

Virgil

The Essential
AENEID

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Introduction by
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Hackett Publishing Company, Inc.
Indianapolis/Cambridge



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 Cumae. Keels
Backed into the long arc of Euboean 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, Phoebeus, 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

Princess Ariadne's great love, unraveling
The twisted skein of the maze, guiding Theseus'
Blind footsteps with a thread. And you also,
Icarus, would have played a great part
In this masterpiece, if grief had allowed:
Twice the artist attempted your fate in gold,
Twice the father's hands fell.

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Aeneas' eyes

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Would have scanned every last detail.
But Achates, sent ahead, was back,
And with him was Deiphobe, Glaucus' daughter,
Priestess of Phoebus and Trivia. A figure
Of divine awe, she had this to say to Aeneas:
"This is no time for looking at pictures.
You should be sacrificing seven bulls
From a sacred herd, and seven chosen sheep."

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She spoke, and when Aeneas' men
Had seen to the sacrifice the priestess
Called the Trojans under the looming temple.

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The flank of that Euboean cliff was carved
Into a hundred cavernous mouths, gaping orifices
That roar the Sibyl's oracular responses.
The virgin priestess greeted them at the threshold:

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"It is time to demand your destiny. The god! Behold,
The god!"

And as she spoke there before the gates
Her color changed, her hair spread out
Into fiery points, she panted for air,
And her breast heaved with feral madness.
She was larger than life now, and her voice
Was no longer human, as the god's power
Took possession of her:

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"You hesitate

To pray, hesitate, Aeneas of Troy?
The great mouths of this thunderstruck hall
Will not open until you pray."

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And she was silent.

Fear seeped like icy water through the Trojans' bones,
And their lord poured forth his heart in prayer:

"Phoebus, who has always pitied Troy
In its darkest times, who guided the arrow
From Paris' hand into the body of Achilles,
And who guided me through so many seas
Pounding so many distant shores,
The remote Massylian tribes, the lands
Fringed by the shoals of the Syrtes—
Now at last we have in our grasp
The ever-receding shore of Italy.
May Troy's fortune follow us no farther.
You also, gods and goddesses
Whom Ilium's great glory offended,
May now justly spare the Dardan race.
And you, most holy prophetess, who hold
The future in your mind, grant the realm
That has been pledged to me by Fate,
Grant that the Teucrians settle in Italy
With the wandering, harried gods of Troy.
Then to Phoebus and Trivia I will dedicate
A temple of solid marble and holy days
In Phoebus' name. And a great shrine
Awaits you in our realm, gracious priestess,
An inner sanctum where I will deposit
Your prophecies and the mystic sayings
Told to my people and ordain your priests.
Only do not entrust your verses to leaves,
Playthings swirling when the wind gusts,
But chant them out loud."

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Aeneas finished.
But the priestess had not yet taken Apollo's
Bit in her mouth, and she convulsed like a maenad
Monstrous in the cave, desperate to shake
The great god from her breast. All the more,
Though, he tired her rabid mouth, tamed
Her wild heart, and molded her to his will.
And now the cave's hundred mouths

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Opened of their own accord and transmitted
The oracle's response through the empty air:

"You have escaped the perils of the sea,
But perils more grave await you on land.
The Dardanians will enter Lavinium—
Be sure of that—but will wish they had never come.
War, I see horrible war, and the Tiber
Foaming with blood. You will have another
Simois and Xanthus, another Doric camp.
A second Achilles has been born in Latium
To a goddess mother, and Juno will
Continue to afflict the Teucrians,
While you, a suppliant, shall beg for help
Throughout Italy. And the cause
Of all this suffering for the Trojans
Shall be once more a foreign bride,
An alien marriage.
Do not yield, but oppose your troubles
All the more boldly, as far as your fate
And fortune allow. Salvation will come first
From where you least expect it—
A Greek city will open wide its gates."

In words such as these the Sibyl of Cumae
Chanted eerie riddles from her shrine
In the echoing cave, shrouding truth
In darkness, as Apollo shook the reins
And twisted the goad in her raving heart.
As soon as her frenzy ceased, and her lips
Were hushed, the Trojan hero began:

"Virgin priestess, trouble of any kind,
However strange, no longer surprises me.
I expect it, and I have thought this through.
I ask for one thing. It is said that here
Are the dark lord's gate and the murky swamp
Of Acheron's backwater. Let me pass.
Open the sacred doors and show me the way,
So that I might see my father face to face.
I saved him, I carried him on my shoulders
Through fire and a thousand enemy spears.

He was at my side through the long journey,
Sharing the perils of sea and sky, crippled
As he was, beyond what his age allowed.
It was his pleas that convinced me to come
As suppliant to you. Pity father and son,
Gracious one, for you have the power.
Not in vain did Hecate appoint you
Mistress of the groves of Avernus.
If Orpheus could call forth his wife's ghost,
Enchanting the shades with his Thracian lyre,
If Pollux could ransom his brother, taking turns
With death, traveling the way so many times—
Not to mention Theseus and Hercules.
I too am descended from Jove most high."

