



Escape from Ilium

The Journey of Aeneas Part I

CAST

AENEAS Trojan Son of Venus
PRIAM Aged King of Troy
HECUBA Queen of Troy
LAOCOÖN Trojan Priest, Son of Priam
SINON Greek Soldier
CREUSA Wife of Aeneas
ANCHISES Elderly Father of Aeneas
ACHATES Aeneas' Loyal Servant
JUNO Queen of Heaven
VENUS Goddess of Love
JUPITER Ruler of the Gods
HECTOR'S GHOST Ghost of the Deceased
Prince of Troy
IULUS Young Son of Aeneas
PYRRHUS Warrior Son of Achilles

NARRATOR: The strewn remains of the Greek encampment dotted the yellow sands of the beach. A perplexed party of Trojan

noblemen were gathered there—staring at a three-story high wooden structure, pieced together from rough logs with mud and pitch. A barrel-like belly supported on four stout legs and topped by a rising equine head formed the crude shape of a horse. Scouts had spotted it earlier in the day and tore into the city—shouting the news. The Greeks had fled. They had left behind only the puzzle that stood before the men now.

PRIAM: (*overjoyed*) At last! At long last they have retreated. I knew the gods would give us victory.

NARRATOR: Among the gathered men stood Aeneas, a handsome young king. For years he had served Priam and battled his enemies, never questioning his judgment. But now he saw that the time had come.

AENEAS: My king, how can we be sure that they have left? The Greeks are a tricky lot.

NARRATOR: Priam shook his head.

PRIAM: Who would go to so much trouble for a simple trick? No, no. They are gone I can feel it.

AENEAS: This horse—or whatever it is—how do you account for it?

PRIAM: The Greeks are not barbarians, my friend. They serve the same gods as we do. They have made this structure as an offering for a safe voyage home.

AENEAS: But look at its midsection. There is enough room in there to hide a troop of men.

(*muttering from the assembled men*)

NARRATOR: A man with the robes of a priest stepped forward from the assembly.

LAOCOÖN: Father, listen to Aeneas. This is not some gift of peace. The Greeks have slaughtered our people and raped our

homeland for ten years. Why would they pack up so quickly?

NARRATOR: It was Laocoön, priest of Apollo and one of Priam's many sons.

PRIAM: I say that this is a gift to the gods. There can be no evil in such a thing.

NARRATOR: A cry rose from down the beach. Two soldiers were dragging a haggard urchin between them. He was wailing piteously.

SINON: (*screaming*) No! Spare me, Noble Trojans! Spare me!

PRIAM: Who is this then? (*mockingly*) Perhaps you *are* right, Aeneas. The Greeks have not fled. They have left one of their number. (*chuckle*)

NARRATOR: The men threw the sniveling man to the ground. He raised his rodent-like face and immediately crawled toward Priam's robe – kissing it between his hands.

SINON: Oh, Trojan King! I have been wronged! Severely wronged!

AENEAS: (*sternly*) What are you babbling about?

SINON: My countrymen have fled – given up! Oh, this long war has broken their will.

PRIAM: When did they leave?

SINON: Yesterday, my lord.

AENEAS: And why were you left behind?

SINON: The Fates have cursed me – that's why! It was all the fault of Calchas, that lying rat! He said a sacrifice was needed, and that it should be me. What have I done? I'm only a poor farmer! A farmer who will never see his family again! (*weeping*)

AENEAS: Why were the Greeks so quick to leave without a warning?

SINON: Oh, my lord. Please do not smite my poor head. But I have been sworn to secrecy! The gods will strike me down!

AENEAS: Answer me, or I will strike you down.

SINON: Since the mighty Achilles passed beneath the earth, our army has been doomed. Agamemnon and Menelaus quarreled like spoiled children. The men threatened to mutiny. Our campaign fell apart. And so they left me, *me* to be tortured by the enemy! Woe is me! (*weeping*)

AENEAS: (*contemptuously*) Ridiculous man.

PRIAM: What is the meaning of this tribute then? Tell us, and we will spare your life.

SINON: Oh, noble king! I weep at your generosity! But I have given my oath never to tell! Apollo will be sure to strike me down!

