

## Ovid, *Daphne and Apollo*

EXCERPT FROM *THE METAMORPHOSES*, C. 1 AD

Other animals of different kinds were produced by the earth, of its own accord, when the long-lingering moisture was warmed through by the rays of the sun. Then the mud and soggy marshes swelled under the heat, and fertile seeds, nourished in the life-giving earth as in a mother's womb, grew and in the fullness of time acquired a definite shape. This is what happens when the Nile, the river with seven mouths, recedes from the flooded fields and returns its streams to their original bed. The new mud becomes burning hot under the sun's rays, and the farmers, as they turn over the sods of earth, come upon many animals. Among these creatures they see some just begun, but already on the point of coming alive, others unfinished, lacking their full complement of limbs; and often in one and the same body one part is alive, while another is still only raw earth. Indeed, when heat and moisture have reached the proper balance, they bring forth life, and all things are born from these two elements. Although fire and water are always opposites, none the less moist heat is the source of everything, and this discordant harmony is suited to creation.

So when the earth, all muddled by the recent flood, grew warm again, under the kindly radiance of the sun in heaven, she brought forth countless forms of life. In some cases she reproduced shapes which had been previously known, others were new and strange. It was at that time that she gave birth to the huge Python, among the rest, though indeed she had no wish to do so; and this snake, whose body covered so great a stretch of the hillside, struck terror into the newborn race of men, for they had never known its like. The archer god, Apollo, who had never before used such weapons against anything but fleeing deer or timid wild goats, almost emptied his quiver to destroy the serpent, overwhelming it with a thousand arrows, till the venom flowed out from all its dark wounds. Then, in case the passage of time should blot out the memory of his glorious deed, the god established sacred games, which he called Pythian, after the serpent he had vanquished. Contests of many kinds were held at these games, and when the young athletes had been successful there in wrestling, running, or chariot-racing, they received a wreath of oak-leaves as a prize. There was no laurel in those days, and any tree served to provide the garland which Phoebus wore around his temples, to crown his handsome flowing locks.

Daphne, the daughter of Peneus, was Phoebus' first love, and it was not blind chance which brought this about, but Cupid's savage spite. Not long before, the Delian god, still exultant over his slaying of the serpent, had seen Cupid bending his taut bow, and had said: 'You naughty boy, what have you to do with a warrior's arms? Weapons such as these are suited to my shoulders: for I can aim my shafts unerringly, to wound wild beast or human foe, as I lately slew the bloated Python with my countless arrows, though it coveted so many acres with its pestilential coils. You be content with your torch to excite love, whatever that may be, and do not aspire to praises that are my prerogative.' But Venus' son replied: 'Your bow may pierce everything else, Phoebus, but mine will pierce you: and as all animals are inferior to the gods, your glory is to that extent less than mine.'

With these words he swiftly winged his way through the air, till he alighted on the shady summit of Parnassus. From his quiver, full of arrows, he drew two darts, with different properties. The one puts love to flight, the other kindles it. That which kindles love is golden, and shining, sharp-tipped; but that which puts it to flight is blunt, its shaft tipped with lead. With this arrow the god pierced the nymph, Peneus' daughter, but Apollo he wounded with the other, shooting it into the marrow of his bones. Immediately the one fell in love; the other, fleeing the very word 'lover,' took her delight in woodland haunts and in the spoils of captured beasts, emulating Diana, the maiden goddess, with her hair carelessly caught back by a single ribbon.

Many a suitor wooed her but, turning away from their entreaties, she roamed the pathless woods, knowing nothing of men, and caring nothing for them, heedless of what marriage or love or wedded life might be. Again and again her father said: 'It is your duty to marry and give me a son-in-law, my child.' Often he repeated: 'My child, it is your duty to give me grandchildren.' But she blushed, hating the thought of marriage as if it were some crime. The modest colour crimsoned her fair face and, throwing her arms round her father's neck, she cried imploringly: 'My dear, dear father, let me enjoy this state of maiden bliss for ever! Diana's father granted her such a boon in days gone by!' Her father did, indeed, yield to her request, but her very loveliness prevented her from being what she desired, and her beauty defeated her own wishes.