So Aeneas prayed, clutching the altars.
And the Sibyl answered:

"Goddess-born son
Of Trojan Anchises, the road down
To Avernus is easy. Day and night
The door to black Dis stands open.
But to retrace your steps and come out
To the upper air, this is the task,
The labor. A few, whom Jupiter
Has favored, or whom bright virtue
Has lifted to heaven, sons of the gods,
Have succeeded. All the central regions
Are swathed in forest, and Cocytus
Enfolds it with its winding, dark water.
But if you have such longing, such dread desire
To cross the Styx twice, twice to see
Black Tartarus, and if it pleases you
To indulge this madness as a sacred mission,
Listen to what you must do first.
Hidden in a darkling tree there lies
A golden bough, blossoming gold
In leaf and pliant branch, held sacred
To the goddess below. A grove conceals
This bough on every side, and umber shadows
Veil it from view in a valley dim.
No one may pass beneath the earth

Until he has plucked from the tree
This golden-leaved fruit. Fair Proserpina
Decrees it be brought to her as a gift.
When one bough is torn away another
Grows in its place and leafs out in gold.
Search it out with your deepest gaze
And, when you find it, pluck it with your hand.
It will come off easily, of itself,
If the Fates call you. Otherwise you will not
Wrench it off by force or cut it with steel.
Farther, there lies unburied (ah, you do not know)
The lifeless body of your friend,
Defiling the entire fleet with his death
While you seek counsel at my doorstep.
Bear him to his resting place and bury him
In the tomb. Then lead black cattle here
As first victims to expiate your sins.
Only then will you see the Stygian groves
And realms closed to the living."

She spoke,
Closed her lips, and said no more.

Aeneas

Left the cave and walked on with downcast eyes,
Pondering these mysteries. Loyal Achates
Walked with him, just as worried, and the two
Talked with each other, trying to sort out
Which comrade might be dead, whose unburied body
The seer spoke of. Then they came to the shore
And saw on the beach the body of Misenus,
Dead before his time—Misenus, son of Aeolus,
Second to none at rousing men to war
With his bugle's call. He had been the companion
Of great Hector and fought at his side,
As good with a spear as he was with his horn.
But when Achilles deprived Hector of life,
Misenus joined the ranks of Aeneas,
Unwilling to follow a lesser hero.
But today he had been sounding a conch shell,
Making it blare and sing like the sea, insanely
Challenging the gods to a contest. Triton

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Was jealous and, if the tale is true, caught
The man and drowned him in the rocks and surf.
And so they gathered around and mourned,
And Aeneas led the echoing dirge,
Since this also was his duty. Then,
In tears, they hurried to carry out
The Sibyl's orders, piling up trees
For his tomb's altar and rearing it skyward.
Then into the primeval forest, the deep lairs
Of wild things—and down fell the pines,
The ilex rang with the axe, ash logs and oak
Were split with wedges, and enormous trunks
Rolled down the mountainside.

Aeneas

Led the way in this work also, wielding
The same tools and cheering on his men.
But his heart was heavy, and as he gazed
At the deep woods a prayer came to his lips:

"Let the golden bough show itself now
On a tree in this forest, since the prophetess
Was all too right about you, Misenus!"

He had scarcely spoken when twin doves
Came fluttering down from heaven
Before his very eyes and settled
On the green grass. Aeneas' mind soared
When he saw his mother's birds, and he prayed:

"Show me the way, float on the air to the heart
Of the forest, where the earth lies soft
In the shadow of the radiant bough
And you, Goddess and Mother, do not fail me
In these doubtful times."

And he stood quietly,
Watching, tracking their direction in the trees.
The doves, as they fed, flew only as far
As someone following could keep them in sight.
But when they came to the jaws of Avernus,
With its foul smell, they ascended swiftly,

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And then, gliding down through the limpid air,
They sat side by side on their chosen perch,
A tree through whose branches there shone
A discordant halo, a haze of gold.

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*During winter's cold, deep in the woods,
Mistletoe blooms with strange leafage
On a tree not its own and entwines
The burled branches with its yellow fruit.*

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Such was the gold seen on the dark ilex,
And so rustled its foil in the gentle breeze.
Aeneas seized it at once, and though the bough
Hesitated, he broke it off eagerly and brought it
Safely back beneath the Sibyl's roof.

265

The Trojans were still lamenting Misenus
There on the shore, performing final rites
For thankless ash. First, they built a huge pyre
Out of resinous pine and split oak,
Then trimmed its sides with gloomy foliage
And set up before it funereal cypresses.
They adorned the top with glittering arms.
Others heated water in bronze cauldrons
And bathed and anointed the cold body.
A cry went up. And then they placed the corpse,
Wet with their tears, onto the couch
And draped it with his familiar purple robes.
A small group lifted the heavy bier,
A poignant service, and with eyes averted
In ancestral manner, lit the fire. Flames crackled
Around the gifts heaped on the pyre—frankincense,
Platters of food, bowls filled with olive oil.
After the embers collapsed and the flames
Died away, they doused the remnant
Of glowing ash with wine. Corynaeus
Gathered the bones and placed them in an urn.
Then he circled the company three times,
Sprinkling them with water fresh as dew
From an olive branch, and so purified the men.
Then he spoke some last words. Aeneas,
In an act of piety, heaped above Misenus

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A huge burial mound—with the hero's arms,
Horn, and oar—beneath a soaring hill
That is still called Misenus
And will bear that name throughout the ages.

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The funeral was finished. Aeneas turned all his attention
To the Sibyl's commands.

