

EXCERPTS FROM OVID, METAMORPHOSES

TRANSLATED BY IAN JOHNSON

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(1) APOLLO AND DAPHNE

The story begins just after the young god Apollo has established himself as an adult, powerful god by killing the dragon/serpent Python and claiming its former grounds as the site for his most significant sanctuary, Delphi.

Apollo's first love
was Daphne, the daughter of Peneus.*
It was not blind chance which made him love her,
but Cupid's savage rage. The Delian god,
proud of his recent conquest of the snake,
saw Cupid flexing his bow, pulling back
the string, and said to him:*

“Impudent boy,
why are you playing with a man's weapon?
Carrying that suits shoulders like my own,
since I can shoot wild beasts and never miss
and wound my enemy. I am the one
who with my countless arrows has just killed
that swollen Pytho, whose venomous gut
covered so many acres. Stay content
kindling any kind of love you fancy
with that torch of yours, but do not pre-empt
those praises due to me.”

The son of Venus
then replied to him:*

“O Phoebus, your bow
may strike all things, but mine can strike at you.
Just as all animals are less than gods,
so, to the very same extent, your fame
is less than mine.”

Cupid spoke. Keen to act,
he struck the air with beating wings and stood
on the shady peak of Mount Parnassus.
He pulled out two arrows from his quiver,

each with a different force. One of them makes love run off, the other brings it on. The arrow which stimulates love is gold, with a sharp, glittering head, while the arrow which inhibits love is blunt and has lead below the shaft. With this second arrow the god pierced the daughter of Peneus, but with the first he struck Apollo's bones, piercing right through them, into the marrow. He is in love immediately, but she runs away from the very name of love, delighting in deep places in the woods and skins of the wild beasts she chases down, emulating virgin Phoebe.* A ribbon holds her tousled hair in place. Many men court her, but she dislikes all suitors. And so, rejecting men, knowing nothing of them, she roams the pathless forest glades, without a care for Hymen, love, or marriage.* Her father often said:

“Daughter, you owe me
a son-in-law.”

And often he complained:

“Daughter, you owe me grandchildren.”

But Daphne,
despising the bridal torch as something criminal, with a modest blush, would wrap her loving arms around her father's neck and say:

“My dearest father, allow me
to enjoy virginity for ever.
Diana's father did that earlier.”*

Her father does, in fact, grant her request, but your beauty, Daphne, is an obstacle to what you so desire—the way you look makes sure your prayers will not be answered. For Phoebus sees Daphne and falls in love. He wants to marry her, and what he seeks he hopes to get. But his own oracles deceive him. Just as light straw catches fire once grain is harvested, and hedges blaze

from torches which some traveller by chance
 has brought too near or else left there at dawn,
 that's how Phoebus is changed then into flames.
 That's how his whole chest burns, and by hoping,
 he feeds a love that is in vain. He sees
 the tangled hair hanging around her neck
 and says:

“What would that hair of hers look like,
 if only it were beautifully arranged.”

He observes her eyes, like bright fiery stars,
 gazes at her lips—but the sight of them 730
 is not enough—and praises fingers, hands,
 her arms, and shoulders (more than half exposed!),
 imagining those parts which lie concealed
 are even lovelier. She runs away,
 swifter than a soft breeze, and does not stop
 when he calls her, crying these words:

“O nymph,
 daughter of Peneus, stay! I beg you.
 I do not chase you as an enemy.
 Nymph, stop! This is the way a lamb runs off,
 fleeing a wolf, or a deer a lion, 740
 or a dove on quivering wings takes flight
 to escape an eagle—each one of them
 racing from its enemy. But the reason
 I am pursuing you is love. Ah me!
 I feel so wretched—you might fall head first,
 or brambles scratch your legs (which don't deserve
 the slightest injury)—and I might be
 the one who brings you pain. You rush ahead
 through rugged places. Set a slower pace,
 I beg you, and restrain your flight. I, too, 750
 will follow you more slowly. At least ask
 who it is that finds you so delightful.
 I am no shepherd or mountain dweller,
 or some uncouth local custodian
 of herds or flocks. You have no idea,
 you thoughtless girl, you do not know the man
 you're running from. That's why you scamper off.
 The Delphic lands, Claros, and Tenedos,
 the palace of Pataraea—all serve me.*
 Jupiter is my father, and through me 760
 what has been and what is and what will be

are each made known, through me songs and strings
 resound in harmony. True, my arrows
 always find their mark, but there's an arrow,
 with truer aim than mine, which has wounded
 my uncommitted heart. The healing arts
 are my invention, and throughout the world
 I am called the Helper. Power of herbs
 lies in my command. Alas for me! Love
 cannot be cured by any herbs, and arts
 which aid all people are no help at all
 to their own master."

