesty, and break your vows.

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The man who first joined himself to me
Has taken my love with him to the grave."

Thus Dido, and her tears wet her bosom.

And Anna:

"O sister dearer than light itself,
Will you waste your youth in spinsterhood
Alone and grieving, never to taste love's joys,
The sweetness of children? Do you think
Any of this matters to ghosts in the grave?
True, in your mourning no potential husbands
Have caught your eye, neither back in Tyre
Nor here in Libya. You've looked down your nose
At Iarbas and Africa's other heralded chieftains.
But does it make sense to resist someone you like?
Has it crossed your mind just where you've settled?
The Gaetulians, invincible in war,
And Numidian horsemen are on one frontier.
Just off the coast are the Syrtes' quicksand shoals,
Desert to the south, and wild Barcaeans nomads
Ranging all over. Need I mention the war clouds
Gathering over Tyre, and your brother's threats?
I think the providential gods, with Juno behind them,
Have blown these Trojan ships our way.
With a husband like this, what a city, Sister,
What a kingdom you would see rise! With Trojan allies
What heights of glory our Punic realm would climb!
Just beg the gods' indulgence, and when you have
Good omens from the sacrifices, pamper
Your guests, and invent reasons for them to linger:
'Stormy Orion vexes the dim sea, your ships
Are battered, the weather just won't cooperate.'"

With these words Anna fanned the flames of love
That flickered in Dido's heart and gave resolve
To her wavering mind, dissolving her sense of shame.

First they make the rounds at shrines, soliciting
Divine approval. To Ceres the lawgiver, Apollo,
And father Bacchus the sisters slaughter

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Choice sheep in perfect rituals. But they honor
Above all Juno, goddess of marriage. Dido herself,
With her great beauty, holds the wine-bowl
And pours it out between a glossy heifer's horns.
She glides past statues of gods to rich altars,
Ushers in each day with offerings, consults in awe
The steaming entrails of disemboweled bulls.
But what do prophets know? How much can vows,
Or shrines, help a raging heart? Meanwhile, the flame
Eats her soft marrow, and the wound lives,
Silent beneath her breast.

Dido is burning.
She wanders all through the city in her misery,
Raving mad,

*like a doe pierced by an arrow
Deep in the woods of Crete. She is unwary,
And the arrow, shot by a shepherd who has no idea
Where it has landed, finds the animal,
And as she runs all through the Dictaeon forest
The lethal shaft clings to her flank.*

So too Dido.

Now she leads Aeneas on a tour of the walls,
Shows him what the wealth of Sidon can build.
She begins to speak, but her voice cracks.
As dusk comes on her royal desire is a banquet.
Mad to hear once more the labors of Ilium,
She demands the story again, and again she hangs
On every word. When her guests have left,
And the waning moon has set, and the westering stars
Make slumber sweet, she pines away
In the empty hall, lying alone on Aeneas' couch,
Seeing and hearing him although he is gone.
Or she holds little Ascanius in her lap
To fill in the features of Aeneas' face
And in this way cheats her unspeakable love.

The half-built towers rise no higher, the men no longer
Drill at arms or maintain the city's defensive works.

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Book 4

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All work stops, construction halts on the huge,
Menacing walls. The idle derricks loom against the sky.

When Jove's dear wife saw Dido so lovesick
That her good name no longer mattered to her
As much as her passion, she approached Venus and said:

"An outstanding victory! What a memorable display
Of divine power by you and your little boy,
Two devious deities laying low a single woman!
Your fear of Carthage and your suspicion
Of its noble houses hardly escapes me, my dear.
But to what purpose? Why are we at odds?
Why not instead work out a lasting peace—
Sealed with a royal marriage? You have what you want:
Dido burning with love, her very bones enflamed.
I propose, therefore, that we rule this people jointly,
With equal authority. Dido can submit
To a Trojan husband, with Carthage as her dowry."

The Goddess of Love detected a ploy
To divert power away from Italy
And to Libyan shores. She responded this way:

"Only a fool would refuse such an offer
And prefer to oppose you—provided, of course,
That your plan meets with success. But I remain
A little unclear about the intentions of Fate.
Does Jupiter want the Tyrians and Trojans
To form one city? Does he approve
This mingling of races? You are his wife,
And so you should persuade him. Lead on,
And I'll follow."

