All of Book II of the *Aeneid* is a prequel to the main events of the epic. Aeneas and his men have landed, exhausted and storm-beaten, in Carthage and have been welcomed by the beautiful queen Dido. Dido asks Aeneas to tell the story of the fall of Troy and he reluctantly agrees to do so. He begins by explaining how the devious Greek Sinon tried to convince the Trojans to let a huge horse built by the Greeks within their walls; Sinon claimed that the horse would bring the Trojans luck. They hesitated but were convinced by what they interpreted as a powerful omen.

**BkII:195-227 Laocoön and the Serpents**

Through these tricks and the skill of perjured Sinon, the thing was credited, and we were trapped, by his wiliness, and false tears, we, who were not conquered by Diomede, or Larissan Achilles, nor by the ten years of war, nor those thousand ships. Then something greater and more terrible befalls us wretches, and stirs our unsuspecting souls. Laocoön, chosen by lot as priest of Neptune, was sacrificing a huge bull at the customary altar. See, a pair of serpents with huge coils, snaking over the sea from Tenedos through the tranquil deep (I shudder to tell it), and heading for the shore side by side: their fronts lift high over the tide, and their blood-red crests top the waves, the rest of their body slides through the ocean behind, and their huge backs arch in voluminous folds. There’s a roar from the foaming sea: now they reach the shore, and with burning eyes suffused with blood and fire, lick at their hissing jaws with flickering tongues. Blanching at the sight we scatter. They move on a set course towards Laocoön: and first each serpent entwines the slender bodies of his two sons, and biting at them, devours their wretched limbs: then as he comes to their aid, weapons in hand, they seize him too, and wreathe him in massive coils: now encircling his waist twice,
twice winding their scaly folds around his throat,
their high necks and heads tower above him.
He strains to burst the knots with his hands,
his sacred headband drenched in blood and dark venom,
while he sends terrible shouts up to the heavens,
like the bellowing of a bull that has fled wounded,
from the altar, shaking the useless axe from its neck.
But the serpent pair escape, slithering away to the high temple,
and seek the stronghold of fierce Pallas, to hide there
under the goddess’s feet, and the circle of her shield.

BkII:228-253 The Horse Enters Troy

Then in truth a strange terror steals through each shuddering heart,
and they say that Laocoön has justly suffered for his crime
in wounding the sacred oak-tree with his spear,
by hurling its wicked shaft into the trunk.
“Pull the statue to her house”, they shout,
“and offer prayers to the goddess’s divinity.”
We breached the wall, and opened up the defences of the city.
All prepare themselves for the work and they set up wheels
allowing movement under its feet, and stretch hemp ropes
round its neck. That engine of fate mounts our walls
pregnant with armed men. Around it boys, and virgin girls,
sing sacred songs, and delight in touching their hands to the ropes:
Up it glides and rolls threateningly into the midst of the city.
O my country, O Ilium house of the gods, and you,
Trojan walls famous in war! Four times it sticks at the threshold
of the gates, and four times the weapons clash in its belly:
yet we press on regardless, blind with frenzy,
and site the accursed creature on top of our sacred citadel.
Even then Cassandra, who, by the god’s decree, is never
to be believed by Trojans, reveals our future fate with her lips.
We unfortunate ones, for whom that day is our last,
clothe the gods’ temples, throughout the city, with festive branches.
Meanwhile the heavens turn, and night rushes from the Ocean,
wrapping the earth, and sky, and the Myrmidons’ tricks,
in its vast shadow: through the city the Trojans
fall silent: sleep enfolds their weary limbs.
BkII:254-297 The Greeks Take the City

And now the Greek phalanx of battle-ready ships sailed from Tenedos, in the benign stillness of the silent moon, seeking the known shore, when the royal galley raised a torch, and Sinon, protected by the gods’ unjust doom, sets free the Greeks imprisoned by planks of pine, in the horses’ belly. Opened, it releases them to the air, and sliding down a lowered rope, Thessandrus, and Sthenelus, the leaders, and fatal Ulysses, emerge joyfully from their wooden cave, with Acamas, Thoas, Peleus’s son Neoptolemus, the noble Machaon, Menelaus, and Epeus who himself devised this trick. They invade the city that’s drowned in sleep and wine, kill the watchmen, welcome their comrades at the open gates, and link their clandestine ranks.