770

Peneus' daughter

with timid steps ran off, away from him,
 as he was on the point of saying more.
 Though his speech was not yet over, she left,
 and he was by himself. And even then
 she seemed so beautiful. The winds revealed
 her body, as the opposing breezes
 blowing against her clothes made them flutter,
 and light gusts teased back her free-flowing hair.
 She looked even lovelier as she fled.
 The youthful god can endure no longer
 wasting his flattery. Love drives him on.
 With increasing speed, he chases after her.
 Just as a greyhound, once it spies a hare
 in an open field, dashes for its prey,
 and the hare, its feet racing, runs for cover—
 one looking as if now he is about
 to clutch her and already full of hope
 he has her in his grip—his outstretched face
 brushes against her heels—while she, not sure
 whether she has been caught, evades his jaws,
 and runs away, his mouth still touching her,
 that's how the god and virgin race away,
 he driven on by hope and she by fear.
 But the one who follows, who has the help
 of Cupid's wings, is faster. He gives her
 no rest and hangs above her fleeing back,
 panting on hair spread across her shoulders.
 She grows pale as her strength fails, exhausted
 by the strain of running away so fast.
 Gazing at the waters of Peneus,
 she cries out:

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“Father, help me! If you streams
have heavenly power, change me! Destroy
my beauty which has brought too much delight!”

Scarcely has she made this plea, when she feels
a heavy numbness move across her limbs,
her soft breasts are enclosed by slender bark,
her hair turns to leaves, her arms to branches,
[550]
her feet, so swift a moment before, stick fast
in sluggish roots, a covering of foliage
spreads across her face. All that remains of her
is her shining beauty.

810

APOLLO MAKES THE LAUREL HIS TREE

Phoebus loves her
in this form, as well. He sets his right hand
on her trunk, and feels her heart still trembling
under the new bark and with his own arms
hugs the branches, as if they were her limbs.
He kissed the wood, but it shrank from his kiss.
The god spoke:

“Since you cannot be my wife,
you shall surely be my tree. O laurel,
I shall for ever have you in my hair,
on my lyre and quiver. You will be there
with Roman chieftains when joyful voices
[560]
sing out their triumphs and long processions
march up within sight of the Capitol.*
And you, as the most faithful guardian
of Augustus’ gates, will stand on his door,
and protect the oak leaves in the centre.*
And just as my untrimmed hair keeps my head
always young, so you, too, must always wear
eternal honours in your leaves.”

820

830

Paeon finished.*

The laurel branches, newly made, nodded
in agreement, and the top seemed to move,
as if it were a head.

(2) IO

The king of the gods, Jupiter, had many affairs with mortal women, fathering many heroes, and his wife Juno was always furious when he found out. Here the ruler of the universe shows some terror of his wife, and allows his human lover, Io, to suffer intensely at her hands.

In Haemonia

there is a grove enclosed on every side
by steep forest. People call it Tempe.

Through here Peneus pours its roiling stream
from the foot of Pindus.* Its heavy fall
gathers mists and drives them on, like thin fumes,
drenching tree tops with the spray and making
places near and far weary of its roar.

840

This is the house and home, the inner heart,
of the great river. Seated in a cave
carved out in the rocks, he sets down laws
for the waters and for the nymphs dwelling
within those streams. There the native rivers
of that country first assemble, unsure
whether to congratulate or console
Daphne's father—the restless Enipeus,
poplar-growing Spercheus, Aeas,
old Apidanus, gentle Amphrysus,
and not long afterwards other rivers
taking exhausted waters to the sea,
weary from meandering here and there,
wherever their current's force carried them.*

850

Only Inachus is absent—hidden
deep inside a cave, he is increasing
the volume of his water with his tears,
in total sorrow, grieving for Io,
his missing daughter. He has no idea
if she is enjoying life or sitting
among the shades. Since he is unable
to locate her anywhere, he believes
she must be nowhere, and so in his mind
fears for the worst.

860

JUPITER AND IO

Jupiter had glimpsed her
returning from her father, the river,
and had said:

“Virgin, worthy of Jupiter
and about to make some man or other
happy in your bed, while it is so hot,
[590]
with the sun in the middle of his path,
at his highest point, move into the shade
of the deep woods.”

870

Jupiter pointed to
some shadowy groves.

“If you are afraid
to go all by yourself into places
where wild beasts lurk, you can safely enter
the deepest parts of any grove at all
with a god to guard you—no common god,
but me who holds the heavenly sceptre
in my powerful fist and who flings down
wandering thunderbolts. Do not fly from me!”

880

She was already fleeing and by now
had gone past Lerna’s pastures and the trees
planted in Lyrcaean fields.* Then Jupiter,
spread darkness and concealed earth far and wide.
He caught her as she was running away
and forced her to have sex against her will.

JUNO SUSPECTS ZEUS

Meanwhile Juno looked down on middle Argos,
curious why swift clouds in bright daylight
had brought on what looked like night. She noticed
they had not come from rivers, nor been sent
from the moist earth. She looks around to see
where Jupiter might be, knowing already
her husband’s tricks, for he has been caught out
so often. Not finding him in heaven,
she says:

890

“Either I am quite mistaken,
or I am being wronged.”

IO IS CHANGED INTO A COW

She glided down
from the lofty aether, stood on the earth,
and commanded the clouds to go away.
Jupiter has foreseen his wife’s arrival
and has changed the daughter of Inachus
so she looks like a sleek heifer—even so,

900

transformed into a cow, she is lovely.
 Juno, Saturn's daughter, reluctantly
 approves of the fine-looking cow and asks
 who it belongs to, what herd it comes from,
 as if she is ignorant of the truth.
 Jupiter lies. In order to forestall
 all enquiries about parents, he claims
 the cow was born from earth. Juno then asks
 to have it as a gift. What can he do? 910
 To hand over his own love is cruel,
 but not to hand her over suspicious.
 Shame insists he should surrender Io,
 but then love insists he should refuse.
 Love would have conquered shame, but for the fact
 that, if he refused the partner of his bed
 and his own kindred such a trifling gift,
 the cow might seem to be no cow at all.*
 He gave the girl to Juno.