And the Queen of Heaven:

"Leave that to me. Now listen, and I'll outline
Exactly how we will deal with the business at hand.
Aeneas and the most unfortunate Dido
Are preparing a woodland hunt for tomorrow,
As soon as Titan lifts his luminous head

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And dissolves with his rays the curtains of the world.
 Just as the beaters start flushing out game
 I'll pour down a black rain laced with hailstones
 And make all the heavens rumble with thunder.
 The hunters will scatter in the enveloping gloom,
 And Dido and Aeneas will find themselves
 In the same cave. I will be there too,
 And with your consent I will unite them
 In holy matrimony. This will be their wedding."

The Cytherean approved and nodded her assent,
 Smiling all the while at Juno's treachery.

Dawn rose from the river Ocean,
 And at first light the hunting party
 Spills out from the gates with nets and spears.
 Massylian horsemen and keen hounds surge ahead,
 But the Carthaginian nobles await their Queen.
 She pauses at the threshold of her chamber
 While her stallion, resplendent in purple and gold,
 Champs the foaming bit. Finally, she steps forward
 With her retinue, wearing a Phoenician cloak
 Finished with embroidery. Her quiver is gold,
 Her hair is bound in gold, and the purple cloak
 Is pinned with a clasp of gold.

Then out ride
 The Trojans with Iulus, excited to be among them.
 Aeneas himself, handsome as a god,
 Takes the lead and joins his troops to Dido's.

*In winter Apollo leaves Lycia and the streams
 Of Xanthus and goes to his birth-isle, Delos.
 There he renews the circling dances,
 And Cretans, Dryopes, and painted Scythians
 Whirl around his sacred altars while the god
 Paces the ridges of Mount Cythrus, braiding
 His flowing hair with soft leaves and gold,
 And the arrows rattle in the quiver on his back.*

No less majestic
 Was Aeneas, and his face shone with equal glory.

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When they came into the high, trackless hills,
 Mountain goats, dislodged from the rocks above,
 Ran down the ridges. Elsewhere, herds of deer
 Streamed across open country, kicking up
 Billows of dust in their flight from the hills.
 Young Ascanius rode his spirited mount
 Up and down the valleys; in high spirits himself,
 Chasing deer and goats but hoping all the while
 That something less tame, a wild boar or tawny lion,
 Would come down from the mountains.

Meanwhile, the sky begins to rumble,
 And a rainstorm, turning to hail, sweeps in.
 The Tyrians and Trojans, with Iulus among them,
 Venus' own dear grandchild, scatter through the fields
 In search of shelter. Streams gush down the mountain,
 And Dido and the Trojan leader make their way
 To the same cave. Earth herself and bridal Juno
 Give the signal. Fires flash in the Sky,
 Witness to their nuptials, and the Nymphs
 Wail high on the mountaintop. That day
 Was the first cause of calamity and of death
 To come. For no longer is Dido swayed
 By appearances or her good name. No more
 Does she contemplate a secret love. She calls it
 Marriage, and with that word she cloaks her sin.

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Rumor at once sweeps through Libya's great cities,
 Rumor, the swiftest of evils. She thrives on speed
 And gains power as she goes. Small and timid at first,
 She grows quickly, and though her feet touch the ground
 Her head is hidden in the clouds. The story goes
 That Mother Earth, vexed with the gods, bore this
 One last child, a sister to Coeus and Enceladus.
 Fast on her feet, her beating wings a blur,
 She is a dread, looming monster. Under every feather
 On her body she has—strange to say—a watchful eye,
 A tongue, a shouting mouth, and pricked-up ears.
 By night she wheels through the dark skies, screeching,
 And never closes her shining eyes in sleep.
 By day she perches on rooftops or towers,
 Watching, and she throws whole cities into panic,

As much a hardened liar as a herald of truth.
 Exultant now, she fills the people's ears
 With all kinds of talk, intoning fact and fiction:
 Aeneas has come, born of Trojan blood;
 Dido, impressed, has given him her hand,
 And now they indulge themselves the winter long,
 Neglecting their realms, slaves to shameful lust.
 The loathsome goddess spreads this gossip
 Far and wide. Then she winds her way to King Iarbas,
 And with her words his rage flares to the sky.

Iarbas, a son of Jupiter Ammon
 By a Garmantian nymph the god had ravished,
 Had built in his vast realm a hundred temples
 For his Father, and on a hundred altars
 Had consecrated sacred fire, an eternal flame
 In honor of the gods. Blood from sacrificial victims
 Clotted the soil, the portals bloomed with garlands,
 As Iarbas, they say, insane with jealousy at Rumor's
 Bitter news, knelt at these altars surrounded by gods,
 Upturned his palms and prayed, prayed to his Father:

"Almighty Jupiter, to whom the Moors now offer
 Libations of wine as they feast on brocaded couches—
 Do you see these things? Why should we shudder
 At you, Father, when you hurl your thunderbolts,
 Or when lightning flashes blindly in the clouds
 And stammering thunder rolls through the sky?
 This woman, a vagrant in my land, who established
 Her little town on a strip of coast we sold to her,
 With acreage on lease—this woman has spurned
 My offers of marriage and embraced Aeneas as her lord.
 And now this Paris, with his crew of eunuchs,
 The bonnet on his pomaded hair tied with ribbons
 Beneath his chin, makes off with the prize
 While we, who bring offerings to temples—
 Your temples—are worshiping an empty name."