As soon as Phoebus saw Daphne, he fell in love with her, and wanted to marry her. His own prophetic powers deceived him and he hoped to achieve his desire. As the light stubble blazes up in a harvested field, or as the hedge is set alight, if a traveller chance to kindle a fire too close, or leaves one smouldering when he goes off at daybreak, so the god was all on fire, his whole heart was aflame, and he nourished his fruitless love on hope. He eyed her hair as it hung carelessly about her neck, and sighed: 'What if it were properly arranged!' He looked at her eyes, sparkling bright as stars, he looked at her lips, and wanted to do more than look at them. He praised

her fingers, her hands and arms, bare almost to the shoulder. Her hidden charms he imagined lovelier still.

But Daphne ran off, swifter than the wind's breath, and did not stop to hear his words, though he called her back: 'I implore you, nymph, daughter of Peneus, do not run away! Though I pursue you, I am no enemy. Stay, sweet nymph! You flee as the lamb flees the wolf, or the deer the lion, as doves on fluttering wings fly from an eagle, as all creatures flee their natural foes! But it is love that drives me to follow you. Alas, how I fear lest you trip and fall, lest briars scratch your innocent legs, and I be the cause of your hurting yourself. These are rough places through which you are running-go less swiftly, I beg of you, slow your flight, and I in turn shall pursue less swiftly!

'Yet stay to inquire whose heart you have charmed. I am no peasant, living in a mountain hut, nor am I a shepherd or boorish herdsman who tends his flocks and cattle in these regions. Silly girl, you do not know from whom you are fleeing: indeed, you do not, or else you would not flee. I am lord of Delphi, Claros, and Tenedos, and of the realms of Patara too. I am the son of Jupiter. By my skill the past, the present, and the future are revealed; thanks to me, the lyre strings thrill with music. My arrow is sure, though there is one surer still, which has wounded my carefree heart. The art of medicine is my invention, and men the world over give me the name of healer. All the properties of herbs are known to me: but alas, there are no herbs to cure love, and the skill which helps others cannot help its master.'

He would have said more, but the frightened maiden fled from him, leaving him with his words unfinished; even then, she was graceful to see, as the wind bared her limbs and its gusts stirred her garments, blowing them out behind her. Her hair streamed in the light breeze, and her beauty was enhanced by her flight. But the youthful god could not endure to waste his time on further blandishments and, as love itself prompted, sped swiftly after her. Even so, when a Gallic hound spies a hare in some open meadow he tries by his swiftness to secure his prey, while the hare, by her swiftness, seeks safety: the dog, seemingly just about to fasten on his quarry, hopes at every moment that he has her, and grazes her hind quarters with outstretched muzzle, but the hare, uncertain whether she has not already been caught, snatches herself out of his very jaws, and escapes the teeth which almost touch her.

Thus the god and the nymph sped on, one made swift by hope and one by fear; but he who pursued was swifter, for he was assisted by love's wings. He gave the fleeing maiden no respite, but followed close on her heels, and his breath touched the locks that lay scattered on her neck, till Daphne's strength was spent, and she grew pale and weary with the effort of her swift flight. Then she saw the waters of the Peneus: 'O father,' she cried, 'help me! If you rivers really have divine powers, work some transformation, and destroy this beauty which makes me please all too well!' Her prayer was scarcely ended when a deep languor took hold on her limbs, her soft breast was enclosed in thin bark, her hair grew into leaves, her arms into branches, and her feet that were lately so swift were held fast by sluggish roots, while her face became the treetop. Nothing of her was left, except her shining loveliness.