LAOCOÖN: Apollo does not strike men down for telling the truth. If you are indeed telling the truth, you have nothing to worry about.

SINON: We toiled many days on the horse – many days. It was another scheme of Calchas'. His mind is ever-working. He told the kings that Neptune would be honored by such an offering, and our journey would be a safe one.

AENEAS: Seems a bit large for an offering.

SINON: Here is the craftiness of that man! He told the kings to build it so tall that you noble lords could never fit it inside your glorious walls. If you did so, he said Neptune would bless you instead, and their voyage would become perilous. I am ashamed of this trickery – especially if it defies you who have so generously –

LAOCOÖN: I don't believe you.

NARRATOR: The rat-faced man recoiled in shock.

SINON: Why would I lie? You have saved me. I only repay my debt with this information.

PRIAM: Laocoön, my son. Do not be so suspicious. Think of how this war has tired even us. The Greeks have been camped upon this beach for ten years. Is it so hard to believe they have gone home?

NARRATOR: The priest of Apollo said no more, but his mouth tensed with anger, and he gripped the spear within his hand even tighter.

PRIAM: Greek, thank you for this information. You have served us well.

LAOCOÖN: No, Father! It is a trick! I can feel it. I fear the Greeks even when they bring gifts!

NARRATOR: He turned—flinging his spear toward the towering horse. With a dull thud, it stuck into a plank of the beast's belly.

PRIAM: (*angrily*) Laocoön!

NARRATOR: Before another word could be said, the nearby shallows of the sea began to foam. All of those gathered turned in shock. Springing forth from the brine like a black arrow came a serpentine streak, which coiled its dripped body around the frightened priest, and as quickly as it had come, drug him screaming back into the tide.

LAOCOÖN: (*hideous screaming*)

NARRATOR: Aeneas rushed forward, sword drawn, but the body of Laocoön was lost in the waves. He whipped around to face the King.

Priam was clutching at his chest. His face ashen.

AENEAS: I—I—he's gone, Your Majesty.

SINON: (*whimpering*)

NARRATOR: Retainers came to attend the King. None dared argue against the Greek tribute now. The gods had made a violent statement of their loyalty.

As the men began to help the feeble Priam back to Ilium, he motioned for Aeneas to come close. Gripping the Trojan's tunic tightly, he breathed acidic words.

PRIAM: (*quietly, but forcefully*) They have taken my Hector—my Paris. I have lost my last son. Get this horse within our walls at any cost. Let them be cursed by the sea and die like the dogs that they are.

NARRATOR: Aeneas nodded grimly.

The ailing King was led away, and Aeneas attended the task of moving the giant structure. Logs were called for and a troop of men. Priam had spoken. The horse would be within the city by nightfall.

Aeneas drove his golden chariot back to Ilium, where he instructed the city gate to be dismantled. The horse was coming, and the way must be made.

And by the time the blood-red sun set, the fabled weapon of destruction was securely nestled in the midst of the Trojan square.

Wearied and worn, Aeneas made his way home to his quarters.

CREUSA: (*eagerly*) Aeneas! Everyone is talking about this giant horse!

NARRATOR: Aeneas' wife greeted him as he entered their dwelling. Servants rushed to rid him of his dusty armor.

AENEAS: (*sigh*) Yes, I know.

CREUSA: What is the news?

AENEAS: (*angrily*) The horse! The horse! I'll speak no more of it! Today I've had the longest day of this miserable war.

CREUSA: (*quieter*) Then, rest. I will have a bath poured. (*pause*) There is dancing in the square tonight—in celebration.

AENEAS: Let them dance and drink to their hearts' content. I will have nothing to do with it. I need rest.

CREUSA: But, my husband, how will they celebrate without their greatest hero?

AENEAS: I'm sure they will find a way.

NARRATOR: He drew his wife to himself and kissed her.

AENEAS: I'm just glad that we have seen the end of all this—all this bloodshed. Now, we can go home—to our own city. Maybe I can focus on being a father now, more than being a hero.

CREUSA: They are one and the same to Iulus. He adores you.

