



AN INTRODUCTION TO THE AENEID

Virgil (70–19 B.C.) grew up on a farm in Italy, but early on, his father recognized his sensitivity to language and sent him away to study in the great Italian cities. Although he was famous in the literary and political circles of Rome, Virgil found the countryside much more to his liking. He devoted the last ten years of his life to writing *The Aeneid*, an epic that glorified the Roman past and established for the empire a noble Greek lineage. In his work, Virgil linked the founding of Rome to the legend of a Trojan hero, Aeneas, who takes flight after the destruction of Troy and sets out to found a new homeland. When Virgil knew he was dying, he ordered the unfinished manuscript burned, but the Emperor Augustus intervened and ordered it saved. He put some trusted friends of Virgil's in charge of finishing and publishing it.

Students also might want to learn about the brilliant and relentless Carthaginian general Hannibal (247–183 B.C.), one of the most impor-

tant figures of the Punic (Latin for *Phoenician*) Wars fought between Rome and Carthage (a city founded by Phoenicians). You might pique their interest with these interesting facts:

Hannibal brought an army complete with war elephants across the Mediterranean in an effort to attack Rome from its weakest fronts. Among other places, he led his army across the narrow Straits of Gibraltar between north Africa and Spain, the Pyrenees Mountains, and the Alps. Hannibal lost many men and animals crossing the Alps, but he had enough war elephants to strike terror in the hearts of the Roman soldiers, who were shocked by his nearly-successful backdoor attack on Rome. Hannibal did not achieve his goal of destroying Rome (in fact, Roman armies destroyed Carthage in the end), but his strategies and ambition still amaze historians.

Extra Tales Worth Their Weight in Trojan Gold!

Reading these tales aloud to students is an engaging way to build background. Notice that letters corresponding to those below are marked in the play next to scenes that match the stories.

A THE PHOENICIANS, TYRE, AND QUEEN DIDO

Queen Dido of Carthage was originally from Tyre, a city on the coast of modern Lebanon. It was here that the Phoenicians created a trading empire

Make sure students know that Carthage was the chief enemy of Rome from the third through the first centuries B.C. Virgil's *Aeneid* gives a legendary explanation for the enmity between the two powers: Before she commits suicide, the desperate Carthaginian queen, Dido, curses Aeneas and the kingdom of his descendants (Rome), because he has abandoned her in search of his own homeland.

unrivaled in ancient times. Phoenician ships carrying goods plied the Mediterranean for hundreds of years. Their most valuable export was purple dye made from the crushed shells of a sea snail. Because the color was so vibrant and it took so many snails to make the dye, it was costly and so became associated with wealth and power. The Romans were especially fond of it, and by law, only emperors were allowed to wear purple togas. In the time of Dido, Tyre was an island, but in 333 B.C. Alexander the Great built a causeway linking the mainland to the island to aid in his conquest, which was successful.

B RITUAL SACRIFICE AND AUSPICIA

There were two types of offerings in the ancient world: bloodless offerings and blood offerings. As in many modern religious practices, strict rules governed ceremonial ritual. For blood offerings, animals like sheep, goats, pigs, and cows were favored, but horses, geese, and other fowl were offered to specific deities or for specific occasions. Requirements concerning color, gender, and condition varied with the god or goddess honored. After a sacrifice, special interpreters studied the internal organs of the slain animal for signs from the gods. The ancients had other ways of figuring out what the gods were saying as well. *Auspicia* involved the study of the flight of birds, of weather phenomenon, of noises and disturbances, and of animal movements, such as the snake slithering over the tomb of Anchises. The most important sign was lightning. Human sacrifice, as in Agamemnon's offering his daughter Iphigenia, was only rarely practiced in ancient times, and then, criminals were most often used.

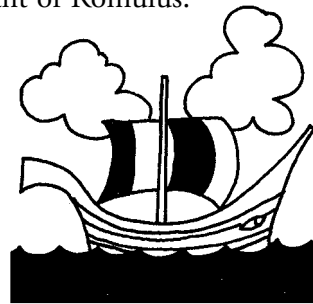
C ALLECTO, THE FURIES, AND RUMOR

Allecto was one of three goddesses of vengeance who punished those who did wrong, regardless of their reasons for doing so. The Greeks called them Erinyes and the Romans referred to them as the Furies. Although they were merciless and much feared, they were also viewed as a beneficial and necessary part of civilized society, for their work to punish wrongdoing upheld the standards of those who did right.

Not to be outdone in stirring up trouble, Rumor was known to spread her spiteful wings and fly through towns whispering into mischievous ears.

