

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. 5

When Dawn had spread the sunlight over earth
And dispelled night's damp shadow from the sky,
Dido, deeply troubled, spoke to her sister: 10

“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. 15
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— 20
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, 25
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 30
 Down to the shades of Erebus below
 And Night profound, before I violate you,
 O Modesty, and break your vows.
 The man who first joined himself to me
 Has taken my love with him to the grave.” 35

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 40
 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. 45
 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, 50
 Desert to the south, and wild Barcaean 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. 55
 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 60
 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 65
 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 70
 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 75
 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. 80

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, 85
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. 90
 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 95

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 100
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.
All work stops, construction halts on the huge,
Menacing walls. The idle derricks loom against the sky. 105

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, 110
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— 115
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.” 120

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, 125
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." 130

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 135
 Are preparing a woodland hunt for tomorrow,
 As soon as Titan lifts his luminous head
 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 140
 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 145
 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 150
 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, 155
 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 160
 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. 165
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 Cynthus, braiding
His flowing hair with soft leaves and gold, 170
And the arrows rattle in the quiver on his back.*

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

When they came into the high, trackless hills,
Mountain goats, dislodged from the rocks above,
Ran down the ridges. Elsewhere, herds of deer 175
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 180
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, 185
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, 190
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 195
Does she contemplate a secret love. She calls it
Marriage, and with that word she cloaks her sin.

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, 200
 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, 205
 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. 210
 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: 215
 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 220
 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 225
 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 230
 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 235