JUNO, ARGUS, AND IO

The goddess
 did not at once set aside all her fears. 920
 She was still suspicious of Jupiter,
 worried about his devious trickery,
 until she handed Io to Argus,
 son of Arestor, to watch over her.
 Round his head Argus had a hundred eyes.
 These eyes took turns resting two at a time,
 while the others kept watching and remained
 on guard. No matter where he was standing,
 he could see Io. When he turned his back,
 Io was still there, right before his eyes. 930
 He lets her graze by day. Once the sun sets
 below the earth, he puts her in a pen
 and ties ropes around her innocent neck.
 She eats arbutus leaves and bitter herbs.

IO'S SUFFERING

In her misery, she lies on the ground,
 often on bare earth where there is no grass,
 instead of in her bed, and drinks water
 from muddy streams. Then, too, when she wanted
 to stretch her arms out in supplication
 towards Argus, she had no arms to stretch, 940
 and when she tried to speak out to complain,

her mouth made a lowing sound, and the noise
 made her afraid, frightened of her own voice.
 She went to the riverbanks where often
 she used to play—the banks of Inachus.
 When she saw her new horns in the water,
 she drew back from herself, amazed and fearful.
 The naiads have no idea who she is.
 Even Inachus himself does not know her.
 But she follows her father, trails behind 950
 her sisters, allowing them to touch her,
 offering herself for their admiration.
 Old Inachus pulls herbs and holds them out.
 She licks his hands, kisses her father's palm,
 and does not hold back her tears. If only
 words would come out with them, she would declare
 her name, describe her troubles, ask for help.
 Instead of words, her hoof traced in the dust
 letters which conveyed the wretched story
 of her body's alteration. Inachus, 960
 her father, hanging on the horns and neck
 of the snow-white heifer, groans and cries out:

“I feel so sad”

And then he groans again.

“I feel so wretched! Are you the daughter
 I have been searching for in every land?
 When you were missing, there was less sorrow
 than there is now, after we have found you.
 You cannot speak or answer what I say,
 but only give out sighs from your deep breast—
 the only way you can converse with me 970
 is with lowing sounds. In my ignorance,
 I was getting marriage and a bridal bed
 ready for you. My first hope was to have
 a son-in-law and then some grandchildren.
 But now you will have to have a husband
 from the herd, and now offspring from the herd.
 And this great grief of mine I cannot end
 with death. It is painful being a god—
 since the gate of death is closed, it draws out
 our sorrow into everlasting time.” 980

While Inachus is grieving for his daughter,
 bright-eyed Argus takes Io from her father

and leads her away to different pastures.
 He himself sits on a high mountain peak,
 some distance off, where from his position
 he can keep watch in all directions.

MERCURY KILLS ARGUS

The ruler of the gods cannot endure
 that the granddaughter of Phoroneus
 suffer such great sorrow any longer.
 He calls his son whom the bright Pleiad bore
 and orders him to put Argus to death.*
 Mercury does not long delay—he ties
 wings on his feet, his strong hand grips that rod
 which brings on sleep, and he covers his head.
 This done, the son of Jupiter leaps down
 from his father's citadel to the earth.
 There he takes off his cap and wings—the rod
 is the only thing he keeps. And with it,
 looking like a shepherd, he drives she goats,
 which he has stolen as he walks along,
 through trackless countryside, playing a song
 on reeds he tied together. Juno's guard,
 enchanted with the sound of this new art,
 speaks out:

990

1000

“Whoever you are, you can sit
 with me here on this rock. There's nowhere else
 where there is better grazing for your flock—
 as you see, this shade well suits a shepherd.”

The grandson of Atlas sat down and spent
 the passing day in conversation, talking
 of many things and playing melodies
 on his tied-together reeds, attempting
 to overpower Argus' watchful eyes.

1010

(3) THE STORY OF SYRINX

This is the story Mercury tells to lull Argus to sleep, but it is a love story of its own. Pan, the wild, goat-legged god of the wilderness, falls in love with the nymph Syrinx, who (like Daphne) seeks escape through transformation.

But Argus fights to keep soft sleep at bay,
and though some of his eyes doze off, others
stay awake. He also asks how the pipe,
something invented only recently,
has been developed. Mercury then says:

“On the icy mountains of Arcadia
among hamadryads of Nonacris
the most celebrated was a naiad—
nymphs called her Syrinx.* She had eluded
many times the satyrs who pursued her,
as well as those gods who inhabited
the shady woods and fertile countryside.
She worshipped the Ortygian goddess
in her actions and remained a virgin.*
She tied up her dress just like Diana
and could have been confused with Leto’s child,
except her bow was made of cornel wood,
while Diana’s was of gold. Even so,
her appearance was deceptive. Once Pan,
his head wreathed in sharp pine leaves, observed her
on her way back from Mount Lycaeus
and spoke to her.”*

Now Mercury had to give
more details—how the nymph then ran away,
despising his pleas, through pathless regions,
until she came to the gentle waters
of the sandy Ladon stream and how here,
with water hindering her way, she begged
her sisters of the stream to transform her,
how Pan, just when he thought he had Syrinx
in his arms at last, was holding marsh reeds
instead of the nymph’s body, and then how
as he sighed there, wind passing through the reed
had made a subtle, plaintive sound, and Pan,
captivated by the new art’s sweet voice,
had said:

“This way of conversing with you
will remain with me.”