AENEAS: Oh, yes. There is much to be adored. A young man growing older—tired of the world.

CREUSA: Your father has been telling him stories—about your battles.

AENEAS: (*laughs*) Father's up to his old lies, eh?

CREUSA: You are right. Rest is what my husband needs. Rest from a weary war that has finally come to an end.

NARRATOR: Aeneas smiled and drew his wife to him.

In the streets, the Trojans were celebrating—drinking until they could drink no more. The Greeks were defeated! The clanging of tambourines and cymbals was heard late into the night, but at long last, the last stragglers succumbed to a drunken slumber, and silence settled over the city.

Under this cover, Sinon the Greek crept forth. He had been brought back into Ilium as a friend. He had toasted and sang with the men. Now, he shimmied up one of the horse's giant legs and triggered the trap door that had been cleverly hidden within the beast's belly.

SINON: (*hissing*) The city sleeps! They are ours for the taking!

NARRATOR: The dark forms of the hidden Greek soldiers dropped down from the hole one-by-one into the shadows. One ran to the ramparts, and lighting a torch, signaled to the troops waiting across the plain. The Greek fleet had merely hidden itself down the coast and sailed back at dusk. Sinon himself saw that the dismembered gates were wide open for the army's advance. The plan of Ulysses had worked perfectly.

SINON: (*laugh of victory*)

NARRATOR: Aeneas was stirred from sleep by what he thought was a scream. He sat up in bed and listened intently. The scream did not come again. He paused.

A cry again—followed by another and another—the clashing of swords. He started to bolt from the bed, but in the dim light he realized there was a dripping form standing in the midst of the room.

HECTOR: (*slowly*) Aeneas.

NARRATOR: The Trojan started in shock. The head of the darkened figure rose. It was Hector—his beard clotted with gore, and his face striped with wounds.

AENEAS: (*breathlessly*) My prince?

HECTOR: Do not waste time asking idle questions. If you doubt who I am, look at my dismembered body, ripped to shreds. Look at my pierced feet where I was hooked to the murderer's chariot.

AENEAS: I do not doubt, Hector! I do not doubt!

HECTOR: Run, Goddess Born. Run. The Greeks have taken the walls. Ilium will fall this night. But through you, we will live on. Take our holy gods—our righteous ways—take them across the sea. Build your own high walls there. A new Ilium from the ashes of the old.

AENEAS: (*panicking*) Hector! Tell me more! Can Troy be saved?

HECTOR: I have spoken the words I was sent to speak. Now, I descend.

NARRATOR: The shadows of the room engulfed the body of the Trojan Prince. Aeneas' heart beat violently within his chest. How had they done it? How had the Greeks made it inside the walls?

He shook Creusa awake.

CREUSA: Wha—what is it?

AENEAS: No time! Get Iulus up! Get Father! We're leaving immediately.

CREUSA: What? What do you mean? Our things—

AENEAS: Leave them! Bring only what you need.

NARRATOR: He hurried to his armor and belt and began to strap them on.

CREUSA: Where are you going?

AENEAS: To Pergamos! The citadel! I have to try to save the King!

CREUSA: From whom? I—I—don't understand.

AENEAS: (*angrily*) Do as I say!

NARRATOR: Drawing his sword, Aeneas rushed from his chambers and down the hallway. The servants were gathered near the entrance—clutching each other in fright.

AENEAS: (*shouting*) Bar the door! Let no one enter—even if they say they are a friend!

NARRATOR: The frightened servants nodded, and Aeneas hurried into the night air.

The streets were chaotic—fleeing men and women clamored over one another in escape. Man-to-man battles raged on every corner. Faraway, buildings were burning and babies were crying. Hades had come to Earth.

Aeneas pushed past all this as best he could. The mighty Trojan warrior cut down several Greek raiders who tried to oppose him—as he aimed his strides toward the citadel and the royal family held within. The mass of the battle was before its gates. Aeneas threw himself in the melee—hacking wildly, biting like a wild animal at any who stood in his way.

At last he gained entrance to the hall within. A band of startled Trojan warriors crouched there—bloody swords drawn.

AENEAS: Trojans! Have any Greeks passed your barrier?