So Iarbas prayed, clutching the altar.
 And the Almighty heard him, and turned his eyes
 To the royal city and the lovers oblivious
 Of their better name.

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Then Jupiter said to Mercury:

"Go now, my son; summon the Zephyrs,
 Glide down on your wings and speak to the Trojan
 Idling in Carthage. He seems to have quite forgotten,
 In his infatuation, the cities given him by Fate.
 Carry my words down through the rushing winds.
 This is not the man his lovely mother promised us.
 Not for this did she rescue him twice from the Greeks,
 But that he should be the one to rule Italy, a land
 Pregnant with empire and clamorous for war,
 And produce a race from Teucer's high blood,
 And bring all the world beneath the rule of law.
 If his own glory means nothing to him, if he will not
 Take on this labor for his own fame's sake,
 Does he begrudge Ascanius the towers of Rome?
 What is he hoping for? Why does he linger
 Among a hostile people and have no regard
 For Ausonia's race and Lavinian fields?
 In sum, he must sail. That is my message."

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Jupiter had spoken, and his son prepared
 To fulfill his commands. He bound on his feet
 The golden sandals whose wings carry him over
 Landscape and seascapes in a blur of wind.
 Then he took the wand he uses to summon
 Pale ghosts from Orcus or send them down
 To Tartarus' gloom—the same wand he uses
 To charm mortals to sleep and make sleepers awake
 And unseal the dead's eyelids. Holding this wand
 He now rides the wind, sailing through thunderheads.
 As he flies along, he makes out the summit
 And steep slopes of Atlas, who shoulders the sky.
 His pine-clad head is forever dark with clouds
 And beaten by storms. Snow mantles his shoulders,
 And icy streams drip from his frozen grey beard.
 Mercury glided to a halt here, poised in the air,
 And then gathered himself for a dive to the sea,
 Where he skimmed the waves

*like a cormorant
 That patrols a broken shoreline hunting for fish.*

And so the god flew from the mountain giant, Atlas,
(Whose daughter, Maia, was Mercury's mother)
And came at last to the beaches of Libya.

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The wing-footed messenger stepped ashore,
And when he reached the huts he saw Aeneas
At work, towers and houses rising around him.
His sword was enstarred with yellow jasper,
And from his shoulders hung a mantle blazing
With Tyrian purple, a splendid gift from Dido,
Who had stitched the fabric with threads of gold.

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Mercury weighed in at once:

"Are you, of all people,
Laying the foundations of lofty Carthage
And building a beautiful city—for a woman?
What about your own realm, your own affairs?
The ruler of the gods—and of all the universe—
Has sent me down to you from bright Olympus,
Bearing his message through the rushing winds.
What are you thinking of, wasting your time in Libya?
If your own glory means nothing to you,
Think of the inheritance you owe to Ascanius—
A kingdom in Italy and the soil of Rome."

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With these words on his lips, Mercury vanished
Into thin air, visible no more to human eyes.

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Aeneas stood there amazed, choking with fear.
He bristled all over, speechless, astounded,
And he burned with desire to leave that sweet land,
In awe of the commandment from the gods above.
But what should he do? What can he say
To the Queen in her passion? How will he choose
His opening words? His mind ranges all over,
Darting this way and that, and as he weighs
His options, this seems the best choice:
He calls his captains, Mnestheus, Sergestus,
And brave Serestus, and he orders them
To prepare the fleet for silent running, get the men
To the shore and the gear in order, but conceal

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The reason for this change of plans. Meanwhile,
He explains that—since good Dido knows nothing
And would never dream that a love so strong
Could ever be destroyed—he himself will find
A way to approach her, the proper occasion
To break the news to her gently.

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The captains
Were more than happy to fulfill his commands.

330

But the Queen (are lovers ever really fooled?)
Had a presentiment of treachery. Fearing all
Even when all seemed safe, she was the first
To detect a shift in the wind. It was evil Rumor
Who whispered that the fleet was preparing
To set out to sea.