And by using wax
to join together reeds of different lengths,
he had immortalized the young girl's name.

(2 AGAIN) IO'S STORY RESUMES

The Cyllenean god, about to relate these details, sees all of Argus' eyes have closed, their bright lights overcome by sleep.* He lowers his voice at once and then strokes the drowsy eyes with his magical rod, to force them to sleep more soundly. And then, with his hooked sword he quickly hacks away the nodding head from where it joins the neck, throws it, covered in gore, down from the rock, and stains steep cliffs with blood.

“Lie there, Argus.

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The light you had in all those eyes of yours has been extinguished, and a single night now sits in those hundred orbs.”

JUNO'S ANGER

Then Juno, Saturn's daughter, picked up those eyes, set them in her own bird's feathers, and filled its tail with starry gems.* Immediately enraged, she made no attempt to hide her anger. To the eyes and mind of that Argive “whore” she sent out a terrifying Fury, pierced her breast with hidden stings, and drove her through the whole world in wandering terror.

1070

JUNO ENDS IO'S TORMENTS

And you, O Nile, remained the final stage of Io's measureless pain. She reached you, fell onto her knees at the river's edge, threw her neck back, lifted her face high up towards the stars—that was the only thing that she could do—and by her groans and tears and sad lowing seemed to be complaining to Jupiter and praying for an end to her distress. Jupiter throws his arms around Juno's neck and asks her to end her punishment. He says:

1080

“Set your fears aside
in future she will never cause you grief.”

And he commands the Stygian waters
to witness what he said. Once the goddess
has calmed down, Io regains those features
she possessed before and becomes the nymph
she was in earlier days. The stiff hair
falls from her body, her horns shrink away,
her eyeballs contract, the bones of her jaw
decrease in size, her arms and hands come back,
and her hooves disappear, after changing
into five nails. Nothing cow-like remains
in her, other than her bright appearance.
Happy to have the use of her two feet,
the nymph stands up, but is afraid to speak,
in case she should utter lowing noises
just like a heifer. Timidly she tries
once more to use words she has stopped using.
Now she is a very famous goddess,
worshipped by large multitudes of people
dressed in linen. At length Io bore a son,
Epaphus, who came, so it is believed,
from the seed of almighty Jupiter,
and guards city temples with his mother.

1090

1100

(4) PHAETHON'S FAMILY

The story begins after Phaethon, the mortal son of Apollo (aka Pheobus), the sun god, unwisely drove the sun chariot, crashed it, and died (creating the Sahara desert in the process). His family's misery brings further disasters.

PHAËTON'S FAMILY LAMENTS

But his sorrowing father, sick with grief,
 had concealed his face, and, so people say,
 if we can believe them, one day went by
 without the sun. The fires provided light, 480
 so that disaster brought some benefits.
 But when Clymene had said whatever
 needed to be said at such times of grief,
 distracted in her sorrow and tearing
 at her breast, she roamed the whole world, seeking
 first his lifeless limbs and later on his bones.
 She found the bones, but they'd been laid to rest
 in a foreign riverbank. She sank down
 in that place and with her tears bathed the name
 she read there in the marble and warmed it 490
 on her naked breast. The Heliades,
 daughters of the sun, grieving just as much,
 shed tears, vain offerings to Death, their hands
 beating against their chests, while night and day
 they cry for Phaëton (who will not hear
 their sad laments) and lie down on his tomb.

THE DAUGHTERS OF THE SUN ARE CHANGED INTO TREES

Four times the moon joined up her horns and filled
 her sphere. Those women, as was their custom
 (for routine had made their grief a habit),
 were offering their lament, when one of them, 500
 Phaëthusa, the eldest sister, wishing
 to throw herself down on the ground, complained
 her feet were growing stiff. Fair Lampetie
 then tried to go to her, but was held back,
 suddenly rooted to the ground. A third,
 whose hands were attempting to tear her hair,
 plucked out leaves. One cries that a wooden trunk
 now holds her legs, another that her arms
 are changing to long branches. While they watch,
 amazed at what is going on, bark grows 510

around their groins and, by degrees, surrounds
 their bellies, breasts, shoulders, and hands, leaving
 uncovered nothing but their mouths calling
 for their mother. What can a mother do,
 other than run here and there, wherever
 the impulse leads her, and kiss their mouths
 while she still can? But that is not enough.
 She tries to tear the bodies from the trees
 and snap off tender branches with her hands.
 But drops of blood come dripping from the breaks,
 as though they were a wound. Whichever child
 is injured in this way cries out

520

“Stop, mother!
 Stop doing that! I’m begging you to stop!
 Inside the tree my body is being torn.
 Farewell.”

