

Aeneas finished. While he spoke, Evander had marked his eyes, his features, his whole frame, and now he replies, pointedly: “Bravest of the Trojans, how I welcome you, recognize you, with all my heart! How well I recall the face, the words, the voice of your father, King Anchises.

“Once, I remember . . .

Priam, son of Laomedon, bound for Salamis,
 out to visit his sister Hesione’s kingdom,
 continued on to see Arcadia’s cold frontiers.
 Then my cheeks still sported the bloom of youth
 and I was full of wonder to see the chiefs of Troy,
 wonder to see Laomedon’s son, Priam himself, no doubt,
 but one walked taller than all the rest—Anchises.
 I yearned, in a boy’s way, to approach the king
 and take him by the hand. So up I went to him,
 eagerly showed him round the walls of Pheneus.
 At his departure he gave me a splendid quiver
 bristling Lycian arrows, a battle-cape shot through
 with golden mesh, and a pair of gilded reins my son,
 Pallas, now makes his. So the right hand you want

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is clasping yours. We are allies bound as one.
 Soon as tomorrow’s sun returns to light the earth
 I’ll see you off, cheered with an escort and support
 I’ll send your way. But now for the rites,
 since you have come as friends,
 our annual rites it would be wrong to interrupt.
 So, with a warm heart celebrate them with us now.
 High time you felt at ease with comrades’ fare.” 200

That said, he orders back the food and cups already cleared away, and the king himself conducts his guests to places on the grass. Aeneas, the guest of honor, he invites to a throne of maple, cushioned soft with a shaggy lion’s hide. Then picked young men and the altar priest, outdoing themselves, bring on the roasted flesh of bulls and heap the baskets high with the gifts of Ceres, wheaten loaves just baked, and in Bacchus’ name they keep the winecups flowing.
 And now Aeneas and all his Trojan soldiers feast on the oxen’s long back cut and sacred vitals. 210

Once their hunger was put aside, their appetites content, King Evander began: “These annual rites, this feast, a custom ages old, this shrine to a great spirit—no hollow superstition, and no blind ignorance of the early gods has forced them on us. No, my Trojan guest, we have been saved from dangers, brutal perils, and so we observe these rites, we renew them year by year, and justly so.

“Now then, first look up at this crag with its overhanging rocks, the boulders strewn afar. An abandoned mountain lair still stands, where the massive rocks came rumbling down in an avalanche, a ruin. There once was a cavern here, a vast unplumbed recess untouched by the sun’s rays, where a hideous, part-human monster made his home—Cacus. The ground was always steaming with fresh blood and nailed to his high and mighty doors, men’s faces 220

dangled, sickening, rotting, and bled white . . .
 The monster's father was Vulcan, whose smoky flames
 he vomited from his maw as he hauled his lumbering hulk. 230
 But even to us, at last, time brought the answer
 to our prayers: the help, the arrival of a god.
 That greatest avenger, Hercules! On he came,
 triumphant in his slaughter and all the spoils
 of triple-bodied Geryon. The great victor,
 driving those huge bulls down to pasture,
 herds crowding these riverbanks and glens.
 But Cacus, desperate bandit, wild to leave
 no crime, no treachery undared, untested, 240
 stole from their steadings four champion bulls
 and as many head of first-rate, well-built heifers.
 Ah, but to leave no hoofmarks pointing forward,
 into his cave he dragged them by the tail,
 turning their tracks backward—
 the pirate hid his plunder deep in his dark rocks.
 No hunter could spot a trace that led toward that cave.

“Meanwhile, Hercules was about to move his herds out,
 full fed from their grazing, ready to go himself when
 the cows began to low at parting, filling the woods 250
 with protest, bellowing to the hills they had to leave.
 But one heifer, deep in the vast cavern, lowed back
 and Cacus' prisoner foiled its jailer's hopes.
 Suddenly Hercules ignited in rage, in black fury
 and seizing his weapons and weighted knotted club,
 he made for the hill's steep heights at top speed.
 And that was the first we'd seen of Cacus afraid,
 his eyes aswirl with terror—off to his cave he flees,
 swifter than any Eastwind, yes, his feet were winged with fear.
 He shut himself in its depths, shattered the chains and 260
 down the great rock dropped, suspended by steel and
 his father's skill, to wedge between the doorposts,
 block the entrance fast.
 Watch Hercules on the attack. Scanning every opening,
 tossing his head, this way, that way, grinding his teeth,

blazing in rage, three times he circles the whole Aventine hill,
 three times he tries to storm the rocky gates—no use—
 three times he sinks down in the lowlands, power spent.