335

She went out of her mind,
Raging through the city

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*as wild and furious
As a maenad when the holy mysteries have begun,
Her blood shaking when she hears the cry "Bacchus!"
In the nocturnal frenzy on Mount Cithaeron,
And the mountain echoes the sacred call.*

Finally she corners Aeneas and says:

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"Traitor! Did you actually hope to conceal
This crime and sneak away without telling me?
Does our love mean nothing to you? Does it matter
That we pledged ourselves to each other?
Do you care that Dido will die a cruel death?
Preparing to set sail in the dead of winter,
Launching your ships into the teeth of this wind!
How can you be so cruel? If Troy still stood,
And you weren't searching for lands unknown,
You wouldn't even sail for Troy in this weather!
Is it me? Is it me you are fleeing?
By these tears, I beg you, by your right hand,
Which is all I have left, by our wedding vows,
Still so fresh—if I have ever done anything
To deserve your thanks, if there is anything in me
That you found sweet, pity a house destined to fall,

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And if there is still room for prayers, I beg you,
 Please change your mind. It is because of you
 The Libyan warlords hate me and my own Tyrians
 Abhor me. Because of you that my honor
 Has been snuffed out, the good name I once had,
 My only hope to ascend to the stars.
 To what death do you leave me, dear guest
 (The only name I can call the man
 I once called husband)? For what should I wait?
 For my brother Pygmalion to destroy my city,
 For Gaetulian Iarbas to lead me off to captivity?
 If you had at least left me with child
 Before deserting me, if only a baby Aeneas
 Were playing in my hall to help me remember you,
 I wouldn't feel so completely used and abandoned."

Dido finished. Aeneas, Jupiter's message
 Still ringing in his ears, held his eyes steady
 And struggled to suppress the love in his heart.
 He finally made this brief reply:

"My Queen,
 I will never deny that you have earned my gratitude,
 In more ways than can be said; nor will I ever regret
 Having known Elissa, as long as memory endures
 And the spirit still rules these limbs of mine.
 I do have a few things to say on my own behalf.
 I never hoped to steal away from your land
 In secret, and you should never imagine I did.
 Nor have I ever proposed marriage to you
 Or entered into any nuptial agreement.
 If the Fates would allow me to lead my own life
 And to order my priorities as I see fit,
 The welfare of Troy would be my first concern,
 And the remnants of my own beloved people.
 Priam's palace would still be standing
 And Pergamum rising from the ashes of defeat.
 But now the oracles of Gryneian Apollo,
 Of Lycian Apollo, have commanded with one voice
 That the great land of Italy is my journey's end.
 There is my love, my country. If the walls
 Of Carthage, vistas of a Libyan city,

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Have a hold on you, a Phoenician woman,
 Why do you begrudge the Trojans
 A settlement in Ausonia? We too have the right
 To seek a kingdom abroad.

The troubled ghost

Of my father, Anchises, admonishes me
 Every night in my dreams, when darkness
 Covers the earth, and the fiery stars rise.
 And my dear son, Ascanius—am I to wrong him
 By cheating him of his inheritance,
 A kingdom in Hesperia, his destined land?
 And now the gods' herald, sent by Jove himself,
 (I swear by your head and mine) has come down
 Through the rushing winds, ordering me to leave.
 I saw the god myself, in broad daylight,
 Entering the walls, and heard his very words.
 So stop wounding both of us with your pleas.
 It is not my own will—this quest for Italy."

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While he is speaking she looks him up and down
 With icy, sidelong glances, stares at him blankly,
 And then erupts into volcanic fury:

"Your mother was no goddess, you faithless bastard,
 And you aren't descended from Dardanus, either.
 No, you were born out of flint in the Caucasus,
 And suckled by tigers in the wilds of Scythia.
 Ah, why should I hold back? Did he sigh as I wept?
 Did he even look at me? Did he give in to tears
 Or show any pity for the woman who loved him?
 What shall I say first? What next? It has come to this—
 Neither great Juno nor the Saturnian Father
 Looks on these things with impartial eyes.
 Good faith is found nowhere. I took him in,
 Shipwrecked and destitute on my shore,
 And insanely shared my throne with him.
 I recovered his fleet and rescued his men.
 Oh, I am whirled by the Furies on burning winds!
 And now prophetic Apollo, now the Lycian oracles,
 Now the gods' herald, sent by Jupiter himself,
 Has come down through the rushing winds
 With dread commands! As if the gods lose sleep

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Over business like this! Go on, leave! I'm not
 Arguing with you any more. Sail to Italy,
 Find your kingdom overseas. But I hope,
 If there is any power in heaven, you will suck down
 Your punishment on rocks in mid-ocean,
 Calling Dido's name over and over. Gone
 I may be, but I'll pursue you with black fire,
 And when cold death has cloven body from soul,
 My ghost will be everywhere. You will pay,
 You despicable liar, and I will hear the news;
 Word will reach me in the deeps of hell."