There was a deep cave
With a jagged, yawning mouth, sheltered
By a dusky lake and a wood's dark shade.
Over this no winged thing could fly, so putrid
And so foul were the fumes that issued
From the cave's black jaws and rose to the sky
(And so the Greeks called the place Avernus).
Here the priestess set in line four black bulls,
Poured wine upon their brows, and plucked
The topmost bristles from between their horns.
They set them on the sacred fire as first offerings,
Calling on Hecate, mistress of the moon
And of Erebus below. Others slit the bulls' throats
And caught their warm blood in bowls
While Aeneas himself sacrificed a lamb,
Black-fleeced, to Night, the Eumenides' mother,
And to Earth, her great sister. To you,
Proserpina, he offered a barren heifer.
Then began a sacrifice to the Lord of Styx,
As at night's darkest hour the hero lay
Carcasses of bulls on the altars, pouring rich oil
On their burning entrails. But, look, under
The threshold of the rising sun the ground rumbled.
The wooded ridges trembled, and dogs howled
As through the gloom the goddess drew near.

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"Begone,
Begone, you uninitiated!" shrieked the seer.
"Stand off from the grove! And you, Aeneas,
Onto the road and unsheathe your sword. Now
Is the time for courage and a heart of iron."

She spoke, then plunged wildly into the cave,
And Aeneas matched her stride for stride.

Gods of the world below, silent shades,
Chaos and Phlegethon, soundless tracts of Night—
Grant me the grace to tell what I have heard,
And lay bare the mysteries in earth's abyss.

330

On they went, shrouded in desolate night,
Through shadow, through the empty halls
Of Dis and his ghostly domain, as dim

335

*As a path in the woods under a faint moon
When Jupiter has buried the sky in gloom
And night has stolen color from the world.*

Just before the entrance, in the very jaws
Of Orcus, Grief and avenging Cares
Have set their beds. Pale Diseases
Dwell there, sad Old Age, Fear, Hunger—
The tempter—and foul Poverty,
All fearful shapes, and Death and Toil,
And Death's brother Sleep, Guilty Joys,
And on the threshold opposite, lethal War,
The Furies in iron cells, and mad Strife,
Her snaky hair entwined with bloody bands.

340

In the middle a huge elm stands, spreading
Its aged branches, the abode of false Dreams
That cling to the bottom of every leaf.
At the doors are stabled the monstrous shapes
Of Centaurs, and biform Scyllas, and Briareus
With a hundred heads, the Lernaean Hydra,
Hissing horribly, the Chimaera armed with flame,
Gorgons, Harpies, and the hybrid shade of Geryon.
Suddenly panicked, Aeneas drew his sword
And turned its edge against their advance,
And if his guide had not observed
That they were hollow, bodiless forms,
Flitting images, he would have charged
And slashed vainly through empty shadows.

345

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From here a road led to the Tartarean waters
Of Acheron, where a huge whirlpool,
Churning with mire, belched all its sand

Into Cocytus. The keeper of these waters
Was Charon, the grim ferryman, frightening
In his squalor. Unkempt hoary whiskers
Bristled on his chin, his eyes like flares
Were sunk in flame, and a filthy cloak hung
By a knot from his shoulder. He poled the boat
Himself, and trimmed the sails, hauling the dead
In his rusty barge. He was already old,
But a god's old age is green and raw.

370

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And now a whole crowd rushed streaming
To the banks, mothers and husbands, bodies
Of high-souled heroes finished with life,
Boys and unwed girls, and young men
Placed upon the pyre before their parents' eyes.

380

*As many as leaves that fall in the woods
At autumn's first frost, as many as birds
That teem to shore when the cold year
Drives them over the sea to sunny lands.*

There they stood, begging to be the first
Ferried across, hands stretched out in love
For the farther shore. But the grim boatman
Culled through the crowd, accepting some,
But keeping the others back from the sand.

385

Aeneas, shocked by this mob of souls, said:

390

"What does this mean, priestess, the spirits
Crowding to the river? How is it decided
That some must leave the banks while others
Sweep the bruised water with oars?"

And the priestess, ancient of years:

395

"Son of Anchises and true son of the gods,
You are looking at the lagoons of Cocytus
And the river Styx, by whose name
Even the gods fear to swear falsely.
The crowd you see are the unburied dead;
The ferryman is Charon; his passengers

400

Are the dead entombed. He may not carry
Any across the raucous, dread water
Until their bones are at rest. Else,
A hundred years they must roam the shoreline
And only then may return to cross these shoals."

405

The son of Anchises stopped in his tracks,
Pondering all this, and pitied in his heart.
Their unjust lot. He saw among them,
Sad and bereft of death's due, Leucaspis,
And Orontes, captain of the Lycian fleet,
Overwhelmed by the storm that engulfed their ships
As they sailed the windy seas out of Troy.

410

And now there came Palinurus, who
While reckoning their course from Libya
By the stars had fallen from the stern
Into the waves. Aeneas hardly knew him,
Forlorn in the deep gloom, but finally
Recognized him and called out:

415

"Palinurus,
What god tore you from us and plunged you
Into the open sea? Apollo, never before
Found false, deluded me when he foretold
You would escape the sea and reach Ausonia."

420

And Palinurus:

"Delphi did not mislead you,
My captain, nor did any god drown me.
The rudder I was holding to steer our course
Ripped apart, and as I fell headlong I
Dragged it down with me. I swear by the wild sea
I was not so afraid for myself as for your ship,
Afraid that stripped of its gear and its pilot overboard
It might founder and sink in the heavy weather.
Three stormy nights the South Wind drove me
Over boundless seas. As the fourth dawn broke
I rode the crest of a wave and sighted
Italy. I fought my way toward land and thought
I had safety in my grasp. I hooked my fingers

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On a crag of shore, but weighed down
By my dripping clothes I was easy prey
For a band of marauders. Wind and surf
Now roll my body along the tide line.
By the sweet light and the air of heaven,
By your father, by the promise Iulus holds,
Save me from these woes, Aeneas unconquered!
Either cast earth upon me—it is in your power
If you sail back to Velia—or if your divine mother
Shows you how (surely it is not your plan
To sail the great Styx without divine power),
Give me your hand and take me with you
Across these waves, so that I may at least
Find in death my final resting place."

