



## I Aeneas is Shipwrecked at Carthage

FROM high Olympus, hidden from the earth by cloud and mist, Juno was watching a line of ships creeping towards the coast of Italy. Tiny they looked, frail as insects, but Juno, Queen of the gods, raged in helpless fury, because these distant, fragile ships were stronger than all her hatred.

They were the ships from Troy. For seven years now they had been making their voyage, groping from one strange, unfriendly coast to another, in search of a new home. Troy was gone, burnt to the ground. Already weeds were beginning to cover its blackened ruins.

Troy was gone, but the Trojan race still clung to life, and Juno could not crush it. She hated these mortals with that bitter, brooding grudge that grows from injured pride, increasing all the more because it can never win.

She could never forget the judgement of Paris. Paris, son of old King Priam of Troy, had dared to overlook the queenly charms of Juno, and award the title of Most Beautiful to Venus, the goddess no man could resist. Juno had felt the insult deep within her. She vowed to punish Paris and all his Trojan race.

With glee she had watched the Greeks burn Troy, and take back the woman Paris had stolen. With relish she had

followed the Trojan survivors as they suffered a cruel voyage. But she could not enjoy the final triumph, the complete destruction of the people she hated. The Trojans were in the hand of Fate, and Fate was stronger than all the gods. So Juno nursed her anger, and waited.

To make matters worse, the survivors were led by Aeneas, the mortal son of that shameless creature, Venus herself. She had taken the Trojan Anchises as her lover, binding herself even more closely to the nation of Paris. Juno could see Aeneas, the son of Venus and Anchises, standing on the prow of the Trojan flagship, scanning the horizon for the first glimpse of his promised land.

She knew what Fate had decreed. This Aeneas would found a new settlement. Its people would grow great, a race mightier than Troy had ever been, rulers of the world. One day they would come to Carthage, Juno's own favourite city, and ravage it as cruelly as the Greeks had ravaged Troy. Juno could not prevent them.

Nevertheless she could try. Using the mysterious paths known only to the gods, she made her way to a faraway cave, the secret dwelling of the Wind-King.

"Mighty King of the Winds," Juno began, charming that lonely ruler with soft words and sweet smiles, although he could scarcely hear her above the howling and whistling of his turbulent subjects, "do one favour for me, and I shall reward you well. Some people I detest – never mind why – are sailing near the coast of Italy. Stir up your winds and order them to rouse a frightful storm, enough to wreck those ships and drown every man. I promise to give you any handmaid of mine you choose to be your bride."

The King's shadowed eyes gleamed for an instant, and the winds whirled away at his command.



Aboard the Trojan ships, there was no time for panic. Sails were ripped from their masts; the decks were a riot of rigging, timber, torn wineskins belching their contents, all mingled with sea-water and blood. There was a tearing and slapping of wet fabric, and the scream and crack of wood bent beyond the limit of its strength. The low, desperate babble of human confusion was broken now and then by the shriek of some poor creature crushed by a mast, or the shrill neighing of a horse swept overboard into the boiling sea.

Human wits and muscles could do nothing. Aeneas, his legs gripping a rocking ladder, raised his hands to the sky. "Why didn't we die in Troy?" he cried, but the words of his prayer were lost in the gale; the whole ship seemed to be wailing the same lament.

In the depths of the sea, the god Neptune was disturbed. Someone was tampering with his watery kingdom. At once he rose to the surface, exclaimed angrily at the scene, and stretched his calming trident over the waves. "Go back, you winds! Tell your king to rule his own domain. Leave me to mine!"

Over the smooth water seven of the Trojan ships limped to a nearby coast. Land, any land, was blessing enough – for the time being. The survivors, too exhausted to be happy at their good luck, too dazed to notice that thirteen ships were missing, lay almost lifeless on the sand.