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With these words she breaks off their talk
 And in her anguish flees from the daylight
 And out of his sight, leaving him there
 Hesitant with fear, and with so much more to say.
 Her maids support her as she collapses, take her
 To her marble room, and lay her on her bed.

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Aeneas, loyal and true, yearns to comfort her,
 Soothe her grief, and say the words that will
 Turn aside her sorrow. He sighs heavily,
 And although great love has shaken his soul,
 He obeys the gods' will and returns to the fleet.

460

Then the Trojans redouble their efforts
 And haul their ships down all along the shore.
 Keels are caulked and floated, leafy tree limbs
 Are brought in for oars, and beams left rough
 In the men's impatience to leave. You could see them
 Streaming down from every part of the city.

465

*Ants, preparing for winter, will busily plunder
 A huge pile of seeds and store it in their nest.
 The black line threads through the fields as the insects
 Transport their spoils on a narrow road through the grass.
 Some push the huge grains along with their shoulders,
 Others patrol the line and keep it moving,
 And the whole trail is seething with their work.*

470

What was it like, Dido, to see all this? What sighs
 Escaped your lips, when from your high tower

You saw the shoreline crawling with Trojans,
 And the sea roiled with the shouts of sailors?

475

Cruel Love, what do you not force human hearts to bear?
 Again Dido collapses into tears, again feels compelled
 To beg Aeneas and to bow down to Love,
 Lest she leave something untried and so die in vain:

480

"Look at them, Anna, scuttling across the shore,
 Streaming down from every direction. The canvas
 Can hardly wait for the breeze, and the sailors
 Are laughing as they hang the sterns with garlands.

485

I had the strength to foresee this sorrow,
 And I will have the strength to endure it, Sister.
 There is one more thing I will ask of you.
 You are the only one that traitor befriended,
 Confiding in you even his deepest feelings.
 Only you will know the best way to approach him:
 Go, my dear, bend your knee before our archenemy.
 Tell him I never joined the Greek alliance at Aulis
 To burn down Troy, never sent my warships
 To Pergamum, nor defiled his father's ashes
 Or disturbed his ghost. Why, then, does he refuse
 To admit my words into his obstinate ears?
 What is his hurry? Is he too rushed to grant
 The final request of his wretched lover:
 To wait for favorable winds for his flight?
 I am no longer asking for our marriage back—
 The marriage he betrayed—nor that he do without
 His precious Latium or relinquish his realm.
 All I want is time, some breathing room for my passion,
 Until Fate has taught me how the vanquished should grieve.
 Beg from him this last favor, Sister. If he grants it,
 I will pay it back with interest—by my death."

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Thus Dido's prayer, and her sister sadly
 Bore it to Aeneas, then bore it again. Unmoved
 By her tears, he made no response to her words.
 Fate stood in the way, and a god sealed the man's ears.

510

*Alpine winds swoop down from the North
 And struggle to uproot an ancient oak.*

*They blow upon it from every side until its leaves
Strew the ground and the strong trunk-wood creaks.
But the tree clings to the crag, and as high as its crown
Reaches to heaven, so deep do its roots sink into the earth.*

515

So too the hero, battered with appeals
On this side and that. His great heart feels
Unendurable pain, but his mind does not move,
And the tears that fall to the ground change nothing.

520

And now Dido, in awe of her doom,
Prays for death. She is weary of looking upon
The dome of heaven, and, furthering her resolve
To leave the light, she saw as she placed offerings
On the incense-fumed altar a fearful omen:
The holy water turned black, and the wine,
When she poured it, congealed into gore.
She told no one of this, not even her sister.
There was more. Dido had in the palace
A marble shrine to her deceased husband,
A shrine she honored by keeping it wreathed
With snow-white wool and festal fronds.
Now she heard, or seemed to hear, her husband's voice,
When dusk had melted the edges of the world,
Calling her. And the owl, alone on the rooftop,
Would draw out its song into an eerie wail.
And the sayings of seers from days gone by
Would fill her with terror. And then in her sleep
A fierce Aeneas would pursue her as she raved.
And then she would be alone, abandoned forever,
Forever traveling a long, lonesome road
Through a desert landscape, searching for her Tyrians—