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Thus Palinurus, and the Sibyl answered him:

"Where did you get this outrageous desire?
Are you, unburied, to look upon the Styx,
The Furies' stream, and approach these shores
Unbidden? Stop hoping that the gods' decrees
Can be bent with prayer. But hear this
And bear it in your heart as consolation.
The neighboring peoples, in cities far and wide,
Will be driven by portents to appease your bones,
Will build a tomb, and to the tomb will tender
Solemn offerings, and forever the place
Will be called Palinurus."

455

460

By these words
His anguish was relieved, his grief dispelled.
And the land rejoices in the name Palinurus.

Continuing their journey, they drew near the river.
Out on the water the boatman saw them
Heading to the bank through the silent wood,
And before they could speak he rebuked them:

465

"Hold it right there, whoever you are
Coming to our river in arms! Why are you here?
This is the Land of Shadows, of Sleep

470

And drowsy Night. Living bodies
May not be transported in this Stygian keel.
I was not happy to take Hercules
Across the lake, or Theseus and Pirithoüs,
Invincible sons of the gods though they were.
One of them wanted to drag off in chains
The Tartarean watchdog from Pluto's throne—
And dragged him off trembling. The others tried
To carry off the queen from the bedroom of Dis."

475

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Apollo's prophetess responded briefly:

"There is no such treachery here. Calm down.
Our weapons offer no threat of violence.
The giant watchdog may howl from his cave
Eternally and frighten the bloodless shades.
Proserpina may keep her chastity intact
Within her uncle's doors. Aeneas of Troy,
Famed as a warrior and man of devotion,
Goes down to his father in lowest Erebus.
If this picture of piety in no way moves you,
Yet this bough" (she showed it under her robe)
"You must acknowledge."

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Charon's engorged rage
Subsided. No more was said. Marveling
At the venerable gift, the fateful bough
So long unseen, he turned the dark-blue prow
Toward shore. There he cleared the deck,
Pushed the shades from the benches, and laid out
The gangplank. He took aboard his hollow boat
Huge Aeneas. Groaning under his weight,
The ragtag craft took on water. At last,
The swamp crossed, the ferryman disembarked
Hero and seer unharmed in the muddy sedge.

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Crouching in a cavern on the farther shore
Cerberus made these regions resound,
Barking like thunder from all three of his throats.
The seer, close enough now to see the snakes
Bristling on his necks, flung a honeyed cake
Laced with drugs into his ravenous jaws.

505

Cerberus snatched it from the air and then
Went slack; easing his huge, limp bulk
To the ground, stretching out over all his den,
Dead to the world. Aeneas entered the cave
And left behind the water of no return.

510

Now came the sound of wailing, the weeping
Of the souls of infants, torn from the breast
On a black day and swept off to bitter death
On the very threshold of their sweet life.
Nearby are those falsely condemned to die.
These places are not assigned without judge
And jury. Minos presides and shakes the urn,
Calls the silent conclave, conducts the trial.

515

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In the next region are those wretched souls
Who contrived their own deaths. Innocent
But loathing the light, they threw away their lives
And now would gladly bear any hardship
To be in the air above. But it may not be.
The unlovely water binds them to Hell,
Styx confines them in its nine circling folds.

525

Not far from here the Fields of Lamentation,
As they are called, stretch into the vastness.
Here those whom Love has cruelly consumed
Languish concealed in sequestered myrtle glades,
Sorrow clinging to them even as they wander
These lost paths in death. In this region of Hell
Aeneas makes out Phaedra, Procris,
And mournful Eriphyle, displaying the wounds
She received from her son. He sees Evadne
And Pasiphaë and, walking with them,
Laodamia, and Caeneus, a young man once,
Now a woman, returned to her original form.
And among them, her wound still fresh,
Phoenician Dido wandered that great wood.
The Trojan hero stood close to her there
And in the gloom recognized her dim form

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*As faint as the new moon a man sees,
Or thinks he sees, through the evening's haze.*

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He broke into tears and spoke to her
With tender love:

"Oh, Dido, so the message was true
That you were dead, that you took your own life
With steel. Was I really the cause of your death?
I swear by the stars, by the powers above,
And by whatever faith lies in the depths below,
It was not my choice to leave your land, my Queen.
The gods commanded me to go, as they force me now
With their high decrees to go through this shadowland,
This moldy stillness, the abyss of Night.
I could not believe that I would cause you
Such grief by leaving. Stop! Don't turn away!
Who are you running from? Fate will never
Let us speak with each other again."

With such words Aeneas tried to soothe
Her burning soul. Tears came to his eyes,
But Dido kept her own eyes fixed on the ground,
As unmoved by his words as if her averted face
Were made of flint or Marpesian marble.
Finally she left, a stranger to him now, and fled
Into a darkling grove, where her old husband,
Sychaeus, comforted her and returned her love.
But Aeneas, struck by the injustice
Of her fate, wept as he watched her
Disappear, and pitied her as she went.

