

VIRGIL

FROM THE AENEID, BOOK VII

TRANSLATED BY DAVID HADBAWNIK

[Aeneas, having emerged from his visit with his father in the afterworld, leads his weary men to the shores of Italy at last.]

I. ac formae magnorum ululare luporum

And you, Aeneas' nurse

gave great fame to our shores
in death the name

HESPERIA

commemorates your bones

one last

last rite

pious Aeneas performs before
leaving port. Smooth sailing.
A friendly breeze, bright moon,
sea gleaming fore and aft.

They scrape close to the shore of Circe
the well-off daughter of the sun
whose closed groves resound with ceaseless

song

fragrant cedar burning in luxuriant halls
to sweeten the night
as Circe passes, twitching
her many webs.

What's that?

The wretched moans of a lion
chafing at chains, roaring under
midnight's yoke
raging of boars

and caged bears
look there!
wolf-shapes raising
great heads to howl
all of them once men, now dosed
by cruel Circe to grow beastly
feathers and fur and hides.

But the good guys of Troy
don't suffer such fate.
Neptune blows their sails full
letting them breeze through
the boiling shallows until
Dawn turns the sea red and light
rises to fill the sky.

Aeneas sees: a huge wood
with a river (the Tiber)
winding through, quietly gathering
steam to a mighty rapids throwing
gold spray from rich sand
delighting the eye.
With a shit-eating grin he orders
the sails trimmed, strange plumes
and birdsong filling the air
as they pass silently
through the woods on the dark water.

II. *maior rerum mihi nascitur ordo*

Remind me, Erato!
What was the state of play
who were the kings, when that fleet
first hit the Ausonian shores?
Let me unfold the cause of
the first battle, goddess,
 whisper
into the ear of your bard
and I'll spin
 awful war, battle arrays
 and brave kings rushing
 to death
 the Tyrrhenian bands and all
 Hesperia armed—
to me the greater tale
 is born, the greater
 work I'll now assay.

Old King Latinus held lands and cities
 in a long-lasting peace.
A Laurentine nymph named Marica
 was his mom, his dad Faunus
whose father was Picus and
 his dad, Saturn,
it's said, ultimate author of that line.

But no sons for Latinus. By fate's decree
they were all snatched away, cut down
 in youth.
So: only a daughter, grown ripe

for a husband, a sweet,
sweet virgin of perfect age.

Many suitors from Greater Latium
sought her hand. Turnus
the most good-looking of all.
He'd come from potent stock
 and the queen was eager
to lock him down in marriage,
 make him her son.

But bad omens stood in the way.
Deep in the palace, a laurel tree
preserved many years in sacred awe
which dad had planted when he first
 built the compound,
 dedicated to Apollo
(from this comes the appellation
 “Laurentine”)

a huge buzzing came across the sky
(bizarre as it seems) and
 BEES
alighted there, swarming a high branch
the priest, freaked out
 called it a sign
that a stranger would come
 leading a huge host
and settle just so in the citadel.

Meanwhile in lighting the altars
Lavinia standing beside her dad

FLAME

(for fuck's sake!) leapt
 into her long, bunched-up hair
and consumed her accoutrements, crackling
and burning her queenly crown
the smoke rolling yellow through
 the whole house.

Crazy!

Everyone took this as a sign, too
that she'd be lustrous and noble in her own fame
 but portend

WAR

 to her people.

The King, bugged by all these omens,
sped to the oracle of Faunus
where deep in the forest the priestess
 breathes from a sacred font
 a dark
 cruel
 vapor.

This was where everyone in Italy went for answers.
They brought gifts to the priestess
who lied on thick fleece from
slaughtered sheep, dreaming
weird dreams of spirits
 flitting about, hearing
 weird voices,
conversing with gods and communing
 with Acheron in
 deepest hell.

It was to her Latinus hurried
 offering 100 woolly sheep
 in sacrifice, groveling
 on their shorn, stretched
 hides, and from deep
 in the forest her voice
 boomed:

“Don’t seek, my son, to marry your daughter
 among Latin hordes,
nor believe in the mapped-out
 wedding plans.
Aliens are coming whose blood
 will lift our name and whose kids
will roll the world like a ball
 at their feet.”

III. *“heus! etiam mensas consumimus”*

Latinus, with this word from father Faunus,
could not keep it to himself—
the rumor spread far and wide, burning
through cities up and down the coast
when

NOW

Aeneas arrives and after docking his fleet
relaxes with his captains and lovely son
Iulus
under the shade of
high trees, laying out
a feast, long crisp flat bread
(following Jove’s own recipe)
with locally grown fruit
spread on top.

So
when the topping’s eaten, the measliness
of the fare drives them to chow down
on the flat bread, not sparing
a crumb in their hunger

“Ha!” jokes Iulus, “we even ate the tables.”

Ha, indeed!

These words
mark the end of long labors—
for when Aeneas hears this remark
he pricks up his ears,

stupefied, blinking,
looking around at the land
with new eyes.

“Hey!” he says, “this is it—
HOME,
the beloved country
prophesied by my father when he said
‘Starvation will make you eat your tables
and then, tired,
seek no more—
you’ve reached the promised land.’