It was the hour when first sleep begins for weary mortals, and steals over them as the sweetest gift of the gods. See, in dream, before my eyes, Hector seemed to stand there, saddest of all and pouring out great tears, torn by the chariot, as once he was, black with bloody dust, and his swollen feet pierced by the thongs.
Ah, how he looked! How changed he was
from that Hector who returned wearing Achilles’s armour,
or who set Trojan flames to the Greek ships! His beard was ragged,
his hair matted with blood, bearing those many wounds he received
dragged around the walls of his city.
And I seemed to weep myself, calling out to him,
and speaking to him in words of sorrow:
“Oh light of the Troad, surest hope of the Trojans,
what has so delayed you? What shore do you come from
Hector, the long-awaited? Weary from the many troubles
of our people and our city I see you, oh, after the death
of so many of your kin! What shameful events have marred
that clear face? And why do I see these wounds?’
He does not reply, nor does he wait on my idle questions,
but dragging heavy sighs from the depths of his heart, he says:
“Ah! Son of the goddess, fly, tear yourself from the flames.
The enemy has taken the walls: Troy falls from her high place.
Enough has been given to Priam and your country: if Pergama
could be saved by any hand, it would have been saved by this.
Troy entrusts her sacred relics and household gods to you:
take them as friends of your fate, seek mighty walls for them,
those you will found at last when you have wandered the seas.”
So he speaks, and brings the sacred headbands in his hands from the innermost shrine, potent Vesta, and the undying flame.

**BkII:298-354 Aeneas Gathers his Comrades**

Meanwhile the city is confused with grief, on every side, and though my father Anchises’s house is remote, secluded and hidden by trees, the sounds grow clearer and clearer, and the terror of war sweeps upon it.

I shake off sleep, and climb to the highest roof-top, and stand there with ears strained:

as when fire attacks a wheat-field when the south-wind rages, or the rushing torrent from a mountain stream covers the fields, drowns the ripe crops, the labour of oxen, and brings down the trees headlong, and the dazed shepherd, unaware, hears the echo from a high rocky peak.

Now the truth is obvious, and the Greek plot revealed.

Now the vast hall of Deiphobus is given to ruin the fire over it: now Ucalegon’s nearby blazes: the wide Sigean straits throw back the glare.

Then the clamour of men and the blare of trumpets rises.

Frantically I seize weapons: not because there is much use for weapons, but my spirit burns to gather men for battle
and race to the citadel with my friends: madness and anger
hurl my mind headlong, and I think it beautiful to die fighting.
Now, see, Panthus escaping the Greek spears,
Panthus, son of Othrys, Apollo’s priest on the citadel,
dragging along with his own hands the sacred relics,
the conquered gods, his little grandchild, running frantically
to my door: “Where’s the best advantage, Panthus, what position
should we take?” I’d barely spoken, when he answered
with a groan: “The last day comes, Troy’s inescapable hour.
Troy is past, Ilium is past, and the great glory of the Trojans:
Jupiter carries all to Argos: the Greeks are lords of the burning city.
The horse, standing high on the ramparts, pours out warriors,
and Sinon the conqueror exultantly stirs the flames.
Others are at the wide-open gates, as many thousands
as ever came from great Mycenae: more have blocked
the narrow streets with hostile weapons:
a line of standing steel with naked flickering blades
is ready for the slaughter: barely the first few guards
at the gates attempt to fight, and they resist in blind conflict.”
By these words from Othrys’ son, and divine will, I’m thrust
amongst the weapons and the flames, where the dismal Fury
sounds, and the roar, and the clamour rising to the sky.
Friends joined me, visible in the moonlight, Ripheus, and Epytus, mighty in battle, Hypanis and Dymas, gathered to my side, and young Coroebus, Mygdon’s son: by chance he’d arrived in Troy at that time, burning with mad love for Cassandra, and brought help, as a potential son-in-law, to Priam, and the Trojans, unlucky man, who didn’t listen to the prophecy of his frenzied bride! When I saw them crowded there eager for battle, I began as follows: “Warriors, bravest of frustrated spirits, if your ardent desire is fixed on following me to the end, you can see our cause’s fate. All the gods by whom this empire was supported have departed, leaving behind their temples and their altars: you aid a burning city: let us die and rush into battle. The beaten have one refuge, to have no hope of refuge.”