ACHATES: We do not know. We only just fought our own way in here, Lord Aeneas.

AENEAS: Come with me! We will fight our way to the peak, and I pray we find Priam still alive. Follow me!

NARRATOR: Shaking the body from his sword, Pyrrhus ran to the two weeping females—gripping them by their hair. He pried them from their shrine and drug them away to his waiting troops.

When Aeneas burst into the chamber, he knew that he was too late. A body lay face down in a pool of black blood. He ran to it and lifted it. He cried aloud.

AENEAS: My king! Gods above! Why have they done this to you?

NARRATOR: Achates, one of the troop, clamped his hand upon Aeneas' shoulder.

ACHATES: We must go, my lord. All is lost here.

AENEAS: Go without me. I must wait a moment—and mourn my king.

ACHATES: What are your orders for us?

AENEAS: Fight. Fight until all are dead.

NARRATOR: The men retreated to the fray once again, leaving Aeneas alone with the corpse in his arms. He had failed.

A jarring light appeared in the midst of the room—its glow pooling into a silvery cloud.

AENEAS: Mother. You've come too late.

NARRATOR: The heavenly figure of Venus appeared—her face contorted in fear.

VENUS: Aeneas! I came as soon as I heard! These filthy, cheating Greeks!

AENEAS: Troy is lost.

VENUS: Yes, there is no hope for Ilium now—but there still is hope for you, my son.

AENEAS: Me? Troy is my home. I will stay here until every last Trojan spear has died a

valiant death, then I will lay my own body down beside those glorious ones who have fallen.

VENUS: Nonsense! If you die, Troy will die. Someone has to survive!

AENEAS: I have spoken, Mother. I will not run away like a coward.

NARRATOR: His heavenly mother floated forward and took his blood-stained face into her hands.

VENUS: You have stood your ground. You have done all that you know to do. Hecuba and Andromache have been dragged away to a life of unending torment. Will you consign your wife and your son to that as well?

NARRATOR: Iulus and Creusa flickered into his mind. He had not thought of that.

AENEAS: Look at all these who have died! Why should *I* survive?

VENUS: Because it is *your* fate to live on. Do not judge the will of the gods. Don't resist it—you struggle against the wind.

AENEAS: Then, tell me. What should I do?

NARRATOR: Below in the citadel courtyard, a bloodied group of surviving Trojans threw themselves against a Greek onslaught. One man fell back clutching the oozing stump of his arm, and another fell from a slash at the throat.

ACHATES: (*shouting*) We won't be able to stand much more of this!

NARRATOR: The citadel doors flew open, and Aeneas entered the fray—lunging left and right with his massive spear. Two Greeks fell instantly, and he rounded upon the contingent of Trojans.

ACHATES: Prince Aeneas!

AENEAS: Flee! This battle is lost! Find the secret ways out of the city! Take your women and your children and flee! Meet me at Mount Ida in three day's time! We will reconvene there!

ACHATES: Yes, my prince!

NARRATOR: The Trojans frenziedly dispersed, and Aeneas thundered back toward his quarters—his breath thundering in his ears.

When he beheld the gates of his house, his heart stopped cold. The gate had been thrown down, and the front doors burned and badly scarred.

AENEAS: Gods! Am I too late?

NARRATOR: The Trojan Prince barreled against the doors—knocking them inward. He continued into the empty hallway where all was dark and silent.

AENEAS: (*yelling*) Creusa! Iulus! Father!

NARRATOR: His words echoed empty back to him from the shadows.

IULUS: (*quietly*) Father?

NARRATOR: Timidly stepping forward came his young son. His wife was there holding his hand. When she beheld her husband, she ran to him and flung her arms about him, trembling.

CREUSA: (*sobbing*) They—they tried to get in—but then it stopped—

AENEAS: Then you are safe?

NARRATOR: She nodded.

AENEAS: Gather what you can carry. We're getting out of here. The whole city will be in flames soon. Where is father?

CREUSA: He is within his chambers. Oh, Aeneas. What shall we do with him? We cannot leave him! But he is too weak to survive any journey.

AENEAS: You tend to Iulus.

