The Aeneid of Virgil

A Verse Translation by Allen Mandelbaum
BOOK IV

Too late. The queen is caught between love’s pain and press. She feeds the wound within her veins; she is eaten by a secret flame. Aeneas’ high name, all he has done, again, again come like a flood. His face, his words hold fast her breast. Care strips her limbs of calm and rest.

A new dawn lights the earth with Phoebus’ lamp and banishes damp shadows from the sky when restless Dido turns to her heart’s sharer: “Anna, my sister, what dreams make me shudder? Who is this stranger guest come to our house? How confident he looks, how strong his chest and arms! I think—and I have cause—that he is born of gods. For in the face of fear the mean must fall. What fates have driven him! What trying wars he lived to tell! Were it not my sure, immovable decision not to marry anyone since my first love turned traitor, when he cheated me by death, were I not weary of the couch and torch, I might perhaps give way to this one fault. For I must tell you, Anna, since the time
Syphax, my poor husband, died and my own brother splashed our household gods with blood, Aeneas is the only man to move my feelings, to overturn my shifting heart. I know too well the signs of the old flame. But I should call upon the earth to gape and close above me, or on the almighty Father to take his thunderbolt, to hurl me down into the shades, the pallid shadows and deepest night of Erebus, before I’d violate you, Shame, or break your laws! For he who first had joined me to himself has carried off my love, and may he keep it and be its guardian within the grave.” She spoke. Her breast became a well of tears.

And Anna answers: “Sister, you more dear to me than light itself, are you to lose all of your youth in dreary loneliness, and never know sweet children or the soft rewards of Venus? Do you think that ashes or buried Shades will care about such matters? Until Aeneas came, there was no suitor who moved your sad heart—not in Libya nor, before, in Tyre: you always scorned Oenone and all the other chiefs that Africa, a region rich in triumphs, had to offer. How can you struggle now against a love that is so acceptable? Have you forgotten the land you settled, those who hem you in? On one side lie the towns of the Gaetulians, a race invincible, and the unbridled Numidians and then the barbarous Syrtis. And on the other lies a barren country, stripped by the drought and by Barcaean raiders, raging both far and near. And I need not remind you of the wars that boil in Tyre and of your brother’s menaces and plots. For I am sure it was the work of gods and Juno that has held the Trojan galleys fast to their course and brought them here to Carthage. If you marry Aeneas, what a city
and what a kingdom, sister, you will see!
With Trojan arms beside us, so much greatness
must lie in wait for Punic glory! Only
pray to the gods for their good will, and having
presented them with proper sacrifices,
be lavish with your Trojan guests and weave
excuses for delay while frenzied winter
storms out across the sea and shatters ships,
while wet Orion blows his tempest squalls
beneath a sky that is intractable.”

These words of Anna fed the fire in Dido.
Hope burned away her doubt, destroyed her shame.
First they move on from shrine to shrine, imploring
the favor of the gods at every altar.
They slaughter chosen sheep, as is the custom,
and offer them to Ceres the lawgiver,
to Phoebus, Father Bacchus, and—above all—
to Juno, guardian of marriage. Lovely
Dido holds the cup in her right hand;
she pours the offering herself, midway
between a milk-white heifer’s horns. She studies
slit breasts of beasts and reads their throbbing guts.
But oh the ignorance of augurs! How
can vows and altars help one wild with love?
Meanwhile the supple flame devours her marrow;
within her breast the silent wound lives on.
Unhappy Dido burns. Across the city
she wanders in her frenzy—even as
a heedless hind hit by an arrow when
a shepherd drives for game with darts among
the Cretan woods and, unawares, from far
leaves winging steel inside her flesh; she roams
the forests and the wooded slopes of Dicte,
the shaft of death still clinging to her side.
So Dido leads Aeneas around the ramparts,
displays the wealth of Sidon and the city
ready to hand; she starts to speak, then falters
and stops in midspeech. Now day glides away.
Again, insane, she seeks out that same banquet,
again she prays to hear the trials of Troy,
again she hangs upon the teller’s lips.
But now the guests are gone. The darkened moon, in turn, conceals its light, the setting stars invite to sleep; inside the vacant hall she grieves alone and falls upon the couch that he has left. Absent, she sees, she hears the absent one or draws Ascanius, his son and counterfeit, into her arms, as if his shape might cheat her untellable love.

Her towers rise no more; the young of Carthage no longer exercise at arms or build their harbors or sure battlements for war; the works are idle, broken off; the massive, menacing rampart walls, even the crane, defier of the sky, now lie neglected.