Aeneas and the Sibyl now made their way
To the farthest fields, a place set apart
For the great war heroes. Here Diomedes
And renowned Parthenopaeus met Aeneas,
And the pale shade of Adrastus. And here,
Lamented on earth and fallen in war,
Were many Dardanians. Aeneas moaned
When he saw their long ranks:
Glaucus, Medon, and Thersilochus,
Antenor's three sons; Polyboetes,
Priest of Ceres, and Idaeus,
Still with his chariot, still bearing arms.
They crowded around him, right and left,

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And it was not enough for these shades
To have seen him: they want to linger,
To walk beside him and learn why he came.
But as soon as the foremost Danaans
And the battalions of Agamemnon
Saw Aeneas' arms flashing in the gloom,
They trembled with fear. Some turned to run,
As if fleeing again to their beachhead camp.
Others tried to shout, but their voices,
Thin and faint, mocked their gaping mouths.

And here Aeneas saw Deiphobus,
Son of Priam, his whole body mangled
And his face cruelly mutilated, shredded,
And both hands gone. His ears had been torn
From the sides of his head, and his nostrils lopped
With a shameful wound. Aeneas scarcely
Recognized him as he trembled, struggling
To hide his brutal disfigurement. He paused
But then addressed him in familiar tones:

"Deiphobus, mighty warrior
Of Teucer's high blood, who took delight
In such torture? Who dared treat you like this?
Word reached me that on that last night, weary
With endless slaughter of Greeks, you fell
On a heap of tangled corpses. I set up for you
An empty tomb on the Rhoetian shore
And called three times upon your ghost.
Your name and your arms guard the place.
You, my friend, I could not see, nor bury you
In your native soil before I had to leave."

And Priam's son responded:

"My friend,
You have left nothing undone but have paid
All that is due to Deiphobus' shade.
My own fate, and that lethal Spartan woman,
Plunged me into this misery. She left
These memorials! You know how we spent
That last night in delusive joy. You know,

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You remember all too well. When the Horse
Leapt to the city's high, holy place, its womb
Heavy with infantry, Helen feigned
A ritual dance and led the Trojan women
Crying in ecstasy around Pergamum's heights
While she herself held the huge, blazing torch
That signaled the Greeks from the citadel.
I was asleep in our ill-starred bedroom,
Worn out with care, wrapped in slumber
As peaceful as death, while Helen,
My incomparable wife, was busy removing
Every weapon from the house and even slipped
My trusty sword from under my head.
Then she called Menelaus inside,
Hoping this would please her lover
And wipe out the memory of her old sins.
Why draw it out? They burst into my room,
Ulysses with them, the evil counselor.

O Gods,

If my face is pious enough to pray for vengeance
Make the Greeks pay in kind!

But you,

Tell me now, what has brought you here,
Alive? Were you driven here while roaming the sea,
Or by Heaven's command? Why do you visit
The drear confusion of this sunless realm?"

While they were talking, Dawn had climbed
High up the sky in her roselight chariot,
And they might have spent all their allotted time
On these matters had not the Sibyl warned:

"Night is coming on, Aeneas, yet we
Weep away the hours. Here is the place
Where the road splits into two. To the right,
Winding under the walls of great Dis,
Is the way to Elysium. But the left road
Takes the wicked to their punishment
In Tartarus."

Deiphobus responded:

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"Do not be angry, great priestess. I will go
And return to my place in the shadows. But you,
Glory of our race, go. Go to a happier fate."

And on this word he turned away.

Aeneas suddenly looked back and saw,
Under a cliff to the left, a great fortification
Surrounded by a triple wall and encircled
By a river of fire—Phlegethon—
That rolled thunderous rocks in its current.
The Gate was flanked by adamantine columns
That could not be destroyed by any force,
Human or divine. High on a tower of iron,
Tisiphone sat, draped in a bloody pall,
Sleeplessly watching the portal night and day.
Groans, the crack of the lash, iron clanking,
And dragging chains grated on the ear.
Stunned by the noise, Aeneas froze in his tracks.

"What evil is here, priestess, what forms of torture,
What lamentation rising on the air?"

And the Sibyl began:

"Teucrian hero,
No virtuous soul may ever set foot
On this accursed threshold, but when Hecate
Made me mistress of the groves of Avernus
She showed me all of the punishments
The gods inflict.

Cretan Rhadamanthus
Rules this iron realm. He queries each soul,
Hears his lies, and forces him to confess
The sins whose atonement he has postponed,
In his deluded vanity, until too late. At once,
Tisiphone pounces upon the guilty soul
With her avenging scourge, brandishing
Glaring serpents in her left fist as she calls
Her sister Furies. Then, metal grinding
Upon metal, slowly open the Gates of Hell.
Do you see the face of the Fury who guards