NARRATOR: Aeneas hurried to his father's chambers. The old man was propped up within his bed. Clutched in his sinewy arms was a nearly-rusted sword.

ANCHISES: (*surprised*) Oh, son. It's only you. I was expecting Greeks. And I was ready for them.

AENEAS: Father, come. We're getting out of the city.

ANCHISES: Yes, a wise plan—for you. I have decided to stay here. When the Greeks come to get me, perhaps I can drag a couple of them down into Hades with me.

AENEAS: (*angrily*) Father! There's no time to argue! Get up! I'm not leaving you here.

NARRATOR: The old man raised his eyebrows.

ANCHISES: The son orders about the father, now? Interesting. I think it is my place to decide when and where I will die. Not yours. I will die here with my city.

AENEAS: (*quietly*) Listen to me. We are meeting at Mt. Ida. I have no idea where we will go from there, but we will need ships. I know nothing of ships, but you do.

ANCHISES: (*small laugh*) Yes, I have built a ship or two in my day. But that was very long ago. Aeneas, let's face it. I'm too old to make it to Ida. As much as I hate to admit it, my feeble body could not stand it.

AENEAS: I thought you'd say that.

NARRATOR: Aeneas moved forward—cradling the old man in his arms.

ANCHISES: What are you doing?

NARRATOR: He lifted his father from the bed and hoisted him upon his shoulder.

ANCHISES: Aeneas! Put me down! I won't have you risking your life for me!

AENEAS: Father. Keep that sword ready. Cover my back.

NARRATOR: He returned swiftly to the hallway where Iulus and Creusa waited expectantly.

AENEAS: Everything ready?

CREUSA: Yes.

AENEAS: All right. Stay close. Iulus, do not let go of your mother's hand. If we are separated, make for the shrine of Ceres just outside the city walls. May the gods protect us.

NARRATOR: And so the family burst into the flaming night once again. The streets were even more chaotic than before. Aeneas hurried down trackless paths, pushing past fleeing servants and women wailing over the corpses of their husbands. Turn after turn through the winding streets of the city came and went, came and went.

Soon the narrow doorway that led outside the city walls to the holy places came into view. It was carefully hidden. Known only to Trojans and their allies.

ANCHISES: Aeneas! I do not see Creusa and the boy!

AENEAS: What?

NARRATOR: He turned—sitting his withered father down upon the ground. He scanned the city street behind him frantically.

AENEAS: How long ago did we get separated?

ANCHISES: I do not know, my son! May the gods cursed my old eyes! I did not see!

NARRATOR: Then—from around the corner—Iulus came into view, running as quickly as his little legs could carry him.

AENEAS: Thank the gods!

NARRATOR: But no Creusa appeared. The boy ran into his father's outstretched arms. He was shaking from head to foot.

AENEAS: Iulus, where is your mother? Iulus! Listen to me. Where is your mother?

IULUS: (*frightened*) I don't know! I don't know!

ANCHISES: Aeneas, I will take the boy. The shrine is not far from here. We will hide there until you return. Search for her, Aeneas. Perhaps she is only lost.

AENEAS: (*in a daze*) Yes. Yes. Perhaps—

NARRATOR: Without another word, he dashed back into the crumbling city.

Anchises rose—taking the hand of the trembling Iulus.

ANCHISES: Now, Grandson. Let us walk, but not too quickly.

NARRATOR: They made their way into the open countryside, down a dusty path that was daily walked by the priestesses of Ceres. It was deserted now. As they drew away from the city, the clashing of blades and cries of those in pain died away, and only the night air greeted them.

ANCHISES: Did I ever tell you the story of how your father was born?

IULUS: No, Grandpa.

ANCHISES: Didn't I? Surely, I did. You see when I was a very young man, a beautiful woman appeared to me – right out of thin air? Do you believe that?

IULUS: I guess.

ANCHISES: A beautiful woman! You'll understand more when you're older, of course, but she was the most glorious thing I had ever seen. We loved each other very much. And you know what?

IULUS: What?

ANCHISES: She was actually a goddess in disguise. I didn't even know it!

IULUS: Which one, Grandpa?