As soon as Jove’s dear wife sees that her Dido is in the grip of such a scourge and that no honor can withstand this madness, then the daughter of Saturn faces Venus: “How remarkable indeed: what splendid spoils you carry off, you and your boy; how grand and memorable is the glory if one woman is beaten by the guile of two gods. I have not been blind. I know you fear our fortresses, you have been suspicious of the houses of high Carthage. But what end will come of all this hate? Let us be done with wrangling. Let us make, instead of war, an everlasting peace and plighted wedding. You have what you were bent upon: she burns with love; the frenzy now is in her bones. Then let us rule this people—you and I— with equal auspices; let Dido serve a Phrygian husband, let her give her Tyrians and her pledged dowry into your right hand.”

But Venus read behind the words of Juno the motive she had hid: to shunt the kingdom of Italy to Libyan shores. And so she answered Juno: “Who is mad enough to shun the terms you offer? Who would prefer to strive with you in war? If only fortune
favor the course you urge. For I am ruled
by fates and am unsure if Jupiter
would have the Trojans and the men of Tyre
become one city, if he likes the mingling
of peoples and the writing of such treaties.
But you are his wife and it is right for you
to try his mind, to entreat him. Go. I’ll follow.”

Queen Juno answered her: “That task is mine.
But listen now while in few words I try
to tell you how I mean to bring about
this urgent matter. When tomorrow’s Titan
first shows his rays of light, reveals the world,
Aeneas and unhappy Dido plan
to hunt together in the forest. Then
while horsemen hurry to surround the glades
with nets, I shall pour down a black raincloud,
in which I have mixed hail, to awaken all
the heavens with my thundering. Their comrades
will scatter under cover of thick night.
Both Dido and the Trojan chief will reach
their shelter in the same cave. I shall be there.
And if I can rely on your goodwill,
I shall unite the two in certain marriage
and seal her as Aeneas’ very own;
and this shall be their wedding.” Cytherea
said nothing to oppose the plan; she granted
what Juno wanted, smiling at its cunning.

Meanwhile Aurora rose; she left the Ocean.
And when her brightness fills the air, select
young men move from the gates with wide-meshed nets
and narrow snares and broad-blade hunting spears,
and then Massylian horsemen hurry out
with strong, keen-scented hounds. But while the chieftains
of Carthage wait at Dido’s threshold, she
still lingers in her room. Her splendid stallion,
in gold and purple, prances, proudly champing
his foaming bit. At last the queen appears
among the mighty crowd; upon her shoulders
she wears a robe of Sidon with embroidered
borders. Her quiver is of gold, her hair
has knots and ties of gold, a golden clasp
holds fast her purple cloak. Her Trojan comrades
and glad Ascanius advance behind her.
Aeneas, who is handsome past all others,
himself approaches now to join her, linking
his hunting band to hers. Just as Apollo,
when in the winter he abandons Lycia
and Xanthus’ streams to visit his maternal
Delos, where he renews the dances—Cretans,
Dryopians, and painted Agathyrsi,
mingling around the altars, shout—advances
upon the mountain ridges of high Cynthus
and binds his flowing hair with gentle leaves
and braids its strands with intertwining gold;
his arrows clatter on his shoulder: no
less graceful is Aeneas as he goes;
an equal beauty fills his splendid face.
And when they reach the hills and pathless thickets,
the wild she-goats, dislodged from stony summits,
run down the ridges; from another slope
stags fling themselves across the open fields;
they mass their dusty bands in flight, forsaking
the hillsides. But the boy Ascanius
rides happy in the valleys on his fiery
stallion as he passes on his course
now stags, now goats; among the lazy herds
his prayer is for a foaming boar or that
a golden lion come down from the mountain.

Meanwhile confusion takes the sky, tremendous
turmoil, and on its heels, rain mixed with hail.
The scattered train of Tyre, the youth of Troy,
and Venus’ Dardan grandson in alarm
seek different shelters through the fields; the torrents
roar down the mountains. Dido and the Trojan
chieftain have reached the same cave. Primal Earth
and Juno, queen of marriages, together
now give the signal: lightning fires flash,
the upper air is witness to their mating,
and from the highest hilltops shout the nymphs.
That day was her first day of death and ruin.
For neither how things seem nor how they are deemed
moves Dido now, and she no longer thinks
of furtive love. For Dido calls it marriage,
and with this name she covers up her fault.