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The vestibule? The Hydra lurking within
Is much worse—fifty gaping black throats.
Then there is the pit of Tartarus itself,
Plunging down into darkness twice as deep
As Olympus is high. Here Earth's ancient brood,
The Titans, struck down by the thunderbolt,
Writhe in the abyss. And here too I saw
The twin sons of Aloeus, the Giants who tried
To tear open the sky and pull Jupiter down.
And I saw Salmoneus suffering torment
For aping the Olympian's thunder and lightning.
Torches shaking, he drove his chariot
Through all the cities of Greece in triumph,
And he brought his show of smoke and mirrors
Home to Elis, demanding a divinity's honors
For mimicking with bronze and horses' hooves
The inimitable rumble of thunderheads.
But the Father Almighty hurled his bolt—
No smoky torch—through the thick clouds
And blasted the sinner into perdition.
And Tityos is there, another son of Earth,
His body stretched over nine full acres,
And a monstrous vulture with a hooked beak
Gnaws away at his immortal liver
And tortured entrails, pecking deep for its feasts.
The bird lives in his bowels while his flesh,
Like his pain, is renewed endlessly.
And then there are the Lapiths, Ixion
And Pirithoüs, above whom a black rock
Totters, ever about to fall. Before their eyes
A banquet fit for a king is spread,
And high festive couches gleam with gold.
Reclining there, the eldest Fury
Keeps their hands from touching the table,
Rearing up with a torch and roaring 'No!'
Here are those who hated their brothers,
Struck a parent, or betrayed a client;
Those who hoarded the wealth they had won,
Saving none for their kin (the largest group this);
Those slain for adultery; those who did not fear
To desert their masters in treasonous war—
All these await their punishment within.

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Do not ask its form, or what fortune undid them.
Some roll huge stones, or hang outstretched
On the spokes of a wheel. Theseus sits
And will sit forever. Phlegyas in his agony
Lifts his voice through the gloom, admonishing all:
'Learn justice, beware, do not slight the gods.'
This one sold his country for gold and installed
A tyrant; another made and unmade laws
For a price. This one went to his daughter's bed.
All dared a great crime, and did what they dared.
Not if I had a hundred mouths, a hundred tongues,
And a voice of iron, could I recount
All the crimes or tell all their punishments."

Thus the aged priestess of Apollo.

"But come, pick up your pace, and complete
What you came for," the Sibyl continued. "Hurry!
I see the walls forged by the Cyclopes
And the gates in the archway opposite, where
We have been told to place our offering."

They went side by side down dusky paths
And drew near the doors. Aeneas
Stood on the threshold, sprinkled his body
With fresh water, and fixed the bough in place.

The offering to the goddess complete,
Aeneas and the Sibyl now came
To regions of joy, the green and pleasant fields
Of the Blissful Groves. Air and sky
Are more spacious here, and the light shines
With an amethyst glow. The land here knows
Its own sun and stars.

Some are at exercise
On the grassy wrestling ground, some contend
On the yellow sand, others tread a dance
And chant a choral song. And Orpheus,
In the long robes of a Thracian priest,
Accompanies them on his seven-toned lyre,
Plucking notes with his fingers and ivory quill.
Here too is the ancient race of Teucer,

A people most fair, high-souled heroes
Born in better times—Ilus, Assaracus,
And Dardanus, founder of Troy.

Aeneas.

Wonders at their weapons and chariots,
Mere phantoms, and yet their spears
Stand fixed in the ground, and their horses
Graze unyoked over all the plain.
The pleasure they took in arms and chariots
When they were alive, in keeping sleek horses,
Is still theirs now beneath the earth.

775

And he sees others, to the right and left,
Scattered on the grass, feasting, or singing
Songs of joy in a fragrant grove of laurel
Where the Eridanus rolls its mighty waters
Through forests to the world above.

780

Here too are those

785

Wounded fighting in their country's defense,
Those who in life were priests and poets,
Bards whose words were worthy of Apollo;
Also, those who enriched life with inventions
Or earned remembrance for service rendered—
Their brows bound with bands as white as snow.
When they had gathered around, the Sibyl
Addressed them, Musaeus especially,
Who stood head and shoulders above the others:

790

"Tell me, blessed souls, and you, best of poets,
Which part of this realm harbors Anchises?
For him we have crossed the rivers of Erebus."

795

The great soul Musaeus answered her briefly:

"We have no fixed homes but dwell in shadowed
Groves, recline on riverbanks, and live in meadows
Freshened by streams. But if you so wish,
Over this ridge I can show you an easy path."

800

He led them up and pointed out to them
Shining fields below. The pair went down.

Anchises, deep in a green valley, was reviewing
As a proud father the souls of his descendants
Yet to be born into the light, contemplating
Their destinies, their great deeds to come.
When he saw his son striding toward him
Through the grass, he stretched out
His trembling hands, tears wet his cheeks,
And these words fell from his lips:

805

"You have come at last! I knew your devotion
Would see you through the long, hard road.
I can look upon your face, and we can hear
Each other's familiar voices again.
I have been counting the hours carefully
Until this day, and my love has not deceived me.
All the lands and seas, all the dangers
You have been through, my son! How I feared
You would come to harm in Libya."

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And Aeneas:

"You, Father, your sad image,
Kept appearing to me, leading me here.
Our ships stand offshore in the Italian sea.
Let me hold your hands in mine, Father,
Do not pull away from my embrace!"

825

As Aeneas said this he began to weep.
Three times he tried to put his arms
Around his father's neck. Three times
His father's wraith slipped through his hands,
As light as wind, as fleeting as a dream.

830

While they talked in this sequestered valley
A secluded grove caught Aeneas' eye.
A stream drifted past its rustling thicket—
The river Lethe—and around it hovered
Nations of souls, innumerable

835

*As bees on a cloudless summer day
That settle upon wildflowers in a field
And swarm so thickly around the white lilies
That the whole meadow hums and murmurs.*

840

Aeneas was shaken at the sight
And asked, in his ignorance, the reason
For this congregation. What was the river,
And who were the men crowding its banks?
Father Anchises answered:

845

"These are souls owed another body by Fate.
In the ripples of Lethe they sip the waters
Of forgetfulness and timeless oblivion.
I have been longing to show them to you,
The census of my generations, so that you
May rejoice as I do at finding Italy."