“Looming over the cavern's ridge a spur reared up,
 all jagged flint, its steep sides sheering away, 270
 a beetling, towering sight, a favorite haunt
 of nestling vultures. This crag jutting over
 the ridge, leaning left of the river down below—
 he charged from the right and rocked it, prised it
 up from its bedrock, tore it free of its roots,
 then abruptly hurled it down and the hurl's force
 made mighty heaven roar as the banks split far apart
 and the river's tide went flooding back in terror.
 But the cave and giant palace of Cacus lay exposed
 and his shadowy cavern cleaved wide to its depths— 280
 as if earth's depths had yawned under some upheaval,
 bursting open the locks of the Underworld's abodes,
 revealing the livid kingdom loathed by the gods,
 and from high above you could see the plunging abyss
 and the ghosts terror-struck as the light comes streaming in.

“So Cacus, caught in that stunning flood of light,
 shut off in his hollow rock, howling as never before—
 Hercules overwhelms him from high above, raining down
 all weapons he finds at hand, torn-off branches, rocks
 like millstones. A deathtrap, no way out for the monster now! 290
 Cacus retches up from his throat dense fumes—unearthly,
 I tell you—endless waves billowing through his lair,
 wiping all from sight, and deep into his cave
 he spews out tides of rolling, smoking darkness,
 night and fire fused. Undaunted Hercules had enough—
 furious, headlong down he leapt through the flames
 where the thickest smoke was massing, black clouds
 of it seething up and down the enormous cavern.
 Here, as Cacus spouts his flames in the darkness,
 all for nothing—Hercules grapples him, knots him 300
 fast in a death-lock, throttling him, gouging out

the eyes in his head, choking the blood in his gullet dry.
 He tears out the doors in a flash, opens the pitch-black den
 and the stolen herds—a crime that Cacus had denied—
 are laid bare to the skies, and out by the heels
 he drags the ghastly carcass into the light.
 No one can get his fill of gazing at those eyes,
 terrible eyes, that face, the matted, bristling chest
 of the brute beast, its fiery maw burnt out.

“From then on, we have solemnized this service 310
 and all our heirs have kept the day with joy.
 Potitius first, the founder of the rites,
 the Pinarian house too, that guards the worship
 of Hercules. Potitius set this altar in the grove.
 The Greatest Altar we shall always call it,
 always the Greatest it will be.

“So come,
 my boys, in honor of his heroic exploits
 crown your hair with leaves, hold high your cups,
 invoke the god we share with our new allies,
 offer him wine with all your eager hearts.” 320

With that welcome, a wreath of poplar, hung
 with a poplar garland’s green and silver sheen
 that shaded Hercules once,
 shaded Evander’s hair and crowned his head
 and the sacred wooden winecup filled his hand.
 In no time, all were tipping wine on the board
 with happy hearts and praying to the gods.

Meanwhile
 evening is coming closer, wheeling down the sky and
 now the priests advance, Potitius in the lead,
 robed in animal skins the old accustomed way 330
 and bearing torches. They refresh the banquet,
 bringing on the second course, a welcome savor,
 weighing the altars down with groaning platters.
 Then the Salii, dancing priests of Mars, come
 clustering, leaping round the flaming altars,

raising the chorus, brows wreathed with poplar:
 here a troupe of boys and a troupe of old men there,
 singing Hercules’ praises, all his heroic feats.
 How he strangled the first monsters, twin serpents
 sent by his stepmother, Juno—crushed them in his hands. 340
 And the same in warfare: how he razed to the roots
 those brilliant cities, Troy and Oechalia both.
 How under Eurystheus he endured the countless
 grueling labors, Juno’s brutal doom.