D ROMULUS AND REMUS AND THE FOUNDING OF ROME

Twin sons of Mars, the god of war, were thrown from Mount Olympus into a river. They were saved by the river god, who took pity on them. He put a mother wolf in charge of the infants, and she raised them with her pups. Later, they were brought up in the house of a shepherd. When they were young men, they built a fortress. Remus made fun of how low the walls were, and Romulus killed him. Romulus then set about creating a city and inviting people to live there. That city was Rome, named after Romulus. Virgil made Aeneas's son, Ascanius, a descendant of Romulus.





THE AENEID

CHARACTERS

NARRATOR 1, NARRATOR 2, JUNO, VENUS, CUPID, AENEAS, SOLDIER 1, SOLDIER 2, SOLDIER 3, SOLDIER 4, SOLDIER 5, QUEEN DIDO, A CROWD AT CARTHAGE, ASCANIUS, ROYAL ATTENDANT 1, ROYAL ATTENDANT 2, 2 LAURENTIAN GUARDS, BARCE, ANNA, PALINURUS, ACESTES, SICILIAN COMPETITORS AT FUNERAL GAMES, TROJAN MEN AND WOMEN, KING LATINUS, QUEEN AMATA, PRINCESS LAVINIA, TURNUS, ALLECTO, SPIRITS FROM HELL, TOWNSMAN 1, TOWNSMAN 2, TOWNSWOMAN 1, TOWNSWOMAN 2, KING EVANDER, PALLAS, VULCAN, CAMILLA, LAURENTIAN WARRIORS, VIRGIL

• SCENE 1 •

NARRATOR 1: I sing of arms and of a man and of the mournful wanderings after war has displaced him and his family.

NARRATOR 2: I sing of arms and of a man and of the scorn of a goddess who causes relentless suffering. Let's look in on Juno, queen of the gods and her daughter, Venus.

JUNO: Although Troy has been defeated and the story of Paris's judgment is over, I will not rest until my honor has been restored.

VENUS: Mother, the judgment Paris made was final. I, Venus, am the fairest of the goddesses—it has been decreed. Troy is indeed destroyed, but a city far greater than she will rise from its ashes and righteous Aeneas, son of Troy, will begin to build her.

JUNO: How dare you challenge my authority! Do you claim to know destiny? Carthage, the city that has received my favor, will continue to prosper and grow in size and strength until she is chief among nations.

VENUS: Your Carthage will be no match for the new Trojan city. Father Jupiter, the king of the gods himself, has promised a great empire whose fortunes will be without end.

NARRATOR 1: Juno, stunned into silence continues to hold her head with pride.

NARRATOR 2: But slowly a knowing smile creeps across her face.

JUNO: We shall see about that, fair daughter. Prepare for a fight.

NARRATOR 1: And both goddesses, like fighters in a boxing ring, take to their thrones on either side of the stage of life. Meanwhile, Aeneas himself, orphan prince of Troy, son of Venus, makes his way around the Mediterranean in an attempt to find a place to call home.

NARRATOR 2: After fleeing Troy and heading south, he gathers refugee Trojans at Mount Ida. They head north to Thrace, and then travel south through the Aegean Sea to the island of Crete. In no place does he find a suitable home. Aeneas and his people sail west, stopping at Sicily where Acestes, a friend, offers them shelter and food. Here Aeneas's father dies.

NARRATOR 1: Yet he is determined to find his own kingdom, and Aeneas sails on, weathering a terrible storm, until they find an inviting cove and a safe harbor on the coast of Libya, North Africa.

AENEAS: Let us shelter here and thank the gods, who give us rest.

SOLDIER 1: Aeneas, not all the gods wish us well.

SOLDIER 2: Yes, tempests have tossed us threadbare and we have lost thirteen ships from our original twenty.

AENEAS: But we must always give thanks.

SOLDIER 3: I shall build a fire to warm our sorry spirits.

SOLDIER 4: And to dry our wet clothes!

AENEAS (*to soldiers*): Accompany me to the hillside so that we might view from on high this bountiful land. (*They move to the side of the stage.*) Look there, in the distance—it looks like a temple.

SOLDIER 5: I have provisions for the journey. Shall we proceed? (*All exit, but Aeneas returns to stage.*)

NARRATOR 1: At the great temple of Juno, patron of the city of Carthage, where the goddess herself keeps her chariot and armor, a crowd has gathered.

NARRATOR 2: As Aeneas approaches, the crowd parts to reveal the queen of Carthage, Dido.