The bark grows over her last words,
 and tears flow from the place. Drops of amber,
 distilled from the sprouting branches, harden
 in the sun. Then clear streams take this amber
 and send it to be worn by Latian brides.

CYNCUS IS CHANGED INTO A SWAN

Cyncus, son of Sthenelus, was present
 at this remarkable event. And though
 he was related to you, Phaeton,
 by his mother’s blood, his feelings for you
 made him even closer. He abandoned
 his royal power (for he was ruler
 of many great cities and of people
 in Liguria) and filled the green banks
 and streams of Eridanus with his cries—
 and the woods, too, which, thanks to those sisters,
 had increased in size.* His voice becomes shrill,
 white feathers cover his hair, a long neck
 stretches from his breast, and a membrane links
 his reddening fingers, wings dress his sides,
 a beak without a point grows on his mouth.
 And Cyncus becomes a new bird—the swan.
 He does not trust the sky or Jupiter,
 for he remembers fire unjustly sent
 from there. So he seeks out wide ponds and pools.
 Hating fire, he chooses to live in streams,
 the enemies of flame.

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540

THE SUN REACTS TO PHAËTON'S DEATH

Meanwhile, Phoebus, 550
 Phaëton's father, mourning and bereft
 of his good looks—the way he tends to be
 when in eclipse—despises light, himself,
 and the day. His mind gives way to sorrow,
 and, adding anger to his grief, denies
 the earth his services, saying:

“My fate
 from the very beginning of the world
 had been disturbed enough. I am weary
 of the tasks I have been carrying out—
 they bring no honour, and they never end. 560
 Let somebody else, anyone you like,
 control that chariot which brings on daylight.
 If no one will do it and all the gods
 acknowledge they cannot guide the chariot,
 let Jupiter himself do it. Then, at least,
 while he is trying out our reins, he may
 [390]
 for a while set aside those lightning bolts,
 which deprive fathers of their sons. Then, too,
 once he has experienced the power
 in that team of horses with hooves of fire, 570
 he will realize that the one who failed
 to guide them well did not deserve to die.”

All the gods are standing around the Sun
 as he says this, and in pleading voices
 they beg him not to act on his desire
 to plunge the world in darkness. Jupiter
 also makes excuses for hurling fire—
 like a king, mixing his requests with threats.
 Phoebus gathers up the maddened horses,
 still trembling with terror. Ill with grieving, 580
 he takes stick and whip and turns his rage on them
 (for he is still incensed), berating them
 and blaming them for Phaeton's death.

(5) CALLISTO

Callisto, a nymph companion of the virgin huntress goddess Diana, attracts Jupiter's attention, with predictably disastrous results.

JUPITER AND CALLISTO

The all-powerful father moves around
the mighty walls of heaven, checking them,
to see if any section has been harmed
by the fire's power. After he's confirmed
they have their old solidity and strength,
he looks out on the earth and works of men.

But taking care of his own Arcadia
is his main concern. He restores the springs
and rivers, which have not yet dared to flow,
gives grass to the earth, and leaves to the trees,
and tells the injured woods to grow once more.

As he moves back and forth, he often stops
to look at a young girl of Nonacris—
then fires burning within his bones would blaze.*

She was not a girl who spent time working
to soften wool by teasing it or play
with stylish new arrangements for her hair.

A simple clasp kept her dress together,
and white ribbons tied back her tangled hair.
Sometimes she carried a light javelin,
at other times a bow was in her hand,
for she was one of Phoebé's warriors.

No nymph who wandered around Maenalus
was more pleasing to goddess Trivia.*
But no power lasts for long.

When the sun,
high in the sky, had moved past the mid-point,
the nymph entered a grove which ages past
had left untouched. She set down the quiver
on her shoulder, loosed her bow, and lay down
on the ground where there was some grass, setting
the painted quiver underneath her neck.
Jupiter spied Callisto there, tired out
and with no one protecting her. He said:

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610

“My wife, I’m sure, won’t learn of my deceit.
And if she does, is that bickering of hers
really so important?”

Without delay,
Jupiter changes face and clothes to look
just like Diana and speaks up: 620

“Young girl,
one of my companions, in what mountains
have you been hunting?”

Rising from the grass,
Callisto says:

“Greetings to you, goddess
greater than Jupiter! I make that claim
though he himself may hear me!”

Jupiter
does hear and laughs, delighted that she thinks
he is greater than himself. He kisses her—
but not modestly, the way one should kiss
a virgin. She is ready to describe 630
where she has been hunting in the forest,
but he stops her story with an embrace
and, to get his own way, commits a crime.
She does fight back, as much as women can—
(how I wish you had seen them there, Juno,
you would have been much easier on her)
but what girl could overcome Jupiter?
Could anyone do that? Once he’s triumphed,
Jupiter seeks out the heavens above.
But Callisto now despised the woods 640
(for the trees were aware of what she’d done).
As she left the place, she almost forgot
to pick up her arrows in their quiver
and the bow suspended there.