Then, swiftest of all evils, Rumor runs straightway through Libya's mighty cities—Rumor, whose life is speed, whose going gives her force. Timid and small at first, she soon lifts up her body in the air. She stalks the ground; her head is hidden in the clouds. Provoked to anger at the gods, her mother Earth gave birth to her, last come—they say—as sister to Coeus and Enceladus; fast-footed and lithe of wing, she is a terrifying enormous monster with as many feathers as she has sleepless eyes beneath each feather (amazingly), as many sounding tongues and mouths, and raises up as many ears. Between the earth and skies she flies by night, screeching across the darkness, and she never closes her eyes in gentle sleep. By day she sits as sentinel on some steep roof or on high towers, frightening vast cities; for she holds fast to falsehood and distortion as often as to messages of truth. Now she was glad. She filled the ears of all with many tales. She sang of what was done and what was fiction, chanting that Aeneas, one born of Trojan blood, had come, that lovely Dido has deigned to join herself to him, that now, in lust, forgetful of their kingdom, they take long pleasure, fondling through the winter, the slaves of squalid craving. Such reports the filthy goddess scatters everywhere upon the lips of men. At once she turns her course to King Iarbas; and his spirit is hot, his anger rages at her words.

Iarbas was the son of Hammon by a ravished nymph of Garamantia. In his broad realm he had built a hundred temples, a hundred handsome shrines for Jupiter. There he had consecrated sleepless fire, the everlasting watchman of the gods; the soil was rich with blood of slaughtered herds,
and varied garlands flowered on the thresholds.
Insane, incited by that bitter rumor,
he prayed long—so they say—to Jupiter;
hе stood before the altars in the presence
of gods, a suppliant with upraised hands:
“All-able Jove, to whom the Moorish nation,
feasting upon their figured couches, pour
Lenaean sacrifices, do you see
these things? Or, Father, are we only trembling
for nothing when you cast your twisting thunder?
Those fires in the clouds that terrify
our souls—are they but blind and aimless lightning
that only stirs our empty mutterings?
A woman, wandering within our borders,
paid for the right to build a tiny city.
We gave her shore to till and terms of tenure.
She has refused to marry me, she has taken
Aeneas as a lord into her lands.
And now this second Paris, with his crew
of half-men, with his chin and greasy hair
bound up beneath a bonnet of Maeonia,
enjoys his prey; while we bring offerings
to what we have believed to be your temples,
still cherishing your empty reputation.”

And as he prayed and clutched the altar stone,
all-able Jupiter heard him and turned
his eyes upon the royal walls, upon
the lovers who had forgotten their good name.
He speaks to Mercury, commanding him:
“Be on your way, my son, call up the Zephyrs,
glide on your wings, speak to the Dardan chieftain
who lingers now at Tyrian Carthage, paying
not one jot of attention to the cities
the Fates have given him. Mercury, carry
across the speeding winds the words I urge:
his lovely mother did not promise such
a son to us; she did not save him twice
from Grecian arms for this—but to be master
of Italy, a land that teems with empire
and seethes with war; to father a race from Teucer’s
high blood, to place all earth beneath his laws.
But if the brightness of such deeds is not
enough to kindle him, if he cannot attempt the task for his own fame, does he—a father—grudge Ascanius the walls of Rome? What is he pondering, what hope can hold him here among his enemies, not caring for his own Ausonian sons or for Lavinian fields. He must set sail. And this is all; my message lies in this.”

His words were ended. Mercury made ready to follow his great father’s orders. First he laces on his golden sandals: winged to bear him, swift as whirlwinds, high across the land and water. Then he takes his wand; with this he calls pale spirits up from Orcus and down to dreary Tartarus sends others; he uses this to give sleep and recall it, and to unseal the eyes of those who have died. His trust in this, he spurs the winds and skims the troubled clouds. And now in flight, he sights the summit and high sides of hardy Atlas who props up heaven with his crest—Atlas, whose head is crowned with pines and battered by the wind and rain and always girdled by black clouds; his shoulders’ cloak is falling snow; above the old man’s chin the rivers rush; his bristling beard is stiff with ice. Here first Cyllene’s god poised on his even wings and halted; then he hurled himself headlong and seaward with his body, like a bird that, over shores and reefs where fishes throng, swoops low along the surface of the waters. Not unlike this, Cyllene’s god between the earth and heaven as he flies, cleaving the sandy shore of Libya from the winds that sweep from Atlas, father of his mother.

As soon as his winged feet have touched the outskirts, he sees Aeneas founding fortresses and fashioning new houses. And his sword was starred with tawny jasper, and the cloak that draped his shoulders blazed with Tyrian purple—a gift that wealthy Dido wove for him;
she had run golden thread along the web. And Mercury attacks at once. "Are you now laying the foundation of high Carthage, as servant to a woman, building her a splendid city here? Are you forgetful of what is your own kingdom, your own fate? The very god of gods, whose power sways both earth and heaven, sends me down to you from bright Olympus. He himself has asked me to carry these commands through the swift air: what are you pondering or hoping for while squandering your ease in Libyan lands? For if the brightness of such deeds is not enough to kindle you—if you cannot attempt the task for your own fame—remember Ascanius growing up, the hopes you hold for Fūlus, your own heir, to whom are owed the realm of Italy and land of Rome." So did Cyllene's god speak out. He left the sight of mortals even as he spoke and vanished into the transparent air.