AENEAS: You, among all, must be the queen. I am Aeneas, come from afar, on my way to settle an unknown land.

QUEEN DIDO: I know you, Aeneas. Who has not heard of your trials and triumphs? The great city of Troy is legendary. Welcome to Carthage.

AENEAS: Great queen, it is my ardent wish to bring assistance to you if needed and rest here with my people to replenish ourselves for our continued journey.

QUEEN DIDO: Mighty warrior, I am well-acquainted with hardship and suffering. And as the gods bestow gifts of success upon me, I determine to assist those facing trials. I am Dido, Queen of Carthage.

AENEAS: I am at your service, dear lady.

QUEEN DIDO: I beg you to join us at banquet this evening. We will share our sorrows and our stories. In the meantime, I will send to your ships twenty cows, a hundred lambs and their mothers, and innumerable vessels of sweet wine. Come to the palace. (*All exit.*)

NARRATOR 1: Little does Dido know, Venus with her son Cupid, is weaving a web of desire around her that she cannot escape.

NARRATOR 2: And poor Dido, whose trials are equal to the saddest of tales, becomes an unsuspecting pawn in the game of the immortals.

• SCENE 2 •

NARRATOR 1: The palace of Queen Dido is resplendent with the best the world has to offer: plates of silver and gold and marble couches draped with cloth of the famed Tyrian purple.

A

NARRATOR 2: Aeneas, his son Ascanius, and the others recline in luxury and bask in the service of the royal attendants. Lining the great hall are gifts the Trojans have presented to Queen Dido.

QUEEN DIDO: Faithful Aeneas, let us hear the tale of your wanderings and your plans for the future.

AENEAS: The sorrow my story brings is almost too much to bear, but since you desire to learn from our misfortunes, I will recount the tale. If only we had listened to Laocoon on the shores of Troy when he warned us of Greeks bearing gifts.

QUEEN DIDO: Tragic indeed, was Laocoon's fate. The great sea serpents dragged him and his two sons into the water. A horrible death!

AENEAS: But a quick one. Many were not so lucky. The Greeks, once inside our fortress spilled out of the great wooden horse while the city was sleeping. They began to burn a path through our city, bringing chaos and destruction. Families fled. I even came across Helen, whimpering and alone, hidden in a corner of the palace. I took my wife and son to the house of my father and found him determined to die in his home, refusing to leave. Finally, the fate of the entire family moved him to take flight, as we could hear the Greeks tearing through the streets and cutting down all in their path.

QUEEN DIDO: How horrible! And were you able to take anything dear to you from your home?

AENEAS: Because my body was so stained with the blood of battle, I put my father in charge of the household gods and the sacred vessels. I lifted him upon my shoulder, took the hand of my son, and told my wife to follow behind.

QUEEN DIDO: And yet, she is not among you.

AENEAS: Alas, Creusa, faithful wife, was lost in the crowds. Only after we'd escaped did I notice her gone. And she was not spared. Retracing my steps, I met her shade, and she urged me on to safety. My poor Creusa.

QUEEN DIDO: I, too, have lost my life's companion.

AENEAS: Dear Dido, please tell of your sorrows, for my wounds are deep and still fresh.

QUEEN DIDO: My father, king of Tyre, gave me in marriage to Sychaeus, a strong and honorable prince and warrior, with lands enough to walk for days on end. To my husband I was devoted, and he to me.

AENEAS: Dear queen, the shores of Tyre are to the east and lie across the sea. How is it that you are here?

QUEEN DIDO: My husband was slain. For a long while it was unknown to me who had cut him down, but he came to me in a dream and told me of his murder. The murderer was my very own brother, jealous of wealth and prompted by greed.

AENEAS: What else did the ghost reveal?

QUEEN DIDO: That my own kin were moving to act against me and that I must flee or perish.

AENEAS: Your safety and success was assured, but how?

QUEEN DIDO: The shade of my husband led me to a hidden treasure, long forgotten, of gold and of silver. With this endowment and companions in fate, I loaded whatever ships were equipped to sail, and fled.

AENEAS: Your trials are endless, dear queen.

QUEEN DIDO: Many joined the flight, and were it not for the strength of my people, my efforts would not have come to much.

AENEAS: Surely, you must accept the fruits of your leadership. Your port is bustling. Your prosperity is evident.

QUEEN DIDO (*raising her goblet*): Let us drink to leadership and prosperity.

AENEAS: This coastal harbor could not have been uninhabited. How did you come to this place?