CALLISTO’S SHAME

Lo and behold,
goddess Diana with her companions,
on her way across high Mount Maenalus,
proud of the creatures she had hunted down,
glimpsed Callisto and, having seen the nymph,
called out to her.* Callisto fled the call,
afraid at first the goddess might well be 650

Jupiter in disguise. But when she saw
 there were nymphs with her as well, she sensed
 there was no trick involved and joined their group.
 Alas, how difficult it is not to show
 one has done wrong by how one looks! She finds
 it hard to raise her eyes up from the ground.
 She is not tied to the goddess' side,
 pre-eminent in that whole company,
 the way she was before, but keeps silent,
 and gives signs by blushing that her honour
 has been shamed. If Diana had not been
 a virgin, she would have perceived her guilt
 from a thousand clues. People say the nymphs
 all recognized it.

660

DIANA REJECTS CALLISTO

When the crescent moon
 was rising once more, nine orbits later,
 the goddess, tired from hunting in the light
 from the sun, her brother, entered a cool grove
 where a stream flowed with a rippling murmur,
 rolling the fine-grained sand. She praised the spot,
 touching the surface waters with her foot.
 Commending these as well, she then remarked:

670

“All witnesses are far away. Let's bathe
 our naked bodies in the flowing stream.”

Callisto was embarrassed. All the nymphs
 took off their clothes. She was the only one
 who tried to hold things up. Reluctantly
 she took her garment off—when she did that,
 her body, now exposed, revealed her shame.
 She desperately tried to hide her belly
 with her hands. Diana said:

“Go away—
 far from this place. Do not contaminate
 the sacred springs.”

680

And she commanded her
 to leave her company.

JUNO PUNISHES CALLISTO

For some time, Juno,
 the great Thunderer's wife, had known all this,

but was postponing any punishment
 until the time was right. And now there seems
 no reason to delay. For Callisto
 by now had given birth to a young boy,
 Arcas. That, too, really angered Juno,
 who thought she was a slut. So when she turned
 her eye and savage mind onto the child,
 she cried:

690

“That’s the only thing that’s missing,
 you adulteress—you would be fertile
 and publicly proclaim the injury
 by giving birth and thus acknowledging
 the disgrace to Jupiter, my husband.
 You wretched girl, you’ll get your punishment.
 I’ll take away that shape of yours, which gave
 you and my husband such delight.”

Juno spoke.

She grabbed Callisto’s hair above her forehead
 and threw her face down on the ground. The nymph
 stretched out her arms in supplication, but then
 rough black hair began to sprout on both her arms,
 her hands curved inward, changing to bent claws,
 and served as feet. Her mouth, which Jupiter
 had earlier praised, became distended
 into a massive jaw. In case her prayers
 and passionate words might move his feelings,
 Juno takes away her power to speak.

700

The voice issuing from her raucous throat
 is threatening, angry, full of menace.
 Her mind still works the way it did before,
 though she has now been changed into a bear.
 She expresses her grief with constant groans,
 raising her hands (such as they are) to heaven,
 and even though she cannot speak of it,
 she feels great Jupiter’s indifference.

710

O how often she did not dare to sleep
 in the solitary woods and wandered
 beside the fields and home that once before
 had been her own! How often barking dogs
 drove her across the rocks, and the huntress
 ran off in terror, fearful of the hunt.
 And often, when she saw wild beasts, she hid,
 forgetting what she was. She was a bear,

720

and yet she trembled when she saw a bear
up in the mountains. Wolves made her afraid,
though Lycaon, her father, was among them.

CALLISTO AND ARCAS BECOME CONSTELLATIONS

Now Lycaon's grandson Arcas, grew up
and, almost fifteen years old, knows nothing
about his mother. While he is chasing
wild beasts, selecting suitable thickets,
and setting his woven nets to enclose
the Erymanthian woods, he meets her.*
His mother saw Arcas and stopped, as if
[500]
she recognized him. Not knowing who she was,
he moved back, worried that she kept her eyes,
which never wavered, staring right at him.
When she wished to move in closer to him,
he was about to jab her with his spear,
a lethal weapon, but great Jupiter
intervened, by removing both of them
(and the chance a crime might be committed)—
together they were seized and carried off
through empty space by a tremendous wind
and placed in the sky as neighbouring stars.*

JUNO VISITS TETHYS AND OCEANUS

When Juno saw that “slut” of Jupiter's
shining among the stars, she swelled with rage
and went down into the sea to visit
white-haired Tethys and old Oceanus,
whose reverence often affects the gods.
When they asked the reason for her journey,
she answered them:

“You are asking why I,
queen of the gods, leave my celestial home
to be here? Another woman now sits
in heaven in my place! I will not lie—
once night comes and clothes the world in darkness,
you will observe some recent stars designed
to wound me, honoured by the highest place
in heaven, up there where the most distant
and the smallest circle in space orbits
the furthest pole. But why would anyone
not wish to injure Juno or worry
about offending me—the ones I harm

I only benefit. Just look how much
I have achieved! How vast my powers are!
I stopped her being human, and she is made
a goddess! That's the sort of punishment
I inflict on evildoers! That shows
my great authority! Let him remove
her savage creature's shape and then restore
the way she looked before, just as he did
earlier with Io, that Argive girl.