This vision stunned Aeneas, struck him dumb; his terror held his hair erect; his voice held fast within his jaws. He burns to flee from Carthage; he would quit these pleasant lands, astonished by such warnings, the command of gods. What can he do? With what words dare he face the frenzied queen? What openings can he employ? His wits are split, they shift here, there; they race to different places, turning to everything. But as he hesitated, this seemed the better plan: he calls Sergestus and Mnestheus and the strong Serestus, and he asks them to equip the fleet in silence, to muster their companions on the shore, to ready all their arms, but to conceal the reasons for this change; while he himself—with gracious Dido still aware of nothing and never dreaming such a love could ever be broken—would try out approaches, seek the tenderest, most tactful time for speech, whatever dexterous way might suit his case.
And all are glad. They race to carry out
the orders of Aeneas, his commands.

But Dido—for who can deceive a lover?—
had caught his craftiness; she quickly sensed
what was to come; however safe they seemed,
she feared all things. That same unholy Rumor
brought her these hectic tidings: that the boats
were being armed, made fit for voyaging.
Her mind is helpless; raging frantically,
inflamed, she raves throughout the city—just
as a Bacchante when, each second year,
she is startled by the shaking of the sacred
emblems, the orgies urge her on, the cry
"o Bacchus" calls to her by night; Cithaeron
incites her with its clamor. And at last
Dido attacks Aeneas with these words:

“Deceiver, did you even hope to hide
so harsh a crime, to leave this land of mine
without a word? Can nothing hold you back—
neither your love, the hand you pledged, nor even
the cruel death that lies in wait for Dido?
Beneath the winter sky are you preparing
a fleet to rush away across the deep
among the north winds, you who have no feeling?
What! Even if you were not seeking out
strange fields and unknown dwellings, even if
your ancient Troy were still erect, would you
return to Troy across such stormy seas?
Do you flee me? By tears, by your right hand—
this sorry self is left with nothing else—
by wedding, by the marriage we began,
if I did anything deserving of you
or anything of mine was sweet to you,
take pity on a fallen house, put off
your plan, I pray—if there is still place for prayers.
Because of you the tribes of Libya, all
the Nomad princes hate me, even my
own Tyrians are hostile; and for you
my honor is gone and that good name that once
was mine, my only claim to reach the stars.
My guest, to whom do you consign this dying
woman? I must say 'guest': this name is all
I have of one whom once I called my husband.
Then why do I live on? Until Pygmalion,
my brother, batters down my walls, until
Iarbas the Gaetulian takes me prisoner?
Had I at least before you left conceived
a son in me; if there were but a tiny
Aeneas playing by me in the hall,
whose face, in spite of everything, might yet
remind me of you, then indeed I should
not seem so totally abandoned, beaten.”

Her words were ended. But Aeneas, warned
by Jove, held still his eyes; he struggled, pressed
care back within his breast. With halting words
he answers her at last: “I never shall
deny what you deserve, the kindnesses
that you could tell; I never shall regret
remembering Elissa for as long
as I remember my own self, as long
as breath is king over these limbs. I’ll speak
brief words that fit the case. I never hoped
to hide—do not imagine that—my flight;
I am not furtive. I have never held
the wedding torches as a husband; I
have never entered into such agreements.
If fate had granted me to guide my life
by my own auspices and to unravel
my troubles with unhampered will, then I
should cherish first the town of Troy, the sweet
remains of my own people and the tall
rooftops of Priam would remain, my hand
would plant again a second Pergamus
for my defeated men. But now Gyranean
Apollo’s oracles would have me seize
great Italy, the Lycian prophecies
tell me of Italy: there is my love,
there is my homeland. If the fortresses
of Carthage and the vision of a city
in Libya can hold you, who are Phoenician,
why, then, begrudge the Trojans’ settling on
Ausonian soil? There is no harm: it is
right that we, too, seek out a foreign kingdom.
For often as the night conceals the earth
with dew and shadows, often as the stars
ascend, afire, my father’s anxious image
approaches me in dreams. Anchises warns
and terrifies; I see the wrong I have done
to one so dear, my boy Ascanius,
whom I am cheating of Hesperia,
the fields assigned by fate. And now the gods’
own messenger, sent down by Jove himself—
I call as witness both our lives—has brought
his orders through the swift air. My own eyes
have seen the god as he was entering
our walls—in broad daylight. My ears have drunk
his words. No longer set yourself and me
afire. Stop your quarrel. It is not
my own free will that leads to Italy.”