QUEEN DIDO: The chiefs in this region, after much debate, agreed to sell to me as much land as I could cover with the hide of an ox. And so (*she smiles*). . . I had the hide cut into tiny pieces and spread over the land as far as you can see.

AENEAS: The chiefs, how did they receive this?

QUEEN DIDO: They were astonished, of course. And then, they admired my ingenuity. Now, I am respected in this land. Indeed, many seek my counsel.

AENEAS: The fates have been good to you. I wish I could say the same for myself. We have endured shipwreck, destruction, pestilence on the isle of Crete, and after carrying him on my shoulders out of the flames of Troy and across the Aegean, the loss of my father—the last tie to my past. He died on the island of Sicily. In my son, Ascanius, who sits here quietly, lies the future of the Trojan people.

QUEEN DIDO: And so we two share the grief that comes from loss and the strength that comes from enduring it. After so long a journey and so eventful a tale, I feel our bodies and spirits need rest. Tomorrow a grand hunt takes place and I would be honored if so great a hero would join us. Guards, escort Aeneas to the room which overlooks the courtyard fountain and yet has views of the sea.

AENEAS: Good night, sweet Queen.

NARRATOR 1: And Aeneas and the others are shown their cells, given baths of fragrant water, sponges heavy with scent, and sweet wine to soothe them to sleep.

NARRATOR 2: Dido, meanwhile, feels stirrings in her heart which she has not felt since the time of her youth, and goes to sleep that night restless with worry at what it all means.

• SCENE 3 •

NARRATOR 1: Aurora spreads wide her joyful colors, and Apollo's fiery orb is moved into place: The sun is up.

NARRATOR 2: Not a cloud wanders on this hopeful morn, and Dido, her mind calm and rested, gives free reign to her heart's yearning.

NARRATOR 1: And as the queen prepares for the hunt, she speaks to her sister, Anna, of her feelings for the Trojan chieftain.

QUEEN DIDO (*sitting down while Barce, her handmaid, weaves a gold ribbon into her hair*): Consider, Anna, this strange man from afar. What could the gods be saying? Should we consult an auger to read the portents of what the future holds?

ANNA: Dear sister, think not on the future to show the way, but to the past. How long has it been since your heart swelled with longing?

QUEEN DIDO: My poor husband. I vowed never to disturb his memory by taking another companion. What now am I to do?

ANNA: The gods smile upon this union. How perfect the match, dear sister. Think on the power great Carthage will represent when united with the life's blood of the Trojan peoples.

QUEEN DIDO: He does indeed show himself to be one in perfection formed.

ANNA: Punic glories will know no end. With this great warrior beside you, none of the neighboring suitors, which you have successfully resisted all these years, will dare to move against you. And our brother, still hot with rage at your escape will not come near to your coasts.

QUEEN DIDO: Yes, Anna, the strategic benefits are clear. But that is not what makes my heart leap.

ANNA: Give way, queen. A great loss it would be were you not gifted with the blessings of motherhood.

QUEEN DIDO: My cloak. (*She gestures to the garment, which Barce takes up and puts on her.*) We will talk no further of this. The debate continues within my heart. Let us meet our guests and take to the hunt. (*All exit. Aeneas, Ascanius, soldiers, and others enter opposite side of the stage.*)

AENEAS: Never have I felt so alive. The air here is remarkable in its clarifying properties.

SOLDIER 1: Indeed, vision is especially keen on a day such as this.

(*Enter Queen Dido and entourage. She is carrying a golden bow.*)

QUEEN DIDO (*speaking as she enters*): Yes, the lowest hills of the island of Sicily can be seen from here. And over here lie desert sands as vast as the endless seas.

AENEAS: Never have I seen so fine a bow! Good morning, Queen. May I? (*She gives the bow up to him.*)

QUEEN DIDO: This bow, of gold it is, was a wedding gift to me from my husband. A fitting gift for a woman who has had to fight her way into the future.

AENEAS: This bow surpasses those carried by the Amazon women, who came to the aid of Troy. Many perished at the hands of the Greeks.

QUEEN DIDO: Including Penthesilea, Queen of the Amazons, struck down by Achilles himself. If only he knew how deeply she loved him.

AENEAS: How well you know the tales, great queen.

QUEEN DIDO (*laughing*): Let the hunt begin!

NARRATOR 2: But after a short time, according to Venus's plan, clouds gather above and rain begins to fall. All shield themselves from the storm with their arms. Queen Dido and Aeneas take refuge in a cave, while the others run off in pursuit of a deer.