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*Like mad Pentheus when he sees the maenads,
And sees a double sun and a duplicate Thebes;
Or like Orestes stalked by Furies on an empty stage,
Pursued by his mother with torches and snakes
While the avenging Fiends lurk in the doorway.*

And so Dido, worn down by grief, went mad.
Determined to die, she worked out by herself
The time and the means, and only then

550

Did she address her sister, hiding her plan
Behind a face radiant with serenity and hope:

"O Sister, I have found a way—be glad for me—
Either to get him back or free myself from love.
On the shore of Ocean, near the setting sun,
Lies farthest Ethiopia, where gigantic Atlas
Turns on his shoulders the star-studded heavens.
A priestess from there, of the Massylian tribe,
Has been presented to me. She guarded the sanctuary
Of the Hesperides, protected the golden apples
On their tree, and feasted the dragon
On honey and the poppy's drowsy opium.
She claims her incantations can set hearts free
Or plunge them into the depths of despair,
All as she chooses. She can stop rivers cold,
Make the stars turn backward, and conjure up
The spirits of night. You will hear the ground bellow
Under your feet, see elms stroll down mountains.
I swear by the gods, Anna, and by your dear head,
I am reluctant to resort to black magic. Still,
Build a pyre secretly in the central courtyard
Under the open sky and pile upon it
The weapons our impious hero left
On our bedroom walls, and all his forgotten clothes,
And the marriage bed that was my undoing.
It will do me good to destroy every reminder
Of that evil man—as the priestess told me."

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She fell silent, and the color drained from her face.

In spite of everything, her sister Anna
Did not believe that Dido was inventing
These strange rites to disguise her own funeral.
She could not conceive of passion so great
And feared no worse for Dido now
Than at the death of Sychaeus.

580

And so,

Anna prepared the pyre.

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But the Queen, out in the open courtyard—
Where the pyre now reared heavenward,

Vast with billets of pine and sawn oak—
Hangs the place with garlands and funeral fronds:
Upon the bed she arranges his clothes, the sword
That he left; and his picture, knowing well
What was to come.

There were altars
Around the courtyard, and the priestess
Shook her hair out free and chanted thunderous prayers
To three hundred gods, to Erebus and Chaos,
To three-bodied Hecate and Diana's three faces,
Virgin huntress, Moon, and pale Proserpina.
She sprinkled water as being from Avernus
And with a bronze knife harvested by moonlight
Herbs selected for their milky, black poison.
She calls for the love charm of a newborn foal
Torn from his forehead before his mother can eat it.
Dido herself, sacred cakes of barley in her pious hand,
Stands close to the altars, one foot unsandaled,
Her dress unbound. Then she calls to witness,
As one about to die, first Gods and then Stars
Who share Destiny's secrets. And then she prays
To whatever Power makes a final reckoning
For lovers who love on unequal terms.

It was night, and all over earth weary bodies
Lay peacefully asleep. Woods and wild seas
Had fallen still, and the stars were midway
In their gliding orbits. Ox and meadow were quiet,
And all the brilliant birds who haunt
The lapping lakes and tangled hedgerows
Were nestled in sleep under the dark, silent sky.

But not Dido, unhappy heart. She never drifted off
Into sleep, nor let night settle on her eyes or breast.
Her anxiety mounts, and her love surges back
And seethes, wave after wave on a furious sea.
At last she breaks into speech, debating in her heart:

"What am I doing? Should I entertain once more
My former suitors—and hear them laugh at me?
Go begging for a marriage among the Nomads,
After scorning their proposals time and again?

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Shall I follow the Trojans' fleet and be subject
To their every command? After all, aren't they
So grateful for the help I gave them
That they could never forget my past kindnesses?
Even if I wanted to, who would let me on board,
Welcome someone so hated onto their ships?
Poor Dido, do you not yet appreciate
The treachery bred into Laomedon's race?
What then? Shall I crew with the Trojans
Cruising cheerfully away, all on my own?
Or should I, at the head of my own Tyrian fleet,
Give them pursuit, order my people to hoist sail
Into the wind again, a people I could scarcely persuade
To abandon their city back in Phoenicia?
No, Dido, die as you deserve, end your sorrow
With a sword.

You, my dear sister, caving in to my tears,
First loaded my frenzied soul with these sorrows
And put me in the enemy's path. It was not my lot
To live a blameless life as a widow, as free
As a wild thing, untouched by these cares.
I have not kept my vow to Sychaeus' ashes."