But all the while Aeneas spoke, she stared
askance at him, her glance ran this way, that.
She scans his body with her silent eyes.
Then Dido thus, inflamed, denounces him:

“No goddess was your mother, false Aeneas,
and Dardanus no author of your race;
the bristling Caucasus was father to you
on his harsh crags; Hyrcanian tigresses
gave you their teats. And why must I dissemble?
Why hold myself in check? For greater wrongs?
For did Aeneas groan when I was weeping?
Did he once turn his eyes or, overcome,
shed tears or pity me, who was his loved one?
What shall I cry out first? And what shall follow?
No longer now does mighty Juno or
our Father, son of Saturn, watch this earth
with righteous eyes. Nowhere is certain trust.
He was an outcast on the shore, in want.
I took him in and madly let him share
my kingdom; his lost fleet and his companions
I saved from death. Oh I am whirled along
in fire by the Furies! First the augur
Apollo, then the Lycian oracles,
and now, sent down by Jove himself, the gods’
own herald, carrying his horrid orders. This seems indeed to be a work for High Ones, a care that can disturb their calm. I do not refute your words. I do not keep you back. Go then, before the winds, to Italy. Seek out your kingdom overseas; indeed, if there be pious powers still, I hope that you will drink your torments to the lees among sea rocks and, drowning, often cry the name of Dido. Then, though absent, I shall hunt you down with blackened firebrands; and when chill death divides my soul and body, a Shade, I shall be present everywhere. Depraved, you then will pay your penalties. And I shall hear of it, and that report will come to me below, among the Shadows.”

Her speech is broken off; heartsick, she shuns the light of day, deserts his eyes; she turns away, leaves him in fear and hesitation, Aeneas longing still to say so much. As Dido faints, her servants lift her up; they carry her into her marble chamber; they lay her body down upon the couch.

But though he longs to soften, soothe her sorrow and turn aside her troubles with sweet words, though groaning long and shaken in his mind because of his great love, nevertheless pious Aeneas carries out the gods’ instructions. Now he turns back to his fleet.

At this the Teucrians indeed fall to. They launch their tall ships all along the beach; they set their keels, well-smearèd with pitch, afloat. The crewmen, keen for flight, haul from the forest boughs not yet stripped of leaves to serve as oars and timbers still untrimmed. And one could see them as, streaming, they rushed down from all the city: even as ants, remembering the winter, when they attack a giant stack of spelt to store it in their homes; the black file swarms across the fields; they haul their plunder through
the grass on narrow tracks; some strain against the great grains with their shoulders, heaving hard; some keep the columns orderly and chide the loiterers; the whole trail boils with work.

What were your feelings, Dido, then? What were the sighs you uttered at that sight, when far and wide, from your high citadel, you saw the beaches boil and turmoil take the waters, with such a vast uproar before your eyes? Voracious Love, to what do you not drive the hearts of men? Again, she must outcry, again, a suppliant, must plead with him, must bend her pride to love—and so not die in vain, and with some way still left untried.

"Anna, you see them swarm across the beaches; from every reach around they rush to sea: the canvas calls the breezes, and already the boisterous crewmen crown the sterns with garlands. But I was able to foresee this sorrow; therefore I can endure it, sister; yet in wretchedness I must ask you for this one service, Anna. Treacherous Aeneas has honored you alone, confiding even his secret feelings unto you; and you alone know all his soft approaches, moods. My sister, go—to plead with him, to carry this message to my arrogant enemy. I never trafficked with the Greeks at Aulis to root the Trojans out, I never sent a fleet to Pergamus, never disturbed his father’s ashes or Anchises’ Shade, that now Aeneas should ward off my words from his hard ears. Where is he hurrying? If he would only grant his wretched lover this final gift: to wait for easy sailing and favoring winds. I now no longer ask for those old ties of marriage he betrayed, nor that he lose his kingdom, be deprived of lovely Latium; I only ask for empty time, a rest and truce for all this frenzy, until fortune teaches me,
defeated, how to sorrow. I ask this—
pity your sister—as a final kindness.
When he has granted it, I shall repay
my debt, and with full interest, by my death.”