AENEAS: Queen Dido, sit here awhile until the storm passes.

QUEEN DIDO: Good Aeneas, your care is much appreciated.

AENEAS: A marvel such as yourself is best protected.

NARRATOR 1: Aeneas throws his cloak over her shoulders and the love between them is acknowledged. And Dido, strong as she is, can no longer resist the love she feels, and at last, puts her head on his shoulder.

NARRATOR 2 (*after a long pause*): When the storm passes, they emerge from the grotto anew. Queen Dido with a fresh hope for the future, and Aeneas with a sense of strength he has been missing. (*Both rise and leave the stage slowly.*)

• SCENE 4 •

NARRATOR 1: Juno, unable to keep her Dido from giving in to the power of love, watches, helpless from Mount Olympus. The days turn into weeks, and the

weeks turn into months. And soon, the neighboring chieftains begin to talk of Dido's distraction.

Between the hunts, the falconing, coastal strolls, and riding, Dido has begun to neglect her kingdom.

NARRATOR 2: When news of the gossip reaches her ears, Dido's confidence begins to waver, and she begins to question her own judgment.

QUEEN DIDO (*speaking to herself*): I don't understand. A union with the Trojans would stabilize the region. Why then do they not believe? Perhaps our strength together will inspire them. But how long will he stay here? Will he stay? Or should I give up what I have made and follow him to a new land? And if that should be my choice, how would I be treated by his people? Not as a queen. And how would I be treated by him? Not as an equal.

NARRATOR 1: These seeds of self-doubt grow and grow until Dido herself becomes wild with shame. She begins to pace the floors of the palace with a wrinkled brow, repeating to herself harsh words of rebuke.

QUEEN DIDO: Why? Why did I give my heart to him? And now I've not only ruined my name, but the name of my husband, long dead, though his memory still beats within my heart. Aeneas, driven by fate, will not stay here.

NARRATOR 2: And as she speaks these words, she walks to the window, looks down on the harbor and sees Aeneas and his men boarding ships and preparing to head out to sea.

QUEEN DIDO: I knew this day would come. And here it is. What am I to do? (*She collapses on a couch.*)
There is only one thing to do.

NARRATOR 1 (*after a long pause to show passage of time*):
And the dusk turns to twilight before Queen Dido dries her tears, rises from her bed, and faces her future.

QUEEN DIDO: Hardened am I in this. Never have I hurt a one, yet the gods take away from me all that I love. Aeneas will never forget our companionship. Burned in his memory it shall be. (*To her handmaid, who comes onstage*): Barce, bring to me the clothes and armor and weapons that the Trojan left in my bedchamber. These which hold his memory will be destroyed. Gather, too, my sister, and send her to cleanse herself and bring offerings for a great sacrifice to Jove. (*Barce runs offstage.*)

NARRATOR 2: And as she speaks she assembles a wooden structure. Barce returns and puts Aeneas's belongings on the pyre, then exits to find Anna.

QUEEN DIDO: Oh, Juno, queen of all, protector of my people and all that I am, and Jupiter, who looks over us all, hear my plea! For the shame the Trojan has brought to my kingdom and my own heart, let him never rest. I here set this funeral pyre aflame. If success is to be his, let him never be in a position to enjoy it. If glory is written on the land that he settles, let the sons of that land, and sons ever after, defend themselves against the avengers who will rise up after me. By all that I have spoken, bring to pass.

NARRATOR 1: Queen Dido slowly mounts the stairs to the pyre, unsheathes Aeneas's sword and plunges it into her heart. She falls, gazes off to the sea and then to the heavens.

NARRATOR 2: As the flames begin to catch around her limbs, Anna flies in, sees what has happened, and falls to her knees, grief-stricken.

• SCENE 5 •

NARRATOR 1: With the flames from Queen Dido's funeral pyre still in view, Aeneas and the Trojans take to the open sea.

AENEAS: If it weren't my fate to settle my people, I would have stayed with Dido. The gods have willed

my destiny and continue to push me on. She is strong and will recover.

NARRATOR 2: While he speaks, Juno stands to cause trouble. The waves turn choppy, dark clouds gather, and a changing wind shows itself in the sails of the ship.

JUNO: I intend to make your journey as difficult as possible. I'll watch from my throne.

PALINURUS: Aeneas, these conditions make our goal of reaching Italy impossible for the moment. Sicily is near. Perhaps we should take shelter in a harbor there.

AENEAS: Trim the sails and set the oars for the island. For Sicily holds the bones of my dear father and is home to my good friend Acestes.