850

"Father, can it be that souls go from here
To the world above and return again
To their gross bodies? What is this yearning
For these poor souls to taste the light?"

855

Aeneas asked this.

"I will tell you, my son,
And not keep you in doubt."

Anchises answered,
And he revealed the mysteries one by one.

"First, heaven and earth, the sea's expanse,
The moon's bright globe, the sun and stars
Are all sustained by a spirit within.
Every part is infused with Mind,
Which moves the Whole, the source of life
For man and beast and all winged things
And the monsters of the marmoreal deep.
A divine fire pulses within those seeds of life,
A celestial energy, but it is slowed and dulled
By mortal frames, earthly bodies doomed to die.
And so men fear and desire, sorrow and exult,
And, shut in the shade of their prison-houses,
Cannot see the sky. Nor, when the last gleam
Of life flickers out, are all the ills
That flesh is heir to completely uprooted,
But many corporeal taints remain,

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Ingrained in the soul in myriad ways.
And so we are disciplined and expiate
Our bygone sins. Some souls are hung
Spread to the winds; others are cleansed
Under swirling waters or purged by fire.
We each suffer our own ghosts. Then we are sent
Through spacious Elysium, and a few enjoy
The Blessed Fields, until the fullness of time
Removes the last trace of stain, leaving only
The pure flame of ethereal spirit.

875

All these,
When they have rolled the wheel of time
Through a thousand years, will be called by God
In a great assembly to the river Lethe,
So that they return to the vaulted world
With no memory and may begin again
To desire rebirth in a human body."

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Anchises paused, and he led his son,
Along with the Sibyl, into the heart
Of the murmuring crowd. He chose a mound
From which he could scan all their faces
As they passed by in long procession.

895

"Now I will set forth the glory that awaits
The Trojan race, the illustrious souls
Of the Italian heirs to our name.
I will teach you your destiny.

900

That youth you see leaning on an untipped spear
Is first in line to be reborn, first in the upper air
From Italian blood mingled with ours,
Silvius, an Alban name, your last child,
Born in your twilight years and reared by your wife,
Lavinia, in a sylvan home,
To be a king and father of kings.
We shall rule through him in Alba Longa.

905

Next comes Procas, pride of our race,
Then Capys and Numitor, and then
Your avatar, Aeneas Sylvius,
Equal to you in piety and arms,

910

If ever he succeeds to Alba's throne,
 Look at these young men, their strength,
 Their brows shaded with civic oak!
 They will build for you Nomentum, Gabii,
 And the town of Fidena. They will crown
 Collatia's hills with towers and will found
 Pometii and Inuus, Bola and Cora,
 Famous names someday, now places without names.
 Then a son of Mars will support his grandsire—
 Romulus, born to Ilia from the line of Assaracus.
 Do you see the double plumes on his head,
 And how the Father of Gods honors him
 As one of his own? Under his auspices,
 My son, Rome will extend her renowned empire
 To earth's horizons, her glory to the stars.
 She will enclose seven hills within the wall
 Of one city, blessed with a brood of heroes

915

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*As the Berecynthian Mother
 Is blessed with a brood divine, riding
 In her chariot through Phrygian towns,
 Wearing her turreted diadem, and embracing
 A hundred grandsons, all of them gods,
 All of them with homes in high heaven.*

Now turn your gaze here and let it rest upon
 Your family of Romans. Here is Caesar,
 And here are all of the descendants of Iulus
 Destined to come under heaven's great dome.
 And here is the man promised to you,
 Augustus Caesar, born of the gods,
 Who will establish again a Golden Age
 In the fields of Latium once ruled by Saturn
 And will expand his dominion
 Beyond the Indus and the Garamantes,
 Beyond our familiar stars, beyond the yearly
 Path of the sun, to the land where Atlas
 Turns the star-studded sphere on his shoulders.

Even now the Caspian Sea trembles
 At the oracles that foretell his coming,
 As does Persia, and the seven-mouthed Nile.

Not even Hercules ranged so far
 Though he shot the bronze-hooved stag, brought calm
 To Erymanthus' groves, and made Lerna quake
 At his bow. Nor did Bacchus, though he drove
 Tigers yoked with vine shoots from Nysa's heights.
 And still we shrink from extending our virtue,
 And fear to take our stand in Ausonia?

101

But who is this in the distance, resplendent
 In his olive crown and sacred insignia?
 I know that white hair and beard.
 This is Numa, who will lay a foundation
 Of law in our city, sent from a small town
 In Sabine country to command a great nation.

955

Coming up after Numa is Tullus,
 Who will shatter his country's leisure
 And rouse to war men sunk in idleness
 And an army unaccustomed to triumphs.

965

Hard upon Tullus' heels is Ancus,
 Flaunting himself, blowing even now
 In winds of popular favor.

Would you like to see

970

The Tarquin kings, the proud, avenging
 Spirit of Brutus, and the rods of office
 He will recover? He will be first to receive
 The power of consul, and the stern axes.
 When his sons stir up rebellious war
 Their own father will exact punishment
 In sweet liberty's name, an unhappy man
 However the future might judge his deeds.
 Love of country will prevail with him,
 And a boundless desire for glory.

975

Look at the Decii and Drusi, still in the distance,
 And Torquatus ferocious with his battle-axe,
 And Camillus with the legion's standards regained.