BkII:355-401 Aeneas and his Friends Resist

So their young spirits were roused to fury. Then, like ravaging wolves in a dark mist, driven blindly by the cruel rage of their bellies, leaving their young waiting with thirsty jaws, we pass through our enemies, to certain death, and make our way
to the heart of the city: dark night envelops us in deep shadow.

Who could tell of that destruction in words, or equal our pain with tears? The ancient city falls, she who ruled for so many years: crowds of dead bodies lie here and there in the streets, among the houses, and on the sacred thresholds of the gods.

Nor is it Trojans alone who pay the penalty with their blood: courage returns at times to the hearts of the defeated and the Greek conquerors die. Cruel mourning is everywhere, everywhere there is panic, and many a form of death.

First, Androgeos, meets us, with a great crowd of Greeks around him, unknowingly thinking us allied troops, and calls to us in friendly speech as well:

“Hurry, men! What sluggishness makes you delay so?
The others are raping and plundering burning Troy: are you only now arriving from the tall ships?”

He spoke, and straight away (since no reply given was credible enough) he knew he’d fallen into the enemy fold.

He was stunned, drew back, and stifled his voice.

Like a man who unexpectedly treads on a snake in rough briars, as he strides over the ground, and shrinks back in sudden fear as it rears in anger and swells its dark-green neck, so Androgeos, shuddering at the sight of us, drew back.
We charge forward and surround them closely with weapons,
and ignorant of the place, seized by terror, as they are, we slaughter
them wholesale. Fortune favours our first efforts.
And at this Coroebus, exultant with courage and success, cries:
“Oh my friends, where fortune first points out the path to safety,
and shows herself a friend, let us follow. Let’s change our shields
adopt Greek emblems. Courage or deceit: who’ll question it in war?
They’ll arm us themselves.” With these words, he takes up Androgeos’s
plumed helmet, his shield with its noble markings,
and straps the Greek’s sword to his side. Ripheus does likewise,
Dymas too, and all the warriors delight in it. Each man
arms himself with the fresh spoils. We pass on
mingling with the Greeks, with gods that are not our known,
and clash, in many an armed encounter, in the blind night,
and we send many a Greek down to Orcus.
Some scatter to the ships, and run for safer shores,
some, in humiliated terror, climb the vast horse again
and hide in the womb they know.

**BkII:402-437 Cassandra is Taken**

“Ah, put no faith in anything the will of the gods opposes!
See, Priam’s virgin daughter dragged, with streaming hair,
from the sanctuary and temple of Minerva,
lifting her burning eyes to heaven in vain:
her eyes, since cords restrained her gentle hands.
Coroebus could not stand the sight, maddened in mind,
and hurled himself among the ranks, seeking death.
We follow him, and, weapons locked, charge together.
Here, at first, we were overwhelmed by Trojan spears,
hurled from the high summit of the temple,
and wretched slaughter was caused by the look of our armour,
and the confusion arising from our Greek crests.
Then the Danaans, gathering from all sides, groaning with anger
at the girl being pulled away from them, rush us,
Ajax the fiercest, the two Atrides, all the Greek host:
just as, at the onset of a tempest, conflicting winds clash, the west,
the south, and the east that joys in the horses of dawn:
the forest roars, brine-wet Nereus rages with his trident,
and stirs the waters from their lowest depths.
Even those we have scattered by a ruse, in the dark of night,
and driven right through the city, re-appear: for the first time
they recognise our shields and deceitful weapons,
and realise our speech differs in sound to theirs.
In a moment we’re overwhelmed by weight of numbers:  

first Coroebus falls, by the armed goddess’s altar, at the hands 
of Peneleus: and Ripheus, who was the most just of all the Trojans, 
and keenest for what was right (the gods’ vision was otherwise): 