Aeneas was the first to recover himself, but there was no joy or relief in his thoughts. "Again and again the gods make fun of us. Do they mean to starve us this time or have us butchered by savages? At least in Troy I could have had a hero's death." The memory of Troy brought back other sorrows, and Aeneas wept for his wife, lost in

the burning city, for his aged father, dead in Sicily, their last port of call, and for his little son, Iulus, probably drowned at sea.

All around him now people were stirring. As each saw how ragged and hopeless the others looked, and how desolate and strange was the land, a despairing silence came over the whole band. No one asked where the missing ships were, but all of them turned their eyes to Aeneas.

Somehow he managed to overcome his own despair: "Come on, everyone! Start collecting wood! Achates, how about a fire? Lend me your bow and arrows – I'm going to climb that rock to see if there's any game I can shoot for our dinner." Gratefully they obeyed him. Obviously, with Aeneas in such a confident mood, there was nothing to worry about.

One person, however, fully understood and shared the fear Aeneas was hiding from his men. High in the dwelling-place of the gods, his mother Venus was pleading with almighty Jupiter.

"Father, how can you let this happen? You promised a great future for my son Aeneas. Well, there he lies, cast away on an unfriendly shore, most of his ships missing, and all because of the spite of a certain goddess. Father, have you forgotten how he worships you and all the gods?"

Jupiter turned his far-seeing eyes away from the world of men, and smiled at his daughter's tears.

"Don't worry, my dear. Juno likes to stir up trouble, but there is nothing she can really change. I have seen the Fates and heard their decree. Your Aeneas will go on to found a great nation, the mightiest and most noble the mortal world has ever known. His home will be in the land

of Italy, where he will fight heroic battles and win for himself a kingdom and a royal bride. In years to come, his descendant – a youth called Romulus – will build a city and call it Rome. Even Juno will change her mind, and with the help of all the gods, the people of Rome will rule over all the world, including those Greeks who think they have put an end to Troy. They will have a mighty leader who will be called Caesar.”

On the beach, Aeneas’ men had eaten well. Their clothes had dried by the heat of the reassuring fire, and they looked forward to sleep. Aeneas stretched himself out to lie alongside them, but there was to be no easy rest for him. Over and over, the same questions tormented him: “What has happened to Iulus? Where are we? How long can we be safe from attack? It’s nearly winter – even if we can manage to repair our ships, will the weather let us sail?”

At first light Aeneas left his slumbering crew. He began to walk away from the sea, restlessly and with no clear purpose; but he was glad to be joined by his friend, Achates. They walked quickly, in silence, alert for any surprise attack.

There was a sudden rustling. Instantly they gripped their spears and stood ready, Aeneas a little in front. There was a moment’s pause, and then from the thicket stepped a beautiful young girl, dressed in a hunting outfit, and carrying two spears. She seemed unafraid: “Have you seen one of my sisters anywhere? She’s dressed like me.”

“No!” Aeneas heard his voice, sharp with relief. “No. We haven’t seen anyone. But please, before you go, tell us what this place is called. We are sailors, shipwrecked on this coast. We have no idea where we are.”

The girl did not seem surprised at all, and smiled. “You needn’t be afraid. No one will harm you here. This is the coast of Africa, a land full of barbaric tribes, but the kingdom hereabouts belongs to civilised people, settlers from Tyre. We are building a new city, called Carthage. Our leader is Queen Dido.”

“A woman!” Achates exclaimed. “In such a barbaric and dangerous land!”

“She is no ordinary woman, as you will see. Her brother Pygmalion was ruler in Tyre – the worst sort of tyrant. He secretly murdered Dido’s husband, in cold blood, by the family altar, and seized all their wealth. But the story goes that her husband’s ghost warned Dido to escape. She packed her possessions, organized her friends, and sailed many miles to this coast. Here she outwitted the tribal chiefs and tricked them into selling her a good plot of ground, enough to build a fine city. Many of the chiefs have asked for her hand in marriage, overcome by her beauty and wisdom, but she has sworn to remain true to her husband’s memory. But now, you must tell me who you are.”