Even as a tree, Phoebus loved her. He placed his hand against the trunk, and felt her heart still beating under the new bark. Embracing the branches as if they were limbs he kissed the wood: but, even as a tree, she shrank from his kisses. Then the god said: 'Since you cannot be my bride, surely you will at least be my tree. My hair, my lyre, my quivers will always display the laurel. You will accompany the generals of Rome, when the Capitol beholds their long triumphal processions, when joyful voices raise the song of victory. You will stand by Augustus' gateposts too, faithfully guarding his doors, and keeping watch from either side over the wreath of oak leaves that will hang there. Further, as my head is ever young, my tresses never shorn, so do you also, at all times, wear the crowning glory of never-fading foliage.' Paeon, the healer, had done: the laurel tree inclined her newmade branches, and seemed to nod her leafy top, as if it were a head, in consent.

There is a grove in Haemonia, shut in on every side by steep wooded slopes. Men call it Tempe. Through this grove flow the foaming waters of Peneus, gushing out from the bottom of Pindus' range. As the river roars downwards, it gathers mists of light spray, and scatters its drops on the treetops. The noise of its waters wearies the ear, far beyond its own neighbourhood. This was the home, the dwelling, the most secret haunt of the great river. Sitting here, in a cave hewn out of the cliffs, he was dispensing justice to the waves and to the nymphs who inhabited his stream.

To this spot there came first the rivers of his own country-Spercheus, poplar-fringed, the neverresting Enipeus, old Apidanus, gentle Amphrysus, and Aeas: none of them knowing whether to congratulate or to condole with Daphne's father. Then all the other rivers came, all the streams which, wherever their course has carried them, at last bring down their waters, weary with wandering, to the sea.

Only Inachus was not present, but remained hidden away in the depths of his cave, swelling his stream with tears, and in utter misery lamenting the loss of his daughter Io. He did not know whether she was alive or among the shades of the dead: but since he could not find her anywhere he assumed that she was nowhere to be found, and his heart feared worse than he knew.

Jupiter had caught sight of her as she was returning from her father's stream, and had said: 'Maiden, you are fit for Jupiter himself to love, and will make someone divinely happy when you share his couch. Now, while

the sun is at its zenith, seek shelter from its heat in the depths of the greenwood,'and he indicated the shady grove-'and do not be afraid to go alone into the haunts of wild beasts: you will be safe, though you make your way into the very heart of the forest, for you will be under the protection of a god; no common god at that, but the one who holds heaven's great sceptre, and launches the roving thunderbolt. Do not run away from me!'-for the girl was already fleeing. She had left the pasture lands of Lerna behind her, and the Lyrcean fields, thickly planted with trees, when the god spread darkness over the wide earth, concealing it from view. Then he halted the maiden's flight, and robbed her of her maidenhood.

Meanwhile Juno looked down over the heart of Argos, and wondered that floating clouds should give the appearance of night during the bright daytime. She realized that these were no river mists, nor were they exhaled from the damp earth. She looked round to see where her husband was: for by now she knew well the deceptions practised by that husband, who had so often been caught behaving as he ought not. When she could not find him in the sky, 'Unless I am mistaken,' she said, 'he is doing me some wrong.' Then, gliding down from high heaven, she stood on earth and bade the clouds disperse.

Jupiter had sensed his wife's arrival before she appeared, and had changed Inachus' daughter into a sleek heifer. Even as a cow she was lovely. Juno, though against her will, admired the look of the animal, and inquired whose it was, where it came from, and from what herd-as if she did not know the truth! Jupiter lied to her, and to stop her asking further questions about its parentage, said that it had been born of the earth. Then Saturn's daughter asked to have it as a present. What was he to do? It would be cruel to hand over his darling to another, but not to give her looked suspicious. On the one hand shame persuaded him to yield, but on the other love made him reluctant. His love would have triumphed over his sense of shame: but if a gift as trivial as a cow were refused to one who was his sister and his wife, it might seem to be more than a cow.

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