So Dido pleads, and her poor sister carries
these lamentations, and she brings them back.
For lamentation cannot move Aeneas;
his graciousness toward any plea is gone.
Fate is opposed, the god makes deaf the hero’s
kind ears. As when, among the Alps, north winds
will strain against each other to root out
with blasts—now on this side, now that—a stout
oak tree whose wood is full of years; the roar
is shattering, the trunk is shaken, and
high branches scatter on the ground; but it
still grips the rocks; as steeply as it thrusts
its crown into the upper air, so deep
the roots it reaches down to Tartarus:
no less than this, the hero; he is battered
on this side and on that by assiduous words;
he feels care in his mighty chest, and yet
his mind cannot be moved; the tears fall, useless.

Then maddened by the fates, unhappy Dido
calls out at last for death; it tires her
to see the curve of heaven. That she may
not weaken in her plan to leave the light,
she sees, while placing offerings on the altars
with burning incense—terrible to tell—
the consecrated liquid turning black,
the outpoured wine becoming obscene blood.
But no one learns of this, not even Anna.
And more: inside her palace she had built
a marble temple to her former husband
that she held dear and honored wonderfully.
She wreeathed that shrine with snow-white fleeces and
holy-day leaves. And when the world was seized
by night, she seemed to hear the voice and words
of her dead husband, calling out to Dido.
Alone above the housetops, death its song,
an owl often complains and draws its long
slow call into a wailing lamentation.
More, many prophecies of ancient seers now terrify her with their awful warnings. And in her dreams it is the fierce Aeneas himself who drives her to insanity; she always finds herself alone, abandoned, and wandering without companions on an endless journey, seeking out her people, her Tyrians, in a deserted land: even as Pentheus, when he is seized by frenzy, sees files of Furies, and a double sun and double Thebes appear to him; or when Orestes, son of Agamemnon, driven across the stage, flees from his mother armed with torches and black serpents; on the threshold the awful goddesses of vengeance squat.

When she had gripped this madness in her mind and, beaten by her grief, resolved to die, she plotted with herself the means, the moment. Her face conceals her meaning; on her brow she sets serenity, then speaks to Anna: “My sister, wish me well, for I have found a way that will restore Aeneas to me or free me of my love for him. Near by the bounds of Ocean and the setting sun lies Ethiopia, the farthest land; there Atlas, the incomparable, turns the heavens, studded with their glowing stars, upon his shoulders. And I have been shown a priestess from that land—one of the tribe of the Massylians—who guards the shrine of the Hesperides; for it was she who fed the dragon and preserved the holy branches upon the tree, sprinkling moist honey and poppy, bringing sleep. She promises to free, with chant and spell, the minds of those she favors but sends anguish into others. And she can stay the waters in the rivers and turn the stars upon their ways; she moves the nightly Shades; makes earth quake underfoot and—you will see—sends ash trees down the mountains. Dear sister, I can call the gods to witness, and you and your dear life, that I resort
to magic arts against my will. In secret
build up a pyre within the inner courtyard
beneath the open air, and lay upon it
the weapons of the hero. He, the traitor,
has left them hanging in my wedding chamber.
Take all of his apparel and the bridal
bed where I was undone. You must destroy
all relics of the cursed man, for so
would I, and so the priestess has commanded.”
This said, she is silent and her face is pale.
But Anna cannot dream her sister hides
a funeral behind these novel rites;
her mind is far from thinking of such frenzy;
and she fears nothing worse than happened when
Sycaeus died. And so, she does as told.