Hypanis and Dymas die at the hands of allies: 
and your great piety, Panthus, and Apollo’s sacred headband 
can not defend you in your downfall. 

Ashes of Ilium, death flames of my people, be witness 
that, at your ruin, I did not evade the Danaan weapons, 

nor the risks, and, if it had been my fate to die, 

I earned it with my sword. Then we are separated, 

Iphitus and Pelias with me, Iphitus weighed down by the years, 

and Pelias, slow-footed, wounded by Ulysses: 

immediately we’re summoned to Priam’s palace by the clamour. 

BkII:438-485 The Battle for the Palace

Here’s a great battle indeed, as if the rest of the war were nothing, 
as if others were not dying throughout the whole city, 

so we see wild War and the Greeks rushing to the palace, 

and the entrance filled with a press of shields. 

Ladders cling to the walls: men climb the stairs under the very
doorposts, with their left hands holding defensive shields
against the spears, grasping the sloping stone with their right.
In turn, the Trojans pull down the turrets and roof-tiles
of the halls, prepared to defend themselves even in death,
seeing the end near them, with these as weapons:
and send the gilded roof-beams down, the glory
of their ancient fathers. Others with naked swords block
the inner doors: these they defend in massed ranks.
Our spirits were reinspired, to bring help to the king’s palace,
to relieve our warriors with our aid, and add power to the beaten.
There was an entrance with hidden doors, and a passage in use
between Priam’s halls, and a secluded gateway beyond,
which the unfortunate Andromache, while the kingdom stood,
often used to traverse, going, unattended, to her husband’s parents,
taking the little Astyanax to his grandfather.
I reached the topmost heights of the pediment from which
the wretched Trojans were hurling their missiles in vain.
A turret standing on the sloping edge, and rising from the roof
to the sky, was one from which all Troy could be seen,
the Danaan ships, and the Greek camp: and attacking its edges
with our swords, where the upper levels offered weaker mortar,
we wrenched it from its high place, and sent it flying:
falling suddenly it dragged all to ruin with a roar, 
and shattered far and wide over the Greek ranks. 
But more arrived, and meanwhile neither the stones 
or any of the various missiles ceased to fly. 
In front of the courtyard itself, in the very doorway of the palace, 
Pyrrhus exults, glittering with the sheen of bronze: 
like a snake, fed on poisonous herbs, in the light, 
that cold winter has held, swollen, under the ground, 
and now, gleaming with youth, its skin sloughed, 
ripples its slimy back, lifts its front high towards the sun, 
and darts its triple-forked tongue from its jaws. 
Huge Periphas, and Automedon the armour-bearer, 
driver of Achilles’s team, and all the Scyrian youths, 
advance on the palace together and hurl firebrands onto the roof. 
Pyrrhus himself among the front ranks, clutching a double-axe, 
breaks through the stubborn gate, and pulls the bronze doors 
from their hinges: and now, hewing out the timber, he breaches 
the solid oak and opens a huge window with a gaping mouth. 
The palace within appears, and the long halls are revealed: 
the inner sanctums of Priam, and the ancient kings, appear, 
and armed men are seen standing on the very threshold.
BkII:486-558 Priam’s Fate