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As these cries erupted from Dido's heart,
Aeneas, bent on leaving, with everything in order,
Was catching some sleep on his ship's high stern,
And in his sleep he had a vision of Mercury,
Returning to him in the same form as before,
The same voice and face, the same golden hair
And graceful body—and, as before, with a warning:

"Goddess-born, how can you sleep in a crisis like this?
Are you blind to the perils surrounding you,
Madman? Don't you hear a sailing breeze blowing?
Dido's heart revolves around evil. Determined
To die, she seethes with tides of raw passion.
Will you not flee now, while flight is still possible?
You will soon see this sea awash with timbers
And the shore in flames—if Dawn finds you
Lingering here. Push off, then, without delay.
A woman is a fickle and worrisome thing."

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And with these words he melted into the dark.

Aeneas was deeply shaken by this apparition.
He tore himself from sleep and woke his crew:

"On the double, men, unfurl those sails
And get to the benches! A god has come down
From heaven again, urging us to cut the cables
And get out of here as fast as we can.
We will follow you, Holy One, whoever you are,
And gladly obey your commands again.
Be with us once more, grant us your grace,
And set propitious stars in the sky before us."

He spoke, drew his sword
Flashing from its sheath, and severed
The stern cable. Aeneas' fervor
Spread through the fleet. They ran to their posts
And shoved off from the shore, blanketing the sea
With their hulls. Leaning into the oars,
They swept the blue water and churned it to foam.

Dawn left Tithonus' saffron bed
And sprinkled the world with early light.
The Queen, in her tower, watched the day whiten
And saw the fleet moving on under level sails.
She knew the shores and harbors were empty,
The oarage gone. She beat her lovely breast
Three times, four times, and tore her golden hair.

"O God!" she said. "Will he get away,
Will this interloper make a mockery of us?
To arms, the whole city, after him!
Launch the fleet! Bring fire, man the oars!
What am I saying? Where am I?
What has come over me? Oh, Dido, only now
Do you feel your guilt? Better to have felt it
When you gave away your crown. Behold
The pledge, the loyalty, of the man they say
Bears his ancestral gods, bore on his shoulders
His age-worn father! Could I have not torn him
Limb from limb and fed him to the fishes?"

Murdered his friends? Minced Ascanius himself
And served him up as a meal to his father?
The battle could have gone either way: What of it?
Doomed to die, whom did I have to fear?
I should have torched his camp with my own hands,
Annihilated father and son and the whole race,
And thrown myself on top of the conflagration.

O Sun, fiery witness to all earthly deeds,
And Juno, complicit in my unhappy love,
Hecate, worshiped with howls at midnight crossroads,
Avenging Furies, and gods of dying Elissa—
Attend to this, turn the force of your wrath
Upon sins that deserve it—O hear my prayer!
If this criminal is destined to make harbor again,

If this is what the Fates and Jupiter demand,
May he still have to fight a warlike nation,
Be driven from his land and torn from Iulus.
May he plead for aid and see his people slaughtered.

And when he has accepted an unjust peace,
May he not enjoy his reign or the light of day

But die before his time and lie unburied
On a desolate shore. This is what I pray for.
These last words I pour out with my blood.
And you, my Tyrians, must persecute his line
Throughout the generations—this your tribute
To Dido's ashes. May treaties never unite
These nations, may no love ever be lost between them.
And from my bones may some avenger rise up
To harry the Trojans with fire and sword,
Now and whenever we have the power.

May coast oppose coast, waves batter waves,
Arms clash with arms, may they be ever at war,
They themselves and their children forever."

Dido said these things and then set her mind
On a quick escape from the hated light. She exchanged
A few words with Barce, Sychaeus' nurse; her own
Was black ashes back in the old country.

"Dear Nurse, bring my sister Anna here.
Have her sprinkle her body with river water
And bring along the victims for expiation. You

Come with her, and wreath your brows with wool.
I intend to complete the rites to Stygian Jove
That I have begun, and so end my troubles,
And to send the Trojan's pyre up in flames."

745

She spoke. The old woman quickened her step.
Dido trembled, panicked at the enormity
Of what she had begun. Eyes bloodshot,
Blotched cheeks quivering, pale with looming death,
She burst into the innermost part of the house,
Climbed the pyre like a madwoman, and unsheathed
The Trojan sword—a gift not sought for such a use.
The sight of the familiar bed and the clothes he wore
Made her stop in tears. Struggling to collect herself,
She lay upon the couch and spoke her final words:

750

"Love's spoils, sweet while heaven permitted,
Receive this soul, and free me from these cares.
I have lived, and I have completed the course
Assigned by Fortune. Now my mighty ghost
Goes beneath the earth. I built an illustrious city.
I saw my walls, I avenged my husband
And made my evil brother pay. Happy,
All too happy, if Dardanian ships
Had never touched our shores!"