THIS is that hunger,
HERE the last hurdle
before we should rest at last.

Go at first light,
suss out the lay of the land,
who holds sway,
look everywhere, find the stronghold
of the local folk.
Now let’s pour one out
for Jove, pray
to father Anchises,
and toast our success.”

Aeneas crowns himself
with fronds
wrapped around his temples.

He prays to the Genius

of this place,
the gods and
nymphs and unknown streams
night and night's
rising stars
then Trojan Jove and the Phrygian Mother
(giving all their proper due)
finally calling to his own
folks in heaven
and Erebus.

The Almighty Father thunders
three times from the clear sky
and shakes from his heavenly brow
a cloud flashing gold lightning.

Word flies through the Trojan troops:
the day's come when they've found their new city.
The party kicks off all over again
at news of this omen—
they set up the bowls and top off each other's wine.

IV. *“fluminis intrastis ripas portuque sedetis”*

Next day, having located the capital, Aeneas
chooses 100 of the best men and orders them
 go there, bearing gifts
for the brave king and begging peace
 for Trojans.

They hurry off, while the remainder
dig trenches and mark out walls
eagerly making their ragtag camp
 into a proper settlement.

Those guys see the towers and roofs
of the Latins and walk under the walls.
Before the city boys and young men
are fooling around on horseback, racing
or throwing spears or punching
each other, half in jest.

 A messenger rushes to the king
and gives the report:

 STRANGERS

who look pretty tough, though dressed
 strangely as well. Latinus orders them
 brought right in.

He greets them, one cool customer:
“Tell me, Trojans – yes, we know
who you are – we’ve heard of your city
and wanderings over the sea – what
do you want? Why are you here?
Maybe storms drove you this way,

as it happens to so many sailors.
Relax, though; you've reached a safe port.
Don't scorn our hospitality, for we Latins
come from Saturn, and we're not nice
out of compulsion, but civilized
by free will and the long custom
of old gods."

Ilioneus answers him:

"King, superb son of Faunus, it wasn't by accident
nor the fault of black storms that we wandered
this way – it was by plan, albeit
not of our making. We're from a realm
that was once the greatest, our race
comes from Jove, from Jove
comes our king: Trojan Aeneas
who sends us to your door.
We've sailed through hell and back
over the vast sea, and now we ask
a small bit of land on your shore
and a harmless landing spot, air
and water. We won't be an embarrassment
to your realm, nor will you go
without proper thanks. By Aeneas
and his strong hand, proven
in arms and war, I swear.
Many peoples and countries have offered
to take us in as allies – in fact, they've begged us –
but the will of the gods brought us here.
From here sprang Dardanus, and here
he returns, and Apollo orders us
back to the Tiber, the source.

I bring you these small tokens of
former glory taken from burning Troy:
Gold, and Priam's royal vestments,
his scepter and crown and
sacred robes sewn by his daughters."

Everyone freezes. You could hear a leaf
stir in the breeze.

None of the purple words
or gifts moves Latinus one bit, but
the thought of his daughter
comes back to him, her marriage,
the prophecy of Faunus.

*This must be the guy from outside
who's supposed to be my son,
called to the realm as equal—
from this the offspring who'll
rule the whole world.*

Latinus smiles.

"The gods bless your intention!
What you want, Trojans, is nothing;
and I won't turn up my nose
at your gifts. As long as I'm king,
feel free to come and go as you please,
and let Aeneas himself, if he's so eager
for us to be friends, make his way here—
he shouldn't be afraid to meet his new pals—
I'm anxious to shake his hand
and seal our friendship. Now,
go back to your boss with our answer.

...In fact,
 tell him I have a daughter
whom the fates say will marry
a guy from another country, whose blood
will raise our name to the stars.
If I'm right, and I think I am, it's none other
 than Aeneas."

Latinus speaks thus and sends them back
with 300 excellent horses decked out
in purple with gold chains hanging down,
and for absent Aeneas he orders
twin steeds from heavenly stock
breathing fire, bred from a line
skillful Circe had raised.

 With such news and gifts
the guys ride to Aeneas.

But wait!

 Where's Juno, the cruel wife of Jove?
She's flying just now over Argos, and
from a long way off, even from Pachynus in Sicily,
she sees the Trojans
 happily
 settling down, already
building homes, abandoning ships.
She stands there shaking her head,
 unable to believe
 what she's seeing.

"What
 the actual

fuck! Why
couldn't they die
on the Sigean plains, why couldn't they
have been captured by... someone?
Why didn't they burn in the fires
of Troy? Instead
they've come through the fire
and as for me and my divinity
I'm caput, exhausted.
I've unleashed all the power
of earth and sea and it's not
done shit to stop them. They made it
through Syrtes, Scylla, and Charybis
and now take their ease by the Tiber's side."

And dusting herself off, somewhat:

"All right. I've left nothing undone,
no gods have helped me, Aeneas,
you've beaten me. But
if my powers aren't great enough,
I won't hesitate to seek help
wherever I can.

If I can't rouse heaven,
I'll raise hell."