But, inside the palace, groans mingle with sad confusion,
and, deep within, the hollow halls howl
with women’s cries: the clamour strikes the golden stars.
Trembling mothers wander the vast building, clasping
the doorposts, and placing kisses on them. Pyrrhus drives forward,
with his father Achilles’s strength, no barricades nor the guards
themselves can stop him: the door collapses under the ram’s blows,
and the posts collapse, wrenched from their sockets.
Strength makes a road: the Greeks, pour through, force a passage,
slaughter the front ranks, and fill the wide space with their men.
A foaming river is not so furious, when it floods,
bursting its banks, overwhelmss the barriers against it,
and rages in a mass through the fields, sweeping cattle and stables
across the whole plain. I saw Pyrrhus myself, on the threshold,
mad with slaughter, and the two sons of Atreus:
I saw Hecuba, her hundred women, and Priam at the altars,
polluting with blood the flames that he himself had sanctified.
Those fifty chambers, the promise of so many offspring,
the doorposts, rich with spoils of barbarian gold,
crash down: the Greeks possess what the fire spares.
And maybe you ask, what was Priam’s fate.

When he saw the end of the captive city, the palace doors wrenched away, and the enemy among the inner rooms, the aged man clasped his long-neglected armour on his old, trembling shoulders, and fastened on his useless sword, and hurried into the thick of the enemy seeking death.

In the centre of the halls, and under the sky’s naked arch, was a large altar, with an ancient laurel nearby, that leant on the altar, and clothed the household gods with shade.

Here Hecuba, and her daughters, like doves driven by a dark storm, crouched uselessly by the shrines, huddled together, clutching at the statues of the gods.

And when she saw Priam himself dressed in youthful armour she cried: “What mad thought, poor husband, urges you to fasten on these weapons? Where do you run?

The hour demands no such help, nor defences such as these, not if my own Hector were here himself. Here, I beg you, this altar will protect us all or we’ll die together.”

So she spoke and drew the old man towards her, and set him down on the sacred steps.

See, Polites, one of Priam’s sons, escaping Pyrrhus’s slaughter, runs down the long hallways, through enemies and spears,
and, wounded, crosses the empty courts.

Pyrrhus chases after him, eager to strike him,

and grasps at him now, and now, with his hand, at spear-point.

When finally he reached the eyes and gaze of his parents,

he fell, and poured out his life in a river of blood.

Priam, though even now in death’s clutches,

did not spare his voice at this, or hold back his anger:

“If there is any justice in heaven, that cares about such things,

may the gods repay you with fit thanks, and due reward

for your wickedness, for such acts, you who have

made me see my own son’s death in front of my face,

and defiled a father’s sight with murder.

Yet Achilles, whose son you falsely claim to be, was no

such enemy to Priam: he respected the suppliant’s rights,

and honour, and returned Hector’s bloodless corpse

to its sepulchre, and sent me home to my kingdom.”

So the old man spoke, and threw his ineffectual spear

without strength, which immediately spun from the clanging bronze

and hung uselessly from the centre of the shield’s boss.

Pyrrhus spoke to him: “Then you can be messenger, carry

the news to my father, to Peleus’s son: remember to tell him

of degenerate Pyrrhus, and of my sad actions:
now die.” Saying this he dragged him, trembling,
and slithering in the pool of his son’s blood, to the very altar,
and twined his left hand in his hair, raised the glittering sword
in his right, and buried it to the hilt in his side.
This was the end of Priam’s life: this was the death that fell to him
by lot, seeing Troy ablaze and its citadel toppled, he who was
once the magnificent ruler of so many Asian lands and peoples.
A once mighty body lies on the shore, the head
shorn from its shoulders, a corpse without a name.