But when beneath the open sky, inside
the central court, the pyre rises high
and huge, with logs of pine and planks of ilex;
the queen, not ignorant of what is coming,
then wreathes the place with garlands, crowning it
with greenery of death; and on the couch
above she sets the clothes Aeneas wore,
the sword he left, and then his effigy.
Before the circling altars the enchantress,
her hair disheveled, stands as she invokes
aloud three hundred gods, especially
Chaos and Erebus and Hecate,
the triple-shaped Diana, three-faced virgin.
And she had also sprinkled waters that
would counterfeit the fountain of Avernus;
she gathered herbs cut down by brazen sickles
beneath the moonlight, juicy with the venom
of black milk; she had also found a love charm
torn from the forehead of a newborn foal
before his mother snatched it. Dido herself—
with salt cake in her holy hands, her girdle
unfastened, and one foot free of its sandal,
close by the altars and about to die—
now calls upon the gods and stars, who know
the fates, as witness; then she prays to any
power there may be, who is both just and watchful,
who cares for those who love without requital.
Night. And across the earth the tired bodies
were tasting tranquil sleep; the woods and savage
waters were resting and the stars had reached
the midpoint of their gliding fall—when all
the fields are still, and animals and colored
birds, near and far, that find their home beside
the limpid lakes or haunt the countryside
in bristling thickets, sleep in silent night.
But not the sorrowing Phoenician; she
can not submit to sleep, can not admit
dark night into her eyes or breast; her cares
increase; again love rises, surges in her;
she wavers on the giant tide of anger.
She will not let things rest but carries on;
she still revolvs these thoughts within her heart:
"What can I do? Shall I, whom he has mocked,
go back again to my old suitors, begging,
seeking a wedding with Numidians whom
I have already often scorned as bridegrooms?
Or should I sail away on Trojan ships,
to suffer there even their harshest orders?
Shall I do so because the Trojans once
received my help, and gratefulness for such
old service is remembered by the mindful?
But even if I wish it, would they welcome
someone so hated to their haughty ships?
For, lost one, do you not yet know, not feel
the treason of the breed of Laomedon?
What then? Shall I accompany, alone,
the exultant sailors in their flight? Or call
on all my Tyrians, on all my troops
to rush upon them? How can I urge on
those I once dragged from Sidon, how can I
now force them back again upon the sea
and have them spread their canvas to the winds?
No; die as you deserve, and set aside
your sorrow by the sword. My sister, you,
won over by my tears—you were the first
to weigh me down with evils in my frenzy,
to drive me toward my enemy. And why
was it not given me to lead a guiltless
life, never knowing marriage, like a wild
beast, never to have touched such toils? I have not
held fast the faith I swore before the ashes of my Sychaeus.” This was her lament.

Aeneas on the high stern now was set to leave; he tasted sleep; all things were ready. And in his sleep a vision of the god returned to him with that same countenance—resembling Mercury in everything: his voice and coloring and yellow hair and all his handsome body, a young man’s—and seemed to bring a warning once again: “You, goddess-born, how can you lie asleep at such a crisis? Madman, can’t you see the threats around you, can’t you hear the breath of kind west winds? She conjures injuries and awful crimes, she means to die, she stirs the shifting surge of restless anger. Why not flee this land headlong, while there is time? You soon will see the waters churned by wreckage, ferocious torches blaze, and beaches flame, if morning finds you lingering on this coast. Be on your way. Enough delays. An ever uncertain and inconstant thing is woman.” This said, he was at one with the black night.

The sudden apparition terrifies Aeneas. And he tears his body free from sleep. He stirs his crewmen: “Quick! Awake! Now man the benches, comrades, now unfurl our sails with speed! Down from the upper air a god was sent to urge us on again, to rush our flight, to slice our twisted cables. O holy one among the gods, we follow your way, whoever you may be; again rejoicing, we shall do as you command. Be present, help us with your kindness, bring your gracious constellations to the heavens.” He spoke; and from his scabbard snatches up his glowing sword; with drawn blade, strikes the hawsers. And all are just as eager, hurrying to leave the shore; the ships conceal the sea. They strain to churn the foam and sweep blue waters.
Now early Dawn had left Tithonus' saffron bed, scattering new light upon the earth. As soon as from her lookout on the tower the queen could see the morning whitening, the fleet move on with level sails, the shores and harbors now abandoned, without oarsmen, she beat against her lovely breast three times, then four, and tore her golden hair, and cried: 

"O Jupiter, you let him go, a stranger who mocked our kingdom! Will my men not ready their weapons, hunt him down, pour from my city and rip the galleys from their moorings? Quick! Bring torches, spread your sails, and ply your oars! What am I saying? Where am I? What madness has turned awry what I had meant to do? Poor Dido, does his foulness touch you now? It should have then, when you gave him your scepter. This is the right hand, this the pledge of one who carries with him, so they say, the household gods of his land, who bore upon his shoulders his father weak with years. And could I not have dragged his body off, and scattered him piecemeal upon the waters, limb by limb? Or butchered all his comrades, even served Ascanius himself as banquet dish upon his father's table? True enough—the battle might have ended differently. That does not matter. For, about to die, need I fear anyone? I should have carried my torches to his camp and filled his decks with fire, destroyed the son, the father, that whole race, and then have thrown myself upon them. You, Sun, who with your flames see all that is done on earth; and Juno, you, interpreter and witness of my sorrows; Hecate, invoked with shrieks, by night, at every city's crossways; and you, the Furies; and the gods that guard dying Elissa—hear these words and turn your power toward my pain; as I deserve, take up my prayers. If it must be that he, a traitor, is to touch his harbor, float to his coasts, and so the fates of Jove
demand and if this end is fixed; yet let him suffer war and struggles with audacious nations, and then—when banished from his borders and torn from the embrace of Iulus—let him beg aid and watch his people’s shameful slaughter. Not even when he has bent low before an unjust peace may he enjoy his kingdom, the light that he has wished for. Let him fall before his time, unburied in the sand. These things I plead; these final words I pour out of my blood. Then, Tyrians, hunt down with hatred all his sons and race to come; send this as offering unto my ashes. Do not let love or treaty tie our peoples. May an avenger rise up from my bones, one who will track with firebrand and sword the Dardan settlers, now and in the future, at any time that ways present themselves. I call your shores to war against their shores, your waves against their waves, arms with their arms. Let them and their sons’ sons learn what is war.”