980

But the two you see there, a match for each other
 In resplendent armor, harmonious souls
 While they are buried in night—what wars will they wage

985

Against each other, what civil slaughter.
Should they ever reach the light, the bride's father
Marching down the Alps from Monaco,
His son-in-law drawing up his Oriental troops!
Do not injure yourselves to such war, my sons,
Nor rend your country's body with strife.
And you, child of Olympus, should show
Clemency first. Cast down your weapons,
My own flesh and blood....

990

995

There is Corinth's conqueror, whose chariot
Will ascend the Capitoline Hill in triumph
After the slaughter of his Greek enemies.
And here is the Roman who will uproot Argos
And Agamemnon's Mycenae, and even the blood
Of Aeacus, mighty Achilles' grandsire,
Avenging Troy and Minerva's temple.
Who, great Cato, could leave you unsung,
Or you, Cottus? Or the Gracchi brothers;
Or the two Scipios, twin thunderbolts of war
And bane of Carthage; or Fabricius,
Whose power will be thrift, or you, Serranus,
Who left your plow? And you Fabii,
Where do you draw my weary gaze? Ah,
You are Fabius Maximus, whose strategy
Was delay, and who alone saved our state.

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Others will, no doubt, hammer out bronze
That breathes more softly, and draw living faces
Out of stone. They will plead cases better
And chart the rising of every star in the sky.
Your mission, Roman, is to rule the world.
These will be your arts: to establish peace,
To spare the humbled, and to conquer the proud."

Thus Anchises, and as they marvel he adds:

"Look at Marcellus, proud in choice spoils
Torn from the vanquished enemy commander,
Towering triumphant over all the crowd!
When the Roman state is falling in ruin
He will set it upright; he will trample down

1020

The Carthaginians, crush the rebel Gauls,
And offer to Quirinus a third set of arms."

1025

At this, Aeneas, seeing a youth pass by
Beautiful in his gleaming armor
But with downcast eyes and troubled brow,
Asked his father:

1030

"Who is this,
At the hero's side? His son, or another
In his great line of descendants? What
An impression he makes with his crowd of followers!
But the shadow of death enshrouds his head."

And Anchises, tears welling up in his eyes:

1035

"Son, do not seek your people's great grief.
Fate will permit him on earth a brief while,
But not for long. Gods above, you thought Rome
Would be too powerful had your gift endured.
What lamentation of the brave will hang

1040

Over the Field of Mars. O River Tiber,
What a funeral you will see as you glide past
His new tomb. No boy bred of Troy will ever raise
The hope of his Latin forefathers so high,
Nor the land of Romulus ever be so proud
Of any of its sons. O, lament

1045

His devotion, lament his pristine honor
And his sword arm invincible in war!
No enemy would have faced him unscathed,
Whether he fought on foot or dug his spurs
Into the flanks of a foaming stallion.
If only you could shatter Fate, poor boy.
You will be Marcellus! Let me strew
Armfuls of lilies and scatter purple blossoms,
Hollow rites to honor my descendant's shade."

1050

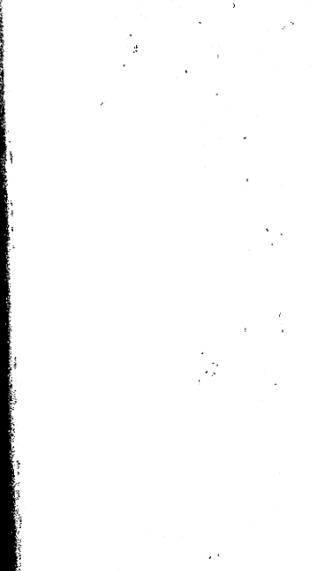
And so they wandered every region of the wide,
Airy plain, surveying all it contained.
When Anchises had led his son
Through every detail and enflamed his soul
With longing for the glory that was to come,

1055

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He told him of the wars he next must wage,
Of the Laurentine people and Latinus' town,
And how to face or flee each waiting peril.

There are two Gates of Sleep, One, they say,
Is horn, and offers easy exit for true shades.
The other is finished with glimmering ivory,
But through it the Spirits send false dreams
To the world above. Anchises escorted his son
As he talked, then sent him with the Sibyl
Through the Gate of Ivory.
Aeneas made his way to the ships,
Rejoined his men, and sailed along the coast
To Caieta's harbor. They cast anchor
From the prow; the sterns faced the shore.



AENEID SEVEN

You too Caieta, nurse of Aeneas,
Have by your death given eternal fame
To our shores. Still your resting place
Is honored, and if bones can lie in glory
So lie yours beneath your name
In great Hesperia.

When the last rites
Were done, and her burial mound heaped up,
Godly Aeneas set sail from the haven
As soon as the high seas had subsided.
Breezes blew on into the night, and the moon
Shone white on the tremulous water below,
Lighting their voyage. Hugging the coastline,
They passed the land where Circe,
Daughter of the Sun, lived in opulence.
The woodland rang with her perpetual song,
And in her high house she burned fragrant cedar
To illumine the night while she worked the loom,
Combing her shrill shuttle through delicate threads.
And from those shores could also be heard
Lions roaring and snapping at their chains
Late into the night, the raging of bristled boars
And caged bears, and huge wolf-shapes howling.
All these were men whom Circe had cruelly drugged
And clad in the hides and faces of beasts.
But Neptune, to save the good Trojans
From these monstrous transformations,
Kept them from landing on those deadly shores,
Filling their sails with wind, and bearing them past
The seething shoals and out of danger.

Now the sea was reddening, and Dawn,
Saffron in her rosy chariot, shone in the sky,
When the winds fell and every breeze died down.