Aeneas sighed, and began. “Our story has no happy ending. We are from Troy, a noble city, where King Priam once ruled a splendid empire. Perhaps you have heard of it? If you have, you would know that it is gone for ever, burnt to the ground by the Greeks. My name is Aeneas, of the royal house of Troy. People call me Aeneas the True, because I carried away from my burning home my aged father, and the statues of my household gods. We are – or rather, we were – making for a western land, called Italy, to found a new city. I had twenty ships under my command. We were in sight of Italy, a few hours would



have brought us there, when some malevolent god sent a terrible storm to destroy us. Thirteen of our ships are missing; the rest lie shattered on the beach. We have no hope of completing our voyage."

The girl had been listening with friendly sympathy, but now her manner became abrupt. "Nonsense! Your ships are quite safe! . . . Don't stare at me like that. I have some knowledge of signs from heaven. I suggest you go up to our city. I am sure the Queen will help you." She turned away, and as she did so, her figure seemed to become taller and more graceful and her hair shone about her head. Achates caught his breath at the miracle, but Aeneas only hid his face in his hands. "Mother," he cried, "why trick me like this? Why not speak to me openly, face to face?" But Venus was gone, with one parting gesture that swept a thick mist around Aeneas and his friend, making them invisible to human eyes.

The new city was a hive of industry. Everywhere buildings were being erected; workmen were clearing plots of ground, lifting blocks of stone, and chiselling fine sculptures. A noise of hammering and sawing filled the air. The Trojans gazed up at the walls already towering above them. Aeneas imagined such a city being built for his weary Trojans, and envied these refugees who had found a new home.

Most splendid of all was a huge temple, everywhere plated with shining bronze. It was Dido's special tribute to her guardian goddess, Juno. Aeneas ran his eyes over a frieze, carved in rich detail on the doors. He suddenly realized what it depicted: "Achates, look! It's our war! See, that must be Troy. And here's old Priam, and Hector, and our chariots! Oh, look here, that monster Achilles

dragging Hector's body . . ." Aeneas wept for his city and his friends, and wept to think that their sufferings were known even in this remote land.

Trumpets blasted, and there was a rush of excited citizens into the temple courtyard. Aeneas and Achates, invisible in their cloak of mist, watched in wonder as a procession of officials took up their positions. They were followed by other attendants in gold and purple robes, and slaves bearing a magnificent throne set on a high platform. Another trumpet-blast announced the arrival of the Queen. Dido appeared, royal not only in dress and bearing; she had all the radiant majesty of a goddess.

Aeneas had met many royal ladies in Troy. Hecuba had been a dignified and well-respected Queen, and her daughters had all been striking princesses much courted by young noblemen. No one in Troy had ever pretended, however, that they did much more than bring grace and gentleness into a world ruled and managed by men.

But here was Dido, judging and settling disputes, pronouncing in a sweet, firm voice verdicts which were instantly obeyed. Aeneas was struck with wonder and admiration. He was considering how best to approach such an unusual ruler, when a commotion amongst the crowd attracted his attention.

Officials were rapping out commands to a group of new arrivals, dirty miserable-looking wretches who were pushed before the throne. "Who are these men?" Dido demanded.

"Foreigners, your majesty. We thought it best to bring them to you at once."

"Of course. Who will speak for you, strangers?"

"I will!"

Aeneas, hardly believing it, recognised the voice of one

of his missing captains, Ilioneus: "Your gracious majesty, we are homeless refugees from Troy, sailing to a western land called Italy to found a new city. A storm drove us to your shores, where your guards arrested us and threatened to burn our ships. Stop them, we beg you! We are not criminals or pirates. Our leader was Aeneas, a noble prince, famous for his loyalty to the gods and his country, and a mighty warrior in battle. He must have perished in the storm. If you will help us, your majesty, we may still reach Italy, if that is the gods' will. If not, we could return to Sicily, where we have friends to welcome us. We are in your hands."

