

The Escape

Listen while I tell the story
Of Aenéas, Dardan warrior,
How he scaped from Troy's destruction,
Scaped the flames and wrath and slaughter,
Scaped the city with his father,
Old Anchíses, son of Cápys,
Scaped the ruin of his homeland
With his son the young Iúlus;
How he scaped not with Creúsa,
Wife he loved and cherished dearly,
Wife he lost, who perished fleeing
Mid the ruin and confusion
As the city fell about them.

 You, dear listeners, know the story:
How the Greeks deceived the Trojans
Who awoke one morn, astonished
When they saw no Greeks around them,
Saw no Greeks upon the seashore,
Thought the Greeks had now departed
Weary after years of warfare,
After ten long years of warfare,
Leaving on the shore an offering
Huge and massive, mighty offering
Made of wood with cunning fashioned;
Like a mighty horse it stood there,
Stood there stark against the shoreline.
On the horse's flank was written
Large and bold that all could read there:
'To Minerva, wise protectress,
'That she bring us home to safety.'

 So the Trojans read, rejoicing,
Joyful at the Greeks' departure,
Thinking that the war was over.
Thought that if the horse were brought in,
Thought that if in Troy it entered,
Then Minerva would protect them,
Then Minerva, Greeks forsaking,
Would protect the Trojan city.
So in madness, breaking open
Walls the Greeks had never broken,
Brought the horse within the city,
Spent the day in merrymaking,
Singing, drinking, celebrating
That the Greeks had gone away.
When at last the Trojans sleeping,
Forth from out the horse's belly
Came the Greeks who'd lain there hidden,

Came they armed with deadly purpose,
Came they death and ruin bringing.
First they signalled to the armies
Who'd returned upon the seashore,
Who then poured through walls now broken,
Pouring in where Trojans slumbered.
Then began the dreadful slaughter,
Then the buildings were demolished,
Then did fire take hold the city.

Then Aenéas woke from slumber,
Heard the screams and shouts of panic,
Saw the sky lit up with burning,
Heard the sounds of buildings crashing,
Saw the chaos and disorder.
So he gathered up his weapons,
Roused his neighbors to the fighting;
But they were too few, outnumbered,
Easy prey to grim Greek warriors.
Soon his neighbours all lay slaughtered.
He alone remained still living,
Seeking vengeance for his city.

But his mother, kindly Venus,
Goddess shining in the darkness,
Stopped her son's impetuous folly.
"Think, my son," she said with feeling,
"Think of those your love's forgotten,
"Those you left alone and fearful.
"Is your aged father living?
"Is Créusa unmolested?
"Do you have a son surviving?
"If I had not them protected,
"Dead they'd be; for all around them
"Even now the Greeks are surging.
"Go, my son, go now and save them.
"Hold no thoughts of senseless vengeance,
"Tis the gods who've brought destruction
"On your city; blame not mortals."
Then she cleared his mortal vision,
Let him see th' immortals' fury:
Neptune with his trident smashing
Walls and towers and Troy's foundations;
Juno rousing Greeks to fury;
Grim Minerva there destroying
Citadel and Priam's palace;
Jove himself the Greeks supporting,
Giving them new strength and courage.
Thus Aenéas gazed in horror;
As he gazed, his mother left him,
Left him, saying on departing:
"Go, my son, escape disaster;

“Go; I give you my protection
“Till you reach your father's homestead.”

Through the flames and through the weapons,
Through the strife Aenéas hastened,
Hastened to his aged father,
Hastened to his wife, Creúsa,
Hastened to his son, Iúlus,
'Neath his mother's sure protection;
So he came unto his homestead,
Found his father, old Anchíses,
But his father would not listen.

“Here I stay,” Anchíses answered,
“Here I stay for I've been punished,
“Punished for my foolish boasting
“How with Venus I had coupled;
“Boasting though fair Venus warned me
“Gainst all boasting and all bragging.
“So I'm punished and must perish
“With the city as it crumbles;
“You are young; escape and leave me,
“Go and take your wife to exile,
“Take your son with you in exile,
“Take our household gods to exile;
“Leave me here in Troy to perish.”