“Hercules,
 you the unvanquished one! You have slaughtered
 Centaurs born of the clouds, half man, half horse,
 Hylaeus and Pholus—the bull, the monster of Crete,
 the tremendous Nemean lion holed in his rocky den.
 The Stygian tide-pools trembled at your arrival,
 Death’s watchdog cringed, sprawling over the heaps 350
 of half-devoured bones in his gory cave. But nothing,
 no specter on earth has touched your heart with fear,
 not even Typhoeus himself, towering up with weapons.
 Nor did Lerna’s Hydra, heads swarming around you,
 strip you of your wits. Hail, true son of Jove,
 you glory added to all the gods! Come to us,
 come to your sacred rites and speed us on
 with your own righteous stride!”

So they sing
 his praise, and to crown it sing of Cacus’ cave,
 the monster breathing fire, and all the woods resound 360
 with the ringing hymns, and the hillsides echo back.

And then, with the holy rites performed in full,
 they turned back to the city. The king, bent with years,
 kept his comrades, Aeneas and his son, beside him,
 moving on as he eased the way with many stories.
 Aeneas marveled, his keen eyes gazing round,
 entranced by the site, gladly asking, learning,
 one by one, the legendary tales of the men of old.

King Evander, founder of Rome’s great citadel, begins:

“These woods the native fauns and the nymphs once held
 and a breed of mortals sprung from the rugged trunks of oaks. 370
 They had no notion of custom, no cultured way of life,
 knew nothing of yoking oxen, laying away provisions,
 garnering up their stores. They lived off branches,
 berries and acorns, hunters’ rough-cut fare. First
 came Saturn, down from the heights of heaven, fleeing
 Jove in arms: Saturn robbed of his kingdom, exiled.
 He united these wild people scattered over the hilltops,
 gave them laws and pitched on the name of Latium for the land,
 since he’d lain hidden within its limits, safe and sound. 380
 Saturn’s reign was the Age of Gold, men like to say,
 so peacefully, calm and kind, he ruled his subjects.
 Ah, but little by little a lesser, tarnished age
 came stealing in, filled with the madness of war,
 the passion for possessions.

“Then on they came,
 the Ausonian ranks in arms, Sicilian tribes and
 time and again the land of Saturn changed its name.
 Then kings reared up and the savage giant Thybris,
 and since his time we Italians call our river Tiber.
 The true name of the old river Albula’s lost and gone. 390
 And I, cast from my country, bound for the ocean’s ends—
 irresistible Fortune and inescapable Fate have planted me
 in this place, spurred on by my mother’s dire warnings,
 the nymph Carmentis, and God Apollo’s power.”

No sooner said than, moving on, he points out
 the Altar of Carmentis, then the Carmental Gate
 as the Romans call it: an ancient tribute paid
 to the nymph Carmentis, seer who told the truth,
 the first to foresee the greatness of Aeneas’ sons
 and Pallanteum’s fame to come. Next he displays 400
 the grand grove that heroic Romulus restored
 as a refuge—the Asylum—then shows him, under
 its chilly rock, the grotto called the Lupercal,
 in the old Arcadian way, Pan of Mount Lycaeus.
 And he shows him the grove of hallowed Argiletum too,

he swears by the spot, retells the Death of Argus,
 once his guest.

From there he leads Aeneas on
 to Tarpeia’s house and the Capitol, all gold now
 but once in the old days, thorny, dense with thickets.
 Even then the awesome dread of the place struck fear 410
 in the hearts of rustics, even then they trembled
 before the woodland and the rock.

“This grove,” he says,
 “this hill with its crown of leaves is a god’s home,
 whatever god he is. My Arcadians think they’ve seen
 almighty Jove in person, often brandishing high
 his black storm-shield in his strong right hand
 as he drives the tempest on. Here, what’s more,
 in these two towns, their walls razed to the roots,
 you can see the relics, monuments of the men of old.
 This fortress built by Father Janus, that by Saturn: 420
 this was called the Janiculum, that, Saturnia.”

So,
 conversing and drawing near Evander’s humble home,
 they saw herds of cattle, everywhere, lowing loud
 in the Roman Forum and Carinae’s elegant district.
 “These gates,” Evander says, as he reaches his lodge,
 “Hercules in his triumph stooped to enter here.
 This mansion of mine was grand enough for him.
 Courage, my friend! Dare to scoff at riches.
 Make yourself—you too—worthy to be a god.
 Come into my meager house, and don’t be harsh.” 430