BkII:559-587 Aeneas Sees Helen

Then for the first time a wild terror gripped me.
I stood amazed: my dear father’s image rose before me
as I saw a king, of like age, with a cruel wound,
breathing his life away: and my Creusa, forlorn,
and the ransacked house, and the fate of little Iulus.
I looked back, and considered the troops that were round me.
They had all left me, wearied, and hurled their bodies to earth,
or sick with misery dropped into the flames.
So I was alone now, when I saw the daughter of Tyndareus,
Helen, close to Vesta’s portal, hiding silently
in the secret shrine: the bright flames gave me light,
as I wandered, gazing everywhere, randomly.
Afraid of Trojans angered at the fall of Troy,
Greek vengeance, and the fury of a husband she deserted,
she, the mutual curse of Troy and her own country,
had concealed herself and crouched, a hated thing, by the altars.
Fire blazed in my spirit: anger rose to avenge my fallen land,
and to exact the punishment for her wickedness.
“Shall she, unharmed, see Sparta again and her native Mycenae,
and see her house and husband, parents and children,
and go in the triumphant role of a queen,
attended by a crowd of Trojan women and Phrygian servants?
When Priam has been put to the sword? Troy consumed with fire?
The Dardanian shore soaked again and again with blood?
No. Though there’s no great glory in a woman’s punishment,
and such a conquest wins no praise, still I will be praised
for extinguishing wickedness and exacting well-earned
punishment, and I’ll delight in having filled my soul
with the flame of revenge, and appeased my people’s ashes.”

BkII:588-623 Aeneas is Visited by his Mother Venus
I blurted out these words, and was rushing on with raging mind, when my dear mother came to my vision, never before so bright to my eyes, shining with pure light in the night, goddess for sure, such as she may be seen by the gods, and taking me by the right hand, stopped me, and, then, imparted these words to me from her rose-tinted lips:

“My son, what pain stirs such uncontrollable anger? Why this rage? Where has your care for what is ours vanished? First will you not see whether Creusa, your wife, and your child Ascanius still live, and where you have left your father Anchises worn-out with age? The Greek ranks surround them on all sides, and if my love did not protect them, the flames would have caught them before now, and the enemy swords drunk of their blood.

You do not hate the face of the Spartan daughter of Tyndareus, nor is Paris to blame: the ruthlessness of the gods, of the gods, brought down this power, and toppled Troy from its heights.

See (for I’ll tear away all the mist that now, shrouding your sight, dims your mortal vision, and darkens everything with moisture: don’t be afraid of what your mother commands, or refuse to obey her wisdom): here, where you see shattered heaps of stone torn from stone, and smoke billowing mixed with dust, Neptune is shaking the walls, and the foundations, stirred
by his mighty trident, and tearing the whole city up by its roots.

There, Juno, the fiercest, is first to take the Scaean Gate, and, sword at her side, calls on her troops from the ships, in rage.

Now, see, Tritonian Pallas, standing on the highest towers, sending lightning from the storm-cloud, and her grim Gorgon breastplate. Father Jupiter himself supplies the Greeks with courage, and fortunate strength, himself excites the gods against the Trojan army. Hurry your departure, son, and put an end to your efforts. I will not leave you, and I will place you safe at your father’s door.” She spoke, and hid herself in the dense shadows of night. Dreadful shapes appeared, and the vast powers of gods opposed to Troy.

BkII:624-670 Aeneas Finds his Family

Then in truth all Ilium seemed to me to sink in flames,
and Neptune’s Troy was toppled from her base:
just as when foresters on the mountain heights compete to uproot an ancient ash tree, struck time and again by axe and blade, it threatens continually to fall, with trembling foliage and shivering crown,
till gradually vanquished by the blows it groans at last,
and torn from the ridge, crashes down in ruin.

I descend, and, led by a goddess, am freed from flames
and enemies: the spears give way, and the flames recede.

And now, when I reached the threshold of my father’s house,
and my former home, my father, whom it was my first desire
to carry into the high mountains, and whom I first sought out,
refused to extend his life or endure exile, since Troy had fallen.

“Oh, you,” he cried, “whose blood has the vigour of youth,
and whose power is unimpaired in its force, it’s for you
to take flight. As for me, if the gods had wished to lengthen
the thread of my life, they’d have spared my house. It is
more than enough that I saw one destruction, and survived
one taking of the city. Depart, saying farewell to my body
lying here so, yes so. I shall find death with my own hand:
the enemy will pity me, and look for plunder. The loss
of my burial is nothing. Clinging to old age for so long,
I am useless, and hated by the gods, ever since
the father of the gods and ruler of men breathed the winds
of his lightning-bolt onto me, and touched me with fire.”