NARRATOR 1: And so they ply the waters until they reach the sands of Sicily. There they disembark.

AENEAS: And who is here to welcome us but Acestes himself!

ACESTES: Greetings, old friend. As always, my home is your home.

AENEAS: Gather around, all Trojans, to hear how our time will be spent in the land of our host, Acestes. It has been a year since the bones of my father, Anchises, were interred in these sands. Tomorrow, we will mark his passing with funeral games on this, the anniversary of his death. And when the gods bring us, at last, to a land of our own, each year such games will be held to honor a brave and noble man.

NARRATOR 2: Weary as they are, their spirits are lifted and Aeneas's words refresh hope in the hearts of his people. (*All exit.*)

NARRATOR 1: The next morning, all assemble on the shore, and Aeneas leads a procession to the tomb of his father, the mortal man who had won the favor of Venus herself.

AENEAS: Hail, father. May these gifts please you.

NARRATOR 2: Aeneas pours onto the ground bowls of wine, milk, and blood. Then he tosses the blossoms and buds of fragrant flowers around the grave.

B

NARRATOR 1: Suddenly, a serpent appears from beneath the shrine. In awe, the Trojans watch as the snake slithers around the bowls and then disappears.

AENEAS: A portent of great meaning! Let the games begin!

NARRATOR 2: And with that, the games begin. They throw spears in competition. They run races to see who is the fastest. They wrestle until a victor is declared.

NARRATOR 1: They draw their bows in earnest and shoot their arrows high. The youngest, dressed for war, mount horses and parade in front of their fathers. Ascanius himself rides astride a fiery stallion that Queen Dido had given him as a pledge of her love. And after nine days of feasting and offerings, Aeneas and his people turn once again to the sea.

AENEAS: Trojan men and Trojan women, we must press on to find our new homeland. Let us return to our ships and continue our journey.

• SCENE 6 •

NARRATOR 2: They sail to the mainland coast of what they know to be Italy and visit the Sybil at Cumae, where Aeneas descends into the Underworld. Later they stop at Caieta, where he visits the grave of his old nurse. And in due course they draw near to the coast of Latium and know it is their homeland, for the winds die down, the sails go slack, and the water becomes calm. (*Venus stands.*)

NARRATOR 1: From the ship Aeneas sees a rich forest, a wide rushing river, and a multitude of birds showing a bountiful land.

AENEAS: I feel that we have been delivered. Great goddess, speak to me so that I know what to do.

NARRATOR 2: Before him, on the deck of the ship, Venus reveals herself.

VENUS: Dear son, you have come home. This is your land, and this is where your people will thrive and prosper. But there are still trials before you.

AENEAS: What more must I endure?

VENUS: The Laurentians inhabit this land, and you must meet the king who rules these parts.

AENEAS: What have I to do with their story?

VENUS: You, my dear son, must find out on your own.

AENEAS: Lead me on to my fate.

NARRATOR 1: And so Aeneas assembles a small group of men and women to accompany him to the palace. And they set off up the hill to the palace of King Latinus.

NARRATOR 2: Nearing the hundred marble columns, the Trojan leader and his people stand awestruck with the majesty of the place. Two guards lead them to the throne room.

KING LATINUS: Welcome, I am King Latinus.

AENEAS: We have traveled many years to reach this place.

KING LATINUS: I know your story well enough. But you have yet to hear mine. Sit here with my queen, Amata, and I will tell you what it is I have been told of your coming.

AENEAS: You knew I was coming?

KING LATINUS: Years ago, we had a son. But the gods ordained that he would be smote down in his youth. His death came as a blow to the family.

QUEEN AMATA: And yet, we were left with a lovely daughter, a mere child at the time.

KING LATINUS: Our fair Lavinia will inherit all that you see, and much more. Many able princes have announced their intentions.

QUEEN AMATA: But, strong Turnus, who has indeed shown himself to be superior in every way, wishes to make her his wife.


KING LATINUS: Were it not for a blazing vision of our dear Lavinia that showed her in her glorious future, she would be married, for Turnus has declared his love for her. But an oracle revealed to me that Lavinia must be joined with a stranger from a foreign land who would build a civilization to which all would bow.

AENEAS: Great king, we stand before you as beggars. A wandering people, but from a hearty stock and a royal line from Jupiter himself. We come in peace and wish merely to live alongside you.

NARRATOR 1: Juno is disturbed on her throne. She stands and raises her arms in anger.



JUNO: If I am unable to control the heavens or the earth, then I will stir up hell! The fates are against me, so now, I am against this kingdom. Lavinia, if you are to be wed to Aeneas, then your people shall pay with their blood!