770

Why should he now not get rid of Juno,
wed the girl, set her in my marriage bed,
take Lycaon for his father in law?
But if this slur to your scorned foster child
affects you, then make sure the seven stars
of that constellation are kept away
from your dark blue waters.* Repel those stars
which have been accepted into heaven
to reward their fornication. Make sure
that whore will never bathe in the pure sea.*

780

(6) NARCISSUS AND ECHO

Narcissus, the beautiful young man who fell in love with his own reflection, rejected the love of the nymph Echo. This story gave rise to our term “Narcissism.” The story also explains two elements of the natural world: the daffodil (narcissus) and the echo.

The winding river Cephisus had once
embraced [Liriopé], enclosed her in his waters,
and taken her by force. From her full womb
this loveliest of nymphs had given birth 530
to an infant one could fall in love with,
even at that age. She called him Narcissus.
When [the prophet] Teiresias was asked about him—
whether the child was destined to witness
the distant season of mature old age—
the visionary prophet then replied:

“Only if he never looks at himself.”

For some time the prophet’s words seemed worthless.
But what in fact took place—the way he died
and the bizarre nature of his madness— 540
proved those words true.

The son of Cephisus
was now sixteen—one might consider him
both boy and youth. Many young men and girls
desired him, but in his tender frame
there was such fearful pride that no young men
or girls affected him.

The nymph Echo,
with the resounding voice, who has not learned
to hold her tongue when someone speaks or else
to speak out first herself, saw Narcissus
driving panicked stags towards his hunting nets. 550
Back then, Echo was not merely a voice.
She still had a body. But nonetheless,
though she loved to talk, she could only speak [360]
as she does now—if a person uttered
many words, she could repeat the last ones.

JUNO PUNISHES ECHO

Juno had made her talk this way, because,
when she could have caught out those mountain nymphs
lying beside her husband Jupiter,
Echo would deliberately detain her
with a long chat, until the nymphs had fled. 560

After the goddess realized the trick,
she said:

“That tongue of yours has swindled me.
I will give you less power over it,
the very briefest use of your own voice.”

And she made good her threat by what she did.
Echo just repeats the last words spoken,
merely duplicating what she has heard.
So when she saw Narcissus wandering
through solitary fields and burned with love,
she tracks him surreptitiously. The more
she follows him, the more she is on fire,
just as quick-burning sulphur smeared around
the tops of torches seizes any flames
which come close to them. O how many times
she longed to approach with flirtatious words,
using soft entreaties! Nature stops her
and does not allow her to begin. But she
is ready for what nature does permit—
she waits for sounds which her voice can repeat.
Now, it so happened that the boy, enticed
away from a group of faithful comrades,
shouted out:

570

580

“Is there anybody here?”

Echo answered:

“Here”

He is astonished.

He casts his eye in all directions and,
in a loud voice, cries out:

“Come over here!”

She calls back to the person calling her.
He looks around and, when no one comes out,
he cried again:

“Why run away from me?”

He gets back all the words he has called out.
Narcissus stands there, misled by what seems
a voice which answers his, and calls again:

590

“Let’s meet here together.”

She could not reply
more willingly to any sound, and cried:

“Meet here together.”

NARCISSUS REJECTS ECHO

To support her words,
she came out from the woods and ran to him,
to throw her arms around the neck she loved.
He ran away and, as he ran, cried out:

“Take your hands off me! Stop these embraces! [390]
I’ll die before you have your way with me!”

All she replied was:

“Have your way with me.” 600

Now spurned, she conceals herself in forests,
and, in her shame, covers her face with leaves.
From that time on she lives in lonely caves.
But her love is still there and even grows
from the pain of her rejection. Worries
and lack of sleep waste her wretched body.
Poverty shrinks her skin, and all juices
in her body move out into the air.
Only her voice and bones are left. Her voice
still lives. The story goes her bones were changed 610
to shapes of stone. Since that time, she hides out
in the woods. No one has ever seen her
in the mountains, but she is heard by all.
It is the sound which still lives on in her.

NARCISSUS FALLS IN LOVE WITH HIS OWN IMAGE

Narcissus scorned her, just as he had scorned
other nymphs born in the streams and mountains,
and just as he had previously scorned
whole companies of men. Then one of those
Narcissus had rejected raised his hands
up to the sky and prayed:

“Though he may love 620
someone in this way, let him not obtain
the object of his love.”

The prayer was just,
and goddess Nemesis agreed to it.*

There was a clear stream, with limpid waters
like silver, as yet untouched by shepherds,
or goats and cattle grazing mountain slopes,
undisturbed by any bird, savage beast,
or bough split off a tree. All around it
there was grass fed by adjacent waters
and woods which would not let the pool grow warm 630
from any sun. Here Narcissus, weary

