

AENEID
BOOKS I-VI

VIRGIL

(PUBLIUS VERGILIUS MARO)

(BOOKS I-VI)

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AENEID

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AENEID

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BOOK I —
SHIPWRECK

As the action begins in the Aeneid, Juno rouses the winds to a great storm out of her enduring rage at Aeneas and the remnants of Troy. Aeneas watches in terror as his fleet breaks up in the waves and rocks.

1. *Aeneae solvuntur frigore membra*

Clouds snatch sun from the sky.
Dark night reigns over all
creased by thunder
and lightning – all things threaten
the men with instant death.

Aeneas gets scared.
Limbs loosened in fear, he
groans, bends over and
pukes over the boat's
edge. "Why" he says
"couldn't I have met death
on Trojan soil, poured out
my soul by your sword,
Diomedes, alongside Hector
and all the others...?"

He talks that way while
waves hang them
high in the air

opening pockets of earth
they swing over—the south wind
twists three ships onto
hidden rocks and right before
Aeneas' eyes surges a huge wall
of water

 hurling
the pilot headlong
over the side

 a vast whirlpool
churns and men scatter
swimming in the abyss, mingled with
weapons treasure and broken
 bits of ship

Then Neptune catches wind of it.
Calling all storms, he
orders them to stop
 right now.

Just like when a riot breaks out
and the rabble rage drunk on
their own anger—stones
and fire fly, madness making
weapons of whatever's
ready to hand—then
if they behold a man
moving among them with
quiet dignity, they fall
silent and stand close,
pricking up their ears—

 just so
Neptune calms the whole hubbub
of waves, routs the clouds and brings back
the sun, lifts the ships and
smooths the seas.

2. *aequora tuta silent*

Aeneas pokes his head out once things grow calm.
His weary men straggle along the shore, turn
inwards to Libya. There's a long inlet
where reefs strike out forming a harbor
waves break on either side of
huge crags that threaten the sky
but inside the sea, protected, lies still
so that
from high above it looks like the topmost
layer of trees gently waving in wind.
Here the broken ships stagger
unable to tie fast anywhere
seven vessels remain of the whole fleet
they disembark eagerly kissing land
and wringing their soaking limbs out on shore
Achates strikes sparks to catch fire
snatches up flame in shavings
then those tired guys carry down
wave-spoiled grain, whatever fruits
and tools they can salvage and prepare to

chop up the food and cook it
for groaning bellies

[Aeneas, shipwrecked and separated from most of his men, wanders in the woods outside of Carthage. Venus, his mother, decides to put on a disguise and help him find his way.]

3. *O dea certe*

His mother comes down to the woods to meet him,
disguised as a Spartan maid armed to the teeth.
She's slung a bow over her shoulder like a huntress,
and her hair hangs free in the wind, legs
bare at the knee, where she's tied a knot
in her dress. "Hey," she says, "you guys—
did you happen to see any of my sisters,
wearing quivers and spotted lynx hides, shouting
after a boar spewing foam on the path?"
So Venus speaks, and her son replies:
"No. I haven't seen or heard anyone like that.
But who are you? Not human, surely.
You're a goddess. Or sister to the sun. Or—
a nymph, maybe? Whoever you are, please
bless us with some information. Let us know

where on earth we are. Because honestly,
we have no clue. We're shipwrecked here.
I swear, I'll go straight to your altar and make
a giant sacrifice!" Venus says, "Well,
I'm hardly worthy of *that*.
All the women here dress this way, with quivers
and purple bound up high on their calves.
What you see is the Phoenician realm; the Tyrians,
and Agenor's city. But these are the borders
of Libya—a people tough in war.
Dido, having fled her brother in Tyre, is in charge.

It's a long story...

But I'll give you the gist of it.
Dido's husband was Sychaeus, richest guy in Phoenicia,
but sick in love with her. Ever since she was a girl
she'd been promised to him in marriage.
But her brother held Tyre—Pygmalion,
wickedest man that ever was.
He went crazy. And blind, with love of gold.
One night he lured Sychaeus out to the altars
and killed him there in cold blood—
some brotherly love! Worse, he mocked Dido
with false hope, feigning grief.
But the ghost of her unburied husband
floated up in her sleep, raising its white face
in a marvelous way, letting her know what
happened, showing her where the sword
had gone through out front of the altars. *Run,*
he told her. *Get out of the country, fast.*
To help he explained where she could find
hidden treasure, a massive horde of silver and gold.

Dido woke up to the danger and rallied her friends,
who'd hated or feared the tyrant all along.
Finding ships ready to go, they loaded them up
and took off. So they got away

and ripped off Pygmalion in the process...

and a woman arranged the whole thing.

They landed here, where you can see the giant walls of New Carthage springing up.

But what about you? Where did you come from? Where are you going?"

Aeneas sighs.

He drags his voice out dramatically:

"O goddess, we could stand here all day talking, and I still couldn't do the story justice.

We're what's left of Troy—if you've ever heard of it—storm-driven

pell-mell, hither and yon to Libyan shores.

I'm one of the good guys—Aeneas—who rescued household gods from the enemy, known all the way up in heaven.

My blood's from Jove, and I seek Italy.

I set out with 20 ships, doing just as my mother, a goddess, told me. Scarcely

seven remain, shattered by wind and waves.

Lost and needy, I wander the Libyan deserts, driven from Europe and Asia. I—"

But Venus can bear it no more.

She cuts him off mid-sigh, saying, "Whoever you are, the gods can't hate you all *that* much.

You're still breathing, and you've made it this far.

Go to the queen. I'm telling you,

your friends and your fleet are safe,

or I don't know augury.

See those swans—two groups of them,

broken up a minute ago by Jove's eagle?

Now some of them in a long line look down

at the others, alighted on land, sporting

there with their wings while their friends

flock and sing in the sky. Likewise,

your ships and men either hold the port
or sail in easily now... Go.
Wherever the road leads, that's the way.”
After she speaks, she turns away.
Her cheeks and neck glow, and the sweetest smell
comes from her hair, while her dress falls
to her feet—no one can doubt
she's a goddess.