Vain were all attempts to shift him;
Vain was all Aenéas' pleading;
Vain the prayers Creúsa uttered,
Vain the the pleas of young Iúlus,
Vain the pleas of all the household.
Then behold a wondrous portent:
Round Iúlus' head there flickered
Tongues of flames all brightly burning,
Flames which played about his temples,
Flames that caused the boy no harming.

Then Anchíses lifting heavenward
Eyes and hands this prayer did utter:
“Gods of homeland, good and gracious,
“This I ask, if we deserve it,
“Grant your aid, confirm this portent!”
Crash of thunder came from heaven,
Then they saw a star appearing,
Shooting cross the sky and trailing
Light behind it as it glided
From the palace to Mount Ida.
Then Anchíses was persuaded,
“Yea,” he said, “no more I linger.
“Gods, who have so clearly signalled,
“Guard our family as you guide us,
“Guard my grandson, young Iúlus,
“Him you favored with your portent.”

Thus at last the group departed,
Left behind the ruined city,
Left their native land for ever.
So Aenéas told his servants,
Where to meet outside the city,
Where once stood an ancient temple,
Temple sacred once to Ceres,
Now a mound, well hid, secluded,
Where still stood an ancient cypress.
“Go,” he said, “by different pathways,
“Go and neath the tree assemble.”
Then the servants each departed,
Going each by secret pathways;
Then upon his back Aenéas
Did his agèd father carry;
At his side the young Íulus
Held his father's hand for safety
As he walked beside his father.
And Creúsa walked behind them,
Marked their steps and followed closely.
As they neared the gates they panicked,
Thought 'twas footsteps they were hearing;
“Run,” Anchíses shouted, “hasten;
“For I see their shields and armour
“Winking in the flickering firelight.”
So they ran, their wits befuddled,
Ran through byways unfamiliar,
Ran until they'd cleared the city,
Till they reached the place secluded,
Till they reached the ancient cypress
Where by Ceres' mound they gathered.
There they found all were assembled,
All save one, all save Creúsa.
Then Aenéas struck with grieving
Cursed the Greeks and cursed all heaven.
He commended old Anchíses
To the care of faithful servants;
He commended young Íulus
And commended all the home-gods
To the care of faithful servants;
Donned his armor, grim, determined,
Back to Troy his steps retracing,
Sought his wife through ruined city,
Sought Creúsa through the looting,
Sought Creúsa mid the pillage;
Frenzied was his search and fruitless,
Till appeared Creúsa's phantom;
Ghost she was, a figure taller
Than she ever was when living.
She addressed her dumb-struck husband:

“Cease, dear husband; cease your grieving;
“Never was Creúsa fated
“To survive the fall of Troyland;
“But for you the gods predestined
“Exile till you reach Hespéria;
“There you'll prosper; there's your kingdom;
“There a royal bride is waiting.
“That's your destiny to follow.
“Grieve no more; I died in freedom –
“Never slave to Greek or looter.
“Be assured your kindly mother,
“Gentle Venus , now protects me
“Where in peace I'll rest for ever.
“Go, dear husband; let Iúlus
“Token of our love be cherished,
“Token of our love for ever.”

At these words Aenéas weeping
Tried to embrace Creúsa's phantom,
Thrice he tried to grasp the phantom,
Thrice in vain his arms embraced her;
Like a fleeting dream she'd vanished.
So Aenéas left the city,
Met again his faithful servants,
Met them as the day was dawning,
Greeted both his son and father,
Greeted too the many others,
Men and women, who'd assembled
Sorry refugees from Troyland.
So the band of exiles gathered,
Exiles who'd escaped the carnage,
Exiles who'd escaped the pillage,
Exiles from the fuming rubble.
Then the band of exiles started
Moving from the ancient cypress,
Moving to the sacred mountain,
To mount Ida south of Troyland,
There to start the destined journey
To Aenéas' promised kingdom,
As Creúsa had foretold him.