755

Dido spoke,
And pressing her face into the couch:

760

"We will die unavenged, but we will die.
This is how I want to pass into the dark below.
The cruel Trojan will watch the fire from the sea
And carry with him the omens of my death."

765

With these words on her lips her companions saw her
Collapse onto the sword, saw the blade
Foaming with blood and her hands spattered.
A cry rises to the roof, and Rumor
Dances wildly through the shaken town.
The houses ring with lamentation
And the wails of women. Great dirges
Hang in the air. It was as if Carthage itself

770

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Or ancient Tyre had fallen to the enemy,
And flames rolled through the houses of men
And over the temples of the gods.

Anna, in great distress, heard the cries.
She rushed through the crowd, clawing her face
With her nails, and beating her breasts
With her fists, and then spoke to her dying sister:

780

"So this is what it was all about, Sister.
You cheated me, didn't you? This is what
Your pyre was for, your altars, your fire—
To deceive me. What should I lament first,
Deserted like this? Did you scorn my company
In death? You should have called on me
To share your fate, to die by the sword
With the same agony, at the same moment!
Did I build this pyre with my own hands
Calling upon the gods of our fathers,
So that when you were lying upon it like this
I would not be here? Cruel! You have destroyed
Yourself, me, the Sidonian elders, and your city.

785

Ah, let me bathe her wounds, and if any last breath
Still lingers on her lips, let me catch it on mine."

795

She had reached the top of the pyre by now
And was holding her sister close to her bosom,
Sobbing as she used her dress to stanch
The blood's dark flow. Dido, trying to lift
Her heavy eyes, grew faint again. The wound hissed
Deep in her chest. Three times she struggled
To prop herself upon her elbow,
Three times she rolled back on the bed.
With wandering eyes she sought the light
In heaven's dome and moaned when she found it.

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Then Almighty Juno, pitying Dido's long agony
And hard death, sent Iris down from Olympus
To free her struggling soul from its mortal coils.
Her death was neither fated nor deserved
But before her day and in the heat of passion.
Proserpina had not yet plucked from her head

810

A golden lock, nor allotted her a place
In the Stygian gloom. And so Iris flew down
Through the sky on sparkling, saffron wings,
Trailing in the sunlight a thousand changing hues,
And then stood above Dido's head.

"This offering
I consecrate to Dis and release you from your body."

As soon as she had cut the lock, all the body's warmth
Ebb'd away, and Dido's life withdrew into the winds.

Book 5 is omitted. Aeneas and the Trojans leave Carthage, and a storm drives them back to Drepanum in Sicily where Acestes again receives them. Aeneas holds funeral games to mark the first anniversary of his father's death. Meanwhile, Juno inspires the Trojan women, weary from seven years of wandering, to burn the ships, but Jupiter douses the fire with rain. The ghost of Anchises appears to Aeneas and acting on his advice, Aeneas allows any of the Trojans who so wish to remain in Sicily. Aeneas' son, Neptune agrees but demands a human life in return. Aeneas' helmsman Palinurus becomes drowsy, falls overboard, and is killed by savages when he swims ashore.

AENEID SIX

Aeneas wept as he spoke, and let the fleet
Glide along until it reached Cumæ. Keels
Backed into the long arc of Eubœan beach,
Prows seaward, as the anchors bit
Into the sea's shelving floor. Crews flashed ashore
Onto the banks of Italy. Some kindled fire
From veins of flint, some foraged timber
From the wilderness, others located streams.
But Aeneas, on a mission of his own,
Sought the high, holy places of Apollo
And the Sibyl's deeps, the immense caverns
Where the prophetic god from Delos breathes
Into her mind and soul and opens the future.
Aeneas and his men were soon within
The groves of Trivia and under golden eaves.

Daedalus once, fleeing Minoan Crete
On beating wings, trusted himself
To the open sky, an unused path,
North toward the Bears and a light landing
On this Chalcidian height,
And dedicated here his airy oarage
To you, Phœbus, and founded this temple.

On the doors, the murder of Androgeus
And the annual penalty for the Athenians,
Seven of their sons offered for sacrifice.
The urn stands ready, the lots are drawn. Opposite,
Rising from the sea, the island of Crete,
Raw passion for a bull, and Pasiphaë
In her furtive position, raising her knees.
And there too the mixed breed, the Minotaur,
Hybrid monument to unspeakable desire.
Here the Labyrinth winds its inextricable course,
And here is Daedalus himself, pitying

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