from eager hunting and the heat, lay down,
 attracted by the scenery of the place
 and by the water springs. And while he tries
 to slake his thirst, another thirst begins.
 As he is drinking, he sees an image,
 his face in the water, and falls in love,
 desiring something which has no substance.
 He thinks the shadow must have a body.
 Astonished by himself, he remains there, 640
 motionless, wearing the same expression,
 like a statue made of Parian marble.
 Stretched out along the ground, he contemplates
 the double constellation of his eyes,
 his hair, which looks suitable for Bacchus
 or worthy of Apollo, his beardless cheeks,
 his ivory neck, his attractive mouth,
 and the blush mixed in with snowy whiteness.
 He marvels at all those things which make him
 worth admiring. Without a sense of shame, 650
 he desires himself—the one approving
 is the person being approved. And while
 he is pursuing, he is being pursued.
 He kindles fire and burns at the same time.
 How often he kisses the devious spring
 in vain! How often he plunges in his arms
 to clutch the neck he sees in the middle
 of the water, and yet his arms cannot
 embrace himself! What he is looking at
 he does not recognize, but what he sees 660
 sets him on fire—and the very error
 which deceives his eyes excites them. Why then,
 you foolish lad, do you vainly grab for
 fleeting images? What you are seeking
 exists nowhere. And if you turn away,
 you will lose the thing you love. What you see
 is the shadow of a mirror image,
 which has nothing of its own. It arrives
 with you and stays with you and leaves with you,
 if you can leave. No need for Ceres' food, 670
 no need for rest can take him from that place.
 Instead he lies on thick grass and gazes
 at the deceiving image, for his eyes
 can never gaze enough.

NARCISSUS LAMENTS THE FUTILITY OF HIS LOVE

He lifts himself
 a little, holds out his arms, and cries:

“You forest trees, has anyone ever
 been more cruelly in love? You should know,
 for you have been useful hiding places
 to many people. In all those ages
 your life has passed, that huge expanse of time, 680
 have you known anyone who pined away
 like this? I see him, and he pleases me.
 But still, what I see and what pleases me
 I cannot find. My loving has been gripped
 by such a huge mistake! To make my pain
 even greater, we are not held apart
 by the mighty sea or by some journey,
 or by mountains, or walls with bolted gates.
 The only thing which keeps us separate
 is a little water! He himself wants 690
 to be embraced. Every time I lean down
 with my lips to the clear water, he lifts
 his upturned face to mine. And you would think
 he could be touched. It’s such a tiny thing
 that blocks our love. Whoever you may be,
 come here! You extraordinary boy,
 why do you deceive me? When I seek you,
 where do you go? You cannot be running
 from my shape and age—and I am someone
 who has been loved by nymphs! You promise me, 700
 with that loving face of yours, unknown hope.
 When I held out my arms to you, then you
 happily held out your own. When I smiled,
 you smiled. Often I have seen you weeping,
 when I shed tears. And if I nod my head,
 you return my gesture. From the motion
 of your fair mouth I guess you send back words
 which do not reach my ears. I am in you.
 I have felt it. I am not being deceived
 by my own image. I am burning up 710
 with love for own self. I rouse the flames
 and suffer from them. What am I to do?
 Should I be the one asking or being asked?
 But what is there to ask for? What I want
 is with me. My riches have made me poor.
 How I wish I could separate myself
 from my own body! What a novel wish
 for someone who’s in love, for I desire
 to be divided from the one I love.
 Now sorrow saps my strength. My time of life 720
 will soon run out, and I will pass away

in the prime of youth. And for me my death
 will not be a burden, since, by dying,
 I put my pain to rest. I would prefer
 the one I love to keep on living longer,
 but now the two of us, both in one life,
 will die together.”

Narcissus finished.

Not thinking clearly, he went back again
 to the same image and splashed the waters
 with his tears. Once he disturbed the surface, 730
 the reflection was obscured. When he saw
 the image disappearing, he cried out:

“Where are you going? Stay! Do not leave me,
 you pitiless boy, the one who loves you!
 Let me gaze upon what I cannot touch
 and get food to feed my wretched madness.”

DEATH OF NARCISSUS

In his grief, he ripped the upper border
 of his clothing and beat his naked chest
 with hands as white as marble. As he struck,
 his chest turned rosy red, just like apples, 740
 in which some parts are usually red
 and some are white, or just as unripe grapes
 in various bunches commonly possess
 a purple colour. Once he saw his form
 in the water, he could not endure it
 a moment longer, but, as yellow wax
 drips in a tiny flame, as morning frost
 dissolves in the warm sun, so Narcissus,
 wasted by love, melts away—gradually
 consumed by hidden fire. And now his face 750
 has no more colour red mixed in with white,
 he lacks vitality and strength, those things
 which, only recently, gave such delight—
 the body Echo earlier had loved.
 She was still angry and remembered him,
 but when she saw Narcissus, she was sad.
 Whenever the poor boy would cry:

“Alas!”

her echoing voice would then repeat:

“Alas!”

And when he struck his shoulders with his hands,
 she sent him back the same sound as the blow. 760
 His final words as he was looking in

those waters he habitually watched
were these:

“Alas, my beloved boy, in vain!”

The place gave every word back in reply.
He cried:

“Farewell.”

And Echo called:

“Farewell!”

He set his weary head down on green turf,
and death closed up those eyes which so admired
the beauty of their master. Even then,
after he had been received in houses
of the dead, he would keep gazing into
waters of the Styx. His naiad sisters
wept for Narcissus. They cut off their hair
and laid it out for him. The dryads, too,
lamented, and Echo returned their cries.
Now they were preparing the funeral pyre—
the torches they would brandish and the bier.
But there was no body. Instead they find
a flower with a central yellow part
surrounded by white petals on all sides.

770

[510]