So he persisted in saying, and remained adamant.

We, on our side, Creusa, my wife, and Ascanius, all our household,
weeping bitterly, determined that he should not destroy everything
along with himself, and crush us by urging our doom.
He refused and clung to his place and his purpose.
I hurried to my weapons again, and, miserably, longed for death,
since what tactic or opportunity was open to us now?
“Did you think I could leave you, father, and depart?
Did such sinful words fall from your lips?
If it pleases the gods to leave nothing of our great city standing,
if this is set in your mind, if it delights you to add yourself
and all that’s yours to the ruins of Troy, the door is open
to that death: soon Pyrrhus comes, drenched in Priam’s blood,
he who butchers the son in front of the father, the father at the altar.
Kind mother, did you rescue me from fire and sword
for this, to see the enemy in the depths of my house,
and Ascanius, and my father, and Creusa, slaughtered,
thrown together in a heap, in one another’s blood?
Weapons men, bring weapons: the last day calls to the defeated.
Lead me to the Greeks again: let me revisit the battle anew.
This day we shall not all perish unavenged.”

BkII:671-704 The Omen

So, again, I fasten on my sword, slip my left arm
into the shield’s strap, adjust it, and rush from the house.

But see, my wife clings to the threshold, clasps my foot, and holds little Iulus up towards his father:

“If you go to die, take us with you too, at all costs: but if as you’ve proved you trust in the weapons you wear, defend this house first. To whom do you abandon little Iulus, and your father, and me, I who was once spoken of as your wife?”

Crying out like this she filled the whole house with her groans, when suddenly a wonder, marvellous to speak of, occurred. See, between the hands and faces of his grieving parents, a gentle light seemed to shine from the crown of Iulus’s head, and a soft flame, harmless in its touch, licked at his hair, and grazed his forehead.

Trembling with fear, we hurry to flick away the blazing strands, and extinguish the sacred fires with water.

But Anchises, my father, lifts his eyes to the heavens, in delight, and raises his hands and voice to the sky:

“All-powerful Jupiter, if you’re moved by any prayers, see us, and, grant but this: if we are worthy through our virtue, show us a sign of it, Father, and confirm your omen.”

The old man had barely spoken when, with a sudden crash, it thundered on the left, and a star, through the darkness,
slid from the sky, and flew, trailing fire, in a burst of light.

We watched it glide over the highest rooftops,

and bury its brightness, and the sign of its passage,

in the forests of Mount Ida: then the furrow of its long track
gave out a glow, and, all around, the place smoked with sulphur.

At this my father, truly overcome, raised himself towards the sky,

and spoke to the gods, and proclaimed the sacred star.

“Now no delay: I follow, and where you lead, there am I.

Gods of my fathers, save my line, save my grandson.

This omen is yours, and Troy is in your divine power.

I accept, my son, and I will not refuse to go with you.”

BkII:705-729 Aeneas and his Family Leave Troy

He speaks, and now the fire is more audible,

through the city, and the blaze rolls its tide nearer.

“Come then, dear father, clasp my neck: I will

carry you on my shoulders: that task won’t weigh on me.

Whatever may happen, it will be for us both, the same shared risk,

and the same salvation. Let little Iulus come with me,

and let my wife follow our footsteps at a distance.

You servants, give your attention to what I’m saying.
At the entrance to the city there’s a mound, an ancient temple of forsaken Ceres, and a venerable cypress nearby, protected through the years by the reverence of our fathers: let’s head to that one place by diverse paths.

You, father, take the sacred objects, and our country’s gods, in your hands: until I’ve washed in running water, it would be a sin for me, coming from such fighting and recent slaughter, to touch them.” So saying, bowing my neck, I spread a cloak made of a tawny lion’s hide over my broad shoulders, and bend to the task: little Iulus clasps his hand in mine, and follows his father’s longer strides.