This said, she ran her mind to every side, for she was seeking ways with which to slice—as quickly as she can—the hated light; and then, with these brief words, she turned to Barce, Sycaeus’ nurse—for Dido’s own was now black ashes in Phoenicia, her old homeland: “Dear nurse, call here to me my sister Anna; and tell her to be quick to bathe her body with river water; see that she brings cattle and all that is appointed for atonement. So must my sister come; while you yourself bind up your temples with a pious fillet. I mean to offer unto Stygian Jove the sacrifices that, as is ordained, I have made ready and begun, to put an end to my disquiet and commit to flames the pyre of the Trojan chieftain.” So Dido spoke. And Barce hurried off; she moved with an old woman’s eagerness.

But Dido, desperate, beside herself with awful undertakings, eyes bloodshot
and rolling, and her quivering cheeks flecked
with stains and pale with coming death, now bursts
across the inner courtyards of her palace.
She mounts in madness that high pyre, unsheathes
the Dardan sword, a gift not sought for such
an end. And when she saw the Trojan’s clothes
and her familiar bed, she checked her thought
and tears a little, lay upon the couch
and spoke her final words: “O relics, dear
while fate and god allowed, receive my spirit
and free me from these cares; for I have lived
and journeyed through the course assigned by fortune.
And now my Shade will pass, illustrious,
beneath the earth; I have built a handsome city,
have seen my walls rise up, avenged a husband,
won satisfaction from a hostile brother:
0 fortunate, too fortunate—if only
the ships of Troy had never touched our coasts.”
She spoke and pressed her face into the couch.
“I shall die unavenged, but I shall die,”
she says. “Thus, thus, I gladly go below
to shadows. May the savage Dardan drink
with his own eyes this fire from the deep
and take with him the omen of my death.”

Then Dido’s words were done, and her companions
can see her fallen on the sword; the blade
is foaming with her blood, her hands are bloodstained.
Now clamor rises to the high rooftop.
Now rumor riots through the startled city.
The lamentations, keening, shrieks of women
sound through the houses; heavens echo mighty
wailings, even as if an enemy
were entering the gates, with all of Carthage
or ancient Tyre in ruins, and angry fires
rolling across the homes of men and gods.

And Anna heard. Appalled and breathless, she
runs, anxious, through the crowd, her nails wounding
her face; her fists, her breasts; she calls the dying
Dido by name: “And was it, then, for this,
my sister? Did you plan this fraud for me?
Was this the meaning waiting for me when
the pyre, the flames, the altar were prepared?
What shall I now, deserted, first lament?
You scorned your sister’s company in death;
you should have called me to the fate you met;
the same sword pain, the same hour should have taken
the two of us away. Did my own hands
help build the pyre, and did my own voice call
upon our fathers’ gods, only to find
me, heartless, far away when you lay dying?
You have destroyed yourself and me, my sister,
the people and the elders of your Sidon,
and all your city. Let me bathe your wounds
in water, and if any final breath
still lingers here, may my lips catch it up.”
This said, she climbed the high steps, then she clasped
her half-dead sister to her breast, and moaning,
embraced her, dried the black blood with her dress.
Trying to lift her heavy eyes, the queen
falls back again. She breathes; the deep wound in
her chest is loud and hoarse. Three times she tried
to raise herself and strained, propped on her elbow;
and three times she fell back upon the couch.
Three times with wandering eyes she tried to find
high heaven’s light and, when she found it, sighed.

But then all-able Juno pitied her
long sorrow and hard death and from Olympus
sent Iris down to free the struggling spirit
from her entwining limbs. For as she died
a death that was not merited or fated,
but miserable and before her time
and spurred by sudden frenzy, Proserpina
had not yet cut a gold lock from her crown,
not yet assigned her life to Stygian Orcus.
On saffron wings dew-glittering Iris glides
along the sky, drawing a thousand shifting
colors across the facing sun. She halted
above the head of Dido: “So commanded,
I take this lock as offering to Dis;
I free you from your body.” So she speaks
and cuts the lock with her right hand; at once
the warmth was gone, the life passed to the winds.