ANCHISES: Venus, of course. Venus is the best of the best, and she had picked me, out of all the mortals of the world to love. But she had to go away, you see. Goddesses are busy people. And nine months later, she appeared to me again. Do you know what she had with her this time?

IULUS: No!

ANCHISES: Your father!

IULUS: Dad was a *baby*!

ANCHISES: Yes. Venus and I had made him together.

IULUS: How?

ANCHISES: Umm...perhaps we can save that part of the story for when you are older. But when people tell you that you have a very special father, they're right. He's the son of a goddess.

NARRATOR: The two travelers— young and old— neared the sacred shrine. A gnarled tree grew up beside it, and they sat themselves down beneath it.

ANCHISES: (*groan*) Soon, your father and your mother will be here, and we will go to a new home.

IULUS: What about Troy?

ANCHISES: Ah, Iulie. This place will be better than Troy. It will be the best place that has ever been.

NARRATOR: A man walking stiff-leggedly emerged from the gloom of the road.

ANCHISES: Aeneas?

NARRATOR: The old man rose and walked forward to his son. Aeneas looked wearily up— his eyes brimming with tears.

AENEAS: I looked everywhere. I filled the streets with my shouting. But in the midst of it all I saw her. She was there, but not there— like a reflection upon the water.

ANCHISES: What are you trying to say, Son?

AENEAS: My wife is dead. She spoke to me. Told me to flee. Her destiny was to die, while mine was to survive. (*sob*) Oh, Father. Life has never been such a curse.

NARRATOR: Anchises draped his son's head over his shoulder, and the fierce warrior—the man who had killed time and time again— wept openly— his heart broken.

Iulus watched this inquisitively. His young mind did not yet understand. He turned away, looking to the sky. A bilious cloud was moving through the night, twinkling as it went.

IULUS: (*laugh*) Grandma!

NARRATOR: Someone else was watching this cloud's course as well—someone higher up in the pitch black of night. In the dim halls of Olympus, Juno sat watching the final moments of her victory.

JUNO: So, Venus. You think that you've achieved some kind of victory by letting this ratty band of Trojans escape. After the Greeks have finished slaying all those in the city, they will hunt these others down like dogs.

NARRATOR: The cloud was too far away to answer—making its way toward the peak of Mt. Ida.

In the darkness behind the Queen of Heaven, her husband appeared.

JUPITER: So, I see you have gotten what you want. The city is in flames.

JUNO: It was what needed to happen. Troy had grown too proud. It needed to be destroyed.

JUPITER: *You* seem to have gotten too proud yourself, yet *you* are not destroyed.

JUNO: Dear, dear. Allow the rest of us some impulsiveness. *You* are always acting on *your* emotions—no matter how lustful they may be.

JUPITER: If I receive coldness in my own bed, I must search for warmth elsewhere.

JUNO: (*hatefully*) Go warm yourself on the fires of your beloved city! That is my warmth!

JUPITER: So quick to destroy, yet a city *you* love will one day perish...

JUNO: (*worried*) What do you mean?

JUPITER: The city-state of Carthage. It has always been your favorite. Am I right?

JUNO: (*worriedly*) What about it? Dido has turned it into a golden kingdom—one ruled by a woman—as it should be.

JUPITER: Women rulers are weak. Her city shall fall—just like my Troy has.

JUNO: How? (*angrily*) How do you know this? Who shall destroy it?

JUPITER: It will be many centuries from now, but it will. These Trojans survivors that you turn your nose up will prosper, they will sail across the sea and rebuild, and that new city will grow into an Empire—one that will crush your Carthage.

JUNO: (*angrily*) No. I will stop it!

NARRATOR: She looked down to where the tiny Trojan ship was making its way out into the pitch black sea. Her eyes narrowed.

JUNO: We shall see. I will bring all my anger against these Trojan whelps! Troy, have I not punished you enough? When will you lie down and die?

JUPITER: (*satisfied*) Great cities never truly die, dear. You will learn that in time.

NARRATOR: Beneath the silent slopes of Mount Ida the survivors of Troy were gathering under the cover of midnight. The Trojan War was ended, but the journey for a new home was about to begin.