My wife walks behind. We walk on through the shadows of places, and I whom till then no shower of spears, nor crowd of Greeks in hostile array, could move, now I’m terrified by every breeze, and startled by every noise, anxious, and fearful equally for my companion and my burden.
And now I was near the gates, and thought I had completed my journey, when suddenly the sound of approaching feet filled my hearing, and, peering through the darkness, my father cried: “My son, run my son, they are near us: I see their glittering shields and gleaming bronze.”

Some hostile power, at this, scattered my muddled wits. for while I was following alleyways, and straying from the region of streets we knew, did my wife Creusa halt, snatched away from me by wretched fate?

Or did she wander from the path or collapse with weariness?

Who knows? She was never restored to our sight, nor did I look back for my lost one, or cast a thought behind me, until we came to the mound, and ancient Ceres’s sacred place. Here when all were gathered together at last, one was missing, and had escaped the notice of friends, child and husband.

What man or god did I not accuse in my madness: what did I know of in the city’s fall crueller than this?

I place Ascanius, and my father Anchises, and the gods of Troy, in my companions’ care, and conceal them in a winding valley:
I myself seek the city once more, and take up my shining armour.

I’m determined to incur every risk again, and retrace
all Troy, and once more expose my life to danger.

First I look for the wall, and the dark threshold of the gate
from which my path led, and I retrace the landmarks
of my course in the night, scanning them with my eye.

Everywhere the terror in my heart, and the silence itself,
dismay me. Then I take myself homewards, in case
by chance, by some chance, she has made her way there.

The Greeks have invaded, and occupied, the whole house.

Suddenly eager fire, rolls over the rooftop, in the wind:
the flames take hold, the blaze rages to the heavens.

I pass by and see again Priam’s palace and the citadel.

Now Phoenix, and fatal Ulysses, the chosen guards, watch over
the spoils, in the empty courts of Juno’s sanctuary.

Here the Trojan treasures are gathered from every part,
ripped from the blazing shrines, tables of the gods,
solid gold bowls, and plundered robes.

Mothers and trembling sons stand round in long ranks.

I even dared to hurl my shouts through the shadows,
filling the streets with my clamour, and in my misery,
redoubling my useless cries, again and again.
Searching, and raging endlessly among the city roofs,
the unhappy ghost and true shadow of Creusa
appeared before my eyes, in a form greater than I’d known.
I was dumbfounded, my hair stood on end, and my voice
stuck in my throat. Then she spoke and with these words
mitigated my distress: “Oh sweet husband, what use is it
to indulge in such mad grief? This has not happened
without the divine will: neither its laws nor the ruler
of great Olympus let you take Creusa with you,
away from here. Yours is long exile, you must plough
a vast reach of sea: and you will come to Hesperia’s land,
where Lydian Tiber flows in gentle course among the farmers’
rich fields. There, happiness, kingship and a royal wife
will be yours. Banish these tears for your beloved Creusa.
I, a Trojan woman, and daughter-in-law to divine Venus,
shall never see the noble halls of the Dolopians,
or Myrmidons, or go as slave to some Greek wife:
instead the great mother of the gods keeps me on this shore.
Now farewell, and preserve your love for the son we share.”
When she had spoken these words, leaving me weeping
and wanting to say so many things, she faded into thin air.
Three times I tried to throw my arms about her neck:
three times her form fled my hands, clasped in vain,
like the light breeze, most of all like a winged dream.
So at last when night was done, I returned to my friends.

BkII:796-804 Aeneas Leaves Troy
And here, amazed, I found that a great number of new companions had streamed in, women and men,
a crowd gathering for exile, a wretched throng.
They had come from all sides, ready, with courage and wealth,
for whatever land I wished to lead them to, across the seas.
And now Lucifer was rising above the heights of Ida,
bringing the dawn, and the Greeks held the barricaded entrances to the gates, nor was there any hope of rescue.
I desisted, and, carrying my father, took to the hills.

End of Book II