

DIDO TO AENEAS

Dardanian, receive this song of dying Elissa:
what you read are the last words written by me.
At fate's call, the white swan, despondent on the grass,
sings, like this, to the waters of Maeander.
I do not speak because I hope to move you with prayers:
I offer up my prayers to a hostile god!

(...)

You're still determined to go, abandoning wretched Dido,
and the same wind will carry off your sails and promises.
Aeneas, you're determined to break your pledge, loose
your ships, to seek domains in Italy, where, you do not
know.

You are not moved by New Carthage, its growing walls,
or the supreme power entrusted to you by the sceptre.
You flee what's done, you seek what is to do: yet searching
for another kingdom in the world, it's already found.
If you reach that country, who'd surrender it to you?
Who'd give possession of his fields to an unknown?
Another love's in store for you, another Dido,
and another pledge being given, you'll again deceive.
Where might you create a city as good as Carthage,
and look out on your people from its high fortress?
If it all came to pass, and the gods did not delay your
hopes,
where would you find a wife, to love you like this?

(...)

My sleepless eyes cling, always, to Aeneas:
I've Aeneas in my mind day and night.
It's true that he's ungrateful, and silent about my gifts,
and if I weren't a fool, I'd wish to be free.
yet I don't hate Aeneas, though he might think badly of me,
though I complain of his treachery, still I love him more.

(...)

why do you still prepare to battle with adverse tides?
Where do you flee to? Storms obstruct you. The storms' aid
will benefit me! See how the wind excites the crashing
waves.

The storm I wished for you, comes to pass without me:
wind and wave are more just to me than your heart.

(...)

Why, unless you're ignorant of how furious the seas can be,
do you so often, so wrongly, trust the waters you've tried?
Even, when you loose the hawsers, persuaded by the tide,
still the wide sea holds many sorrows.
It's no use tempting the waves, when faith's been violated:
there punishment's demanded for treachery,
especially when love is wounded.

(...)

Live, I beg you! Thus I'd curse you more harshly than if
you died,

you'd be more widely known as the cause of my death.

Come, imagine, if you were snatched up by a swift
whirlwind

let there be no weight to that omen what would be in your
mind?

Immediately the perjury of your false tongue will strike you
and Dido, forced to die by Phrygian deceit:

the image of the wife you cheated would stand before your
eyes,

in sorrow, and with loosened bloodstained hair.

However many times you say: 'Forgive me, I deserved it
all!'

you'll find each one a thunderbolt falling on you!

Grant a little space to your cruelty, and the sea:

a safe path in future will be the great reward for your delay.

If you've no care for me: spare your child lulus!

It's enough for you to bear notoriety for my death.

(...)

Spewed up by the waves, I received you to a safe harbour
and, scarce having heard your name aright, gave you a
kingdom.

Yet I wish I'd been contented with those services
and my reputation not buried by our union!

That day harmed me, when a sudden dark rainstorm
forced us to shelter under the roof of a cave.

I heard a voice: I thought it the nymphs' wailing:

it was the Furies giving warning of my fate.

Exact my punishment, wounded Honour, and by the
violated

laws of my marriage-bed leave no reputation to my ashes.

And you ghost, and spirit, and ashes of my Sychaeus
to whom, alas for me, filled with shame I go.

Sychaeus is honoured by me in a marble shrine:

covered by shadowing branches, with their white strands of
wool.

From it, four times, I heard his familiar voice, calling me
by name:

his tones, faintly, saying: 'Elissa, come!'

No delay: I come: I come to you, a wife in debt -

yet still I am late through confessing to my shame!

Grant forgiveness of my sin: he was worthy, he who
deceived me:

that it was him removes the evil from my offence.

His divine mother, Venus, and the son's pious burden, his

old father, Anchises, gave me hope he'd be a true husband

to me.

If I was mistaken, the error had an honest cause:

add my loyalty, and nothing is to be regretted.

The course of my fate holds true to the end,
and runs clear to the last day of my existence:

My husband, Sychaeus, died at the altar of his house
and my wicked brother, Pygmalion, has the spoils.

Exiled from Tyre, I left my country, my husband's ashes,
and endured harsh journeys, pursued by enemies.

Escaping my brother and the sea, I was brought to
unknown lands,

and I won this shore, that I granted to you, faithless man.

I founded Carthage, and laid out wide walls on every side,
a cause of envy to the neighbouring peoples.

War broke out. A stranger, and a woman, they tested me by
war,

and I'd barely prepared the weapons and defences of my
new city.

I was flattered by a thousand suitors, plaintive to wed me,
and I don't know which of their marriage beds I preferred.

Why hesitate to surrender me in chains to Iarba, of the
Gaetuli?

I will have offered my arms up to your wickedness.

There is my brother, too, whose impious hand demands
to be sprinkled with my blood, already stained by my
husband's.

Set aside the gods, and the holy things you profane by
touching!

(...)

Wicked man, you abandon both pregnant Dido
and that part of you hidden enclosed by my body.

You add the infant's death to the unhappy mother's,
and you'll be author of the funeral of your unborn child.

Iulus's brother will die with his mother,
and one punishment will destroy the two of us.

'But the god orders me to go.' I wish he had prevented your
coming to Carthage, its earth from being touched by a
Trojan.

Led by this god, are you not driven by adverse winds,
and endlessly scoured by ravaging seas?

Returning to Troy had scarcely been so much effort for you
if it were as great as when Hector was alive.

You don't seek your father's Simois, but Tiber's streams,
surely, when you reach the place you wish, you'll be an
enemy.

While the land, you force yourself on, hides and shuns your
ships,

you'll hardly be able to touch what you seek until you're

old.

Rather you should accept this nation, without quibbling,
as my dowry, and the riches of Pygmalion I brought here.

Transform this happier Phoenician city into Troy,
and rule this place, and hold the sacred sceptre!

If your mind's eager for war, if Iulus asks, what victorious
part

might fall to him in battle, we'll have no lack of enemies
to offer him, for him to overcome: here he can cultivate
the conditions for peace, here too a place for arms.

Only - by your mother Venus, and your brother's arms, his
arrows,

and the sacred Trojan gods companions of your flight! -

may whoever of your race you brought, so conquer,
and cruel Mars bring an end to your troubles,

and Ascanius fulfil his years in happiness

and old Anchises's bones rest in peace!

I beg you, spare this house that surrenders ownership to
you!

What crime could you say was mine except having loved?

I was not born in Greece, in Phthia, or great Mycenae,
my husband and father did not depend on you.

If it's shameful to marry me, call me friend not wife:
so long as Dido is yours, she'll endure anything.

(...)

By my kindnesses, if I am destined for you, beyond this,
by those hopes of union I beg a little time:

while the seas grow calmer, while love's eased by
familiarity,

I learn to bear my sorrows more firmly.

If not, I have the courage to pour away my life:
your harshness cannot endure within me long.

I wish you could see my appearance as I write:

I write, and a Trojan sword lies in my lap:

and tears fall from my cheeks onto the naked blade,
which will soon be stained with tears of blood.

How truly fitting your gift is for my death,
you prepare my funeral at little cost.

Nor is this the first wound, from a weapon, my heart
suffers:

that place bears the wound of cruel love.

Anna, sister, sister Anna, sadly conscious of my crime,
soon you must give the last offerings to my ashes.

Do not write 'Sychaeus' Elissa', when I'm consumed by
fire,

let this verse, alone, appear on my marble tomb:

'Aeneas offered a reason to die, and the sword.

Dido killed herself by her own hand.'