Ilioneus bowed, and the other Trojans murmured in agreement. Dido did not hesitate, but rose and signed to the guards to release them. "Have no fear, my friends. I know exactly how you feel. I, too, have been a refugee. We have all heard of Troy, and of the courage of your people, and of your great leader, Aeneas. I will give you all the help you need. If you decide to sail, I will make sure your ships are repaired, and send you under escort to Italy, or Sicily, or wherever you like. If you prefer to stay here, you may live freely in Carthage and share our city. I will give orders for a search to be made for Aeneas. Perhaps he is still alive, lost somewhere on the shores of our kingdom."

This was too much for Aeneas and Achates. They rushed forward, and their cloak of mist melted away. With an invisible hand, the goddess Venus poured vigour and grace over Aeneas, so that he stepped out of the crowd, tall and straight, with shining hair and eyes, and the fresh, untroubled features of a god. "I am here – Aeneas of Troy! Madam, you have given us back our hopes. If ever we can,

we will repay you for your kindness, but even if we can never do so, may the gods bless you and all your people for the way you have received us!"

The next moment there was eager hand-shaking and delighted questioning and cries of relief and joy. Dido, astonished at first, laughed with pleasure at the happy scene of reunion, and the people of Carthage, too, caught the mood and broke out in cheers and applause.

"Sir," Dido said at last, extending her hand, "I am delighted to see you safe. My kingdom is at your disposal. Please make yourself at home. I should be honoured if you would join me at dinner tonight. We have heard many tales of Troy and of your valiant deeds, Aeneas. I am most anxious to hear them from your own lips. All of you are welcome, gentlemen."

Aeneas found himself being escorted into the temple, where Dido offered prayers of thanksgiving to the gods. Down by the ships, the sailors were amazed by the immediate delivery of every kind of food, abundant wine from the royal cellars, and clothing to outfit the whole crew like princes.

Aeneas could not wait to see his little son. He sent Achates to bring the boy at once to Dido's palace, together with some gifts of jewellery and silks rescued from the ruins of Troy and luckily saved in the shipwreck.

Venus had been watching these developments from afar, partly content, partly fearful. She knew that Carthage was a city dedicated to Juno. How long would it be before Dido's hospitality wore thin, and Juno caused her to plot some cruel end for Aeneas? It would be safer to bind Dido more closely to Aeneas. So Venus called to her other son, the little god of Love.

"Come, Cupid," she said, "I have a very important task for you. You are just about the same size as my little grandson, Iulus. I want you to take his place at Dido's banquet tonight. As soon as you get the chance, you must pierce her heart with one of your magic arrows, so that she can think of nothing else but a desperate love for Aeneas."

Venus waited for the right moment; she plucked Iulus up, and carried him, wrapped in gentle sleep, to a secret and beautiful place far away. Achates escorted Cupid, now looking exactly like the young prince, to Dido's palace, along with the gifts Aeneas had requested.

"So this is your son, Aeneas. What a handsome boy, with the makings of a noble warrior. You said his name was Iulus?" Dido lifted the child on to her knee.

"That is his name, though at home we often called him Ascanius. Give the Queen a kiss, son. We owe our lives to her."

The feast began. Servants handed the guests garlands for their heads, and scented water to wash their hands. Sweet music played, and course after course was carried in, displayed on platters of exquisite design. Aeneas and his officers savoured every morsel of the food set before them, eagerly drank the rich wine, and began to forget the years of hardship and sorrow.

Dido sat with the child on her knee, and found herself more and more entranced by the sight of Aeneas. The image of her late husband, which had haunted her thoughts day and night, began to blur and fade. Again and again, she called for a toast, her conversation sparkled with wit, and she applauded the musicians heartily and often. Courtiers began to remark under their breath that the Queen looked particularly bright and happy tonight.



The hour grew late, but still Dido talked, asking how Priam and Hector had died, wanting to know every detail of Achilles' chariot, every feature of Helen's beauty: "Speak, Aeneas. I want to know it all from the very beginning. Tell us what happened, from the day you left Troy. Leave nothing out. I must hear every one of your adventures, every single moment of your marvellous story. Come, begin."