NARRATOR 2: Juno calls up the spirits of the dead and sends their fiery madness across the land. Leading the forces of anger and hatred is  Allecto herself.

NARRATOR 1: Burning with the fury of a thousand years, Allecto flies to the palace of King Latinus. Swooping through the golden doors and into the throne room on a gust of wind, Allecto, unseen by mortals, comes to rest in front of Queen Amata.

JUNO: Allecto, I call on you to wreak havoc on the plans of my daughter, Venus. Position obstacles, real and imagined in the lives of these who have offended my honor.

NARRATOR 2: So Allecto, evil destroyer of life and hope, takes a long black snake from her headful of serpents and lets it loose on the unsuspecting queen.

NARRATOR 1: At that moment, Queen Amata's right hand flies to her chest, her eyes roll to the back of her head, she trembles all over, and then an eerie calmness overtakes her as the serpent works its way deep into her heart.

QUEEN AMATA: Good husband, our only child, the pure Lavinia! Please consider her future. A wandering stranger who begs for mercy and yet who looks as strong as a god himself has no place as our daughter's mate. Indeed, she had been promised to Turnus!

KING LATINUS: Dear wife, your fears are unfounded. The oracle has spoken and the gods have decreed. Aeneas, eat with us tonight, and we will hear of your journeys.

NARRATOR 2: And with that, the king silences his wife, whose heart has turned black through the darkest of powers.

• SCENE 7 •

NARRATOR 1: While a grand feast is prepared, Allecto, chief among evildoers, searches out new and ruinous ways. And she smiles her hideous smile when she sees that she has set in motion the horrible devastation that is to come.

NARRATOR 2: Finding Turnus asleep in bed, she fills him with a hot rage that demands blood. And young Ascanius, riding his horse on the beach, is the final instrument. Allecto makes him aim his arrow at the pet deer of a local girl, which sends the good people of the kingdom into such a fury at the Trojan prince that they march to the palace. Turnus bursts in with a crowd of Latins.

TURNUS: King Latinus, soon to be father, let not these foreign strangers continue to damage our homeland. By all that I am, I will prohibit their settling on our soil.

TOWNSMAN 1: We have not nurtured our fields to feed a group of strangers who decide to settle here.

TOWNSWOMAN 1: Our daughters will not be fodder for the likes of these savage men.

TOWNSWOMAN 2: I refuse to stand by and let it happen.

TOWNSMAN 2: War! Storm the palace!

(Crowd shouts and pleads with the king.)

KING LATINUS *(holding up his hands):* Good people, I see that a force bigger than we can imagine has overpowered you. Let it be known by all who are here: We are no match for the will of the gods—and I can do no more. *(He exits.)*

TURNUS: Secure the queen and the princess! (*He exits.*)

NARRATOR 1: The townspeople fan out into the palace searching for the Trojans, who are preparing themselves for the table. (*Aeneas walks in with some Trojans.*)

AENEAS (*startled*): Palinurus, go to the shore and bring the others! We will also need the help of King Evander.

PALINURUS: King Evander, old friend of your father, has promised two hundred men, and his young son, Pallas, will lead an equal number.

AENEAS: Brave King Evander, a former guest in the house of my father, sends his only son?

PALINURUS: He hopes Pallas will learn the art of war by your side, since he himself is too old to teach it.

AENEAS: Then he will learn.

PALINURUS: Your own son, Ascanius, who has been put in charge of the camp, will be glad to hear of his first chance to fight. (*He exits.*)

AENEAS: The rest of you, do what you can to keep our position here in the palace.

NARRATOR 2: And while the fighting begins, Venus, refusing to sit still any longer, rises from her throne and calls on her husband, Vulcan, god of fire and metal.

VENUS: Dear husband, all during the Greek assault on my Trojan people, never once did I ask for your help. But now I must ask.

VULCAN: Goddess divine and queen of my heart, what can I do?

VENUS: For Thetis's son, the mighty Achilles, you forged armor and a shield of bright metal. Hammer out in that special way that only you know how, a shield and weapons for my son, Aeneas.

VULCAN: And what design do you wish me to apply to this shield?

VENUS: Using your powers of prophesy, make this shield tell the full story of Italy and her people. Her triumphs and tragedies, her quarrels and unions.

NARRATOR 1: Her request sets Vulcan to work.

• SCENE 8 •

NARRATOR 2: The shield that Vulcan forges like no other. With great pride, Venus appears before her son, Aeneas, holding high the magnificent set.

VENUS (*holding forth the shield*): Aeneas, prepare for battle, for the future is depicted here on this shield.

AENEAS: Venus, goddess of light, with honor, I will carry this shield for my people. (*He takes the shield.*) Lead us on.

VENUS: You, sir, know the way.

NARRATOR 1: Palinurus and some Trojan soldiers enter, carrying swords, spears, and clubs.

PALINURUS: Aeneas, Turnus has brought warriors from afar who have vowed to destroy us. Even the maiden warrior Camilla joins Turnus. Ascanius and Pallas are waiting outside. Turnus leads from a chariot drawn by two milk-white stallions.

AENEAS: Bring all the weapons you can muster. We will meet them with confidence.

NARRATOR 2: The Trojans rush onto the steps of the palace and clash with their enemies.

AENEAS: Pallas, dear friend, with the help of your father King Evander, we will triumph.

PALLAS: Aeneas, we will see you after the victory!

ASCANIUS: Father, for the memory of my mother, may all of my fighting be a success.

AENEAS: Brave Ascanius, who, as a child, fled the Greeks from the burning ruins of Troy, your success awaits you.

NARRATOR 1: And the fighting begins. Fierce Trojans against determined Laurentians battle for supremacy on the field before the marble palace. Both sides take tremendous losses. Warriors fall all around. Camilla, strong and beautiful, fights with sword and club, taking down man after man in her path.

NARRATOR 2: But she is on the wrong side, and the gods, after much debate, have her struck down by a young and able Trojan. Finally, Aeneas, recognizing a break in the battle line and nearing the steps of the palace, spots Ascanius on his knees next to a lifeless Pallas.

AENEAS: What has happened?

ASCANIUS: Turnus let fly a single javelin. Pallas fell.

NARRATOR 1: And Aeneas, who thinks of Pallas more like his own son, and further, a matchless friend, drops his head to his chest. His failure in his duty crushes him. His eyes pan the area where Pallas once stood. Slowly, Aeneas lifts up his chin and all can see the rage that burns within him.

NARRATOR 2: The crowd of Trojan warriors parts to reveal Turnus, standing tall beside his chariot, unshaken, and proud. Behind the Trojans, on the steps, King Latinus and Lavinia come out. His arm is around her, and she is crying.

KING LATINUS: The queen, believing her dear Turnus to be slaughtered, has killed herself. When will the misery end for my people?

TURNUS: The time has come, Aeneas. Before you I stand. Send my body, alive or dead, back to my parents, who need leave-taking of their son. You are the victor here. Lavinia is yours.

NARRATOR 1: Aeneas, wild-eyed, looks at Turnus, and softens as the image of his own parents flash through his mind. But his sympathy lasts only a moment, for Aeneas's eyes catch the gleam of Pallas's sword belt on the shoulder of his enemy.

NARRATOR 2: Aeneas lets fly his rage, and his fury will not be checked.

AENEAS: You, who plunder the body of the only son of King Evander, ask for mercy! It is Pallas himself who takes revenge on you here and now! (*He plunges his sword into Turnus's chest.*)

NARRATOR 1: With that, Aeneas, born of Venus, establishes himself supreme victor in Latium, bringing his journey to find a homeland to an end.

NARRATOR 2: King Latinus gives his daughter in marriage to Aeneas who then names a town in her honor, Lavinium. A son, Silvius, born to Aeneas and Lavinia, is the first in a long line of kings.

VIRGIL: From the military might of those kings, a superpower grew. One descendant, legend tells us, founded the city of Rome, which became a cultural and military power in the region. For 700 years, Rome ruled. Carthage, the Phoenician kingdom of Queen Dido, became Rome's archenemy long after the death of this legendary queen. The two powers fought for control of the region for 118 years and three Punic Wars. Rome, in the end, was the victor, and became the greatest power in the Mediterranean. Julius Caesar conquered more territory and created an empire that stretched far and wide. Can you imagine the Romans in London or Vienna? Well, they had reached the distant lands where these cities would one day thrive. And what is my role in all this, you might ask? Julius Caesar's famous adopted son Octavius, who was called Augustus Caesar, was a good friend of mine. And after bringing the empire under control after a period of turmoil, he sought to revive some of the old traditions. He liked my work and asked me to write the story of the divine origin of the Roman people. *The Aeneid* took me ten years to write.

Finally the people of Rome had their link to the heroic past and could proudly assert themselves as divine victors over the region—a civilization, at least for a time in history, to which all others bowed.