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OVID

Metamorphoses



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With an Introduction and Notes by

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My brow is ever young, my locks unshorn;
So keep your leaves' proud glory ever green.
Thus spoke the god; the laurel in assent
Inclined her new-made branches and bent down,
Or seemed to bend, her head, her leafy crown.

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There is a vale in Thessaly, enclosed
With hanging forests, steep on every side;
Men name it Tempe. Here Peneus rolls
At towering Pindus' foot his foaming course,
And from his mighty fall the swirling clouds
Of mist drift down in rain upon the trees,
And far the waters' wearying roar resounds.
Here is the home, the mansion, the retreat
Of that majestic river; seated here
Within a rock-hewn cavern he dispensed
Justice to all his waters and their nymphs.
Hither assemble first the neighbouring streams,
Restless Enipeus, old Apidanus,
Spercheus poplar-fringed, gentle Amphrysus
And Aeas, doubtful whether to console
Daphne's fond parent or congratulate.
Soon other rivers come, whose courses flow
Where'er their currents drive and lead at last
Their wandering waters weary to the sea.
But one is absent, Inachus, withdrawn
Deep in his cave and weeping tears that swell
His current, as he mourns in bitter grief
Io, his daughter lost. He cannot tell
Whether she lives or dwells among the shades,
And finding her nowhere thinks she must be
Nowhere and fear feeds fear when knowledge fails.*
Io returning from her father's stream
Had caught Jove's eye. 'You charming girl', he said,
'Well worthy of Jove's love, happy is he,
Who'er he be, that wins you for his bed.
Go to the deep wood's shade'—he pointed to
The shady wood—'the hour is hot; the sun

Shines in his zenith. If you fear alone
To risk the wild beasts' lairs, a god will guard you
And in the deepest forest keep you safe—
No common god! The sceptre of the sky
Is mine to hold in my almighty hand;
I wield at will the roaming thunderbolts—
No, do not run! For now the girl had run:
Through Lerna's meadows and the forest lands
Of high Lyceus she sped until the god
Drew down a veil of darkness to conceal
The world and stayed her flight and ravished her.
Juno meanwhile observed the land of Argos
And wondered that the floating clouds had wrought
In the bright day the darkness of the night.
These were no river mists! No clouds like these
The humid earth exhaled! She looked around
To find her husband; well she knew his tricks,
So often had caught him in his escapades;
And searched the sky in vain. 'If I'm not wrong',
She thought, 'I'm being wronged'; and gliding down
From heaven's height she lighted on the earth
And bade the clouds disperse. Jove had fore-sensed
His spouse's visit and transformed poor Io
Into a sleek white heifer (lovely still
Although a cow). Juno, against her will,
Admired the creature and asked whose she was,
And whence she came and to what herd belonged,
Pretending not to know the truth. He lied—
'The earth had brought her forth'—so to deflect
Questions about her birth. Then Juno begged
The heifer as a gift. What should he do?
Too cruel to give his darling! Not to give—
Suspicious, shame persuades but love dissuades.
Love would have won; but then—if he refused
His wife (his sister too) so slight a gift,
A cow, it well might seem no cow at all!
The goddess won her rival, but distrust
Lingered and still she feared her husband's tricks,
Till, for safe-keeping, she had given the cow
To Argus—Argus of the hundred eyes.

All watching and on duty round his head,
 Save two which took in turn their sleep and rest.
 Whichever way he stood he looked at Io,
 To before his eyes behind his back!
 By day he let her graze, but when the sun
 Sank down beneath the earth he stabled her
 And tied—for shame!—a halter round her neck.
 She browsed on leaves of trees and bitter weeds,
 And for her bed, poor thing, lay on the ground,
 Not always grassy, and drank the muddy streams;
 And when, to plead with Argus, she would try
 To stretch her arms, she had no arms to stretch.
 Would she complain, a moo came from her throat,
 A startling sound—her own voice frightened her.
 She reached her father's river and the banks
 Where often she had played and, in the water,
 Mirrored she saw her muzzle and her horns,
 And fled in terror from the self she saw.
 The Naiads did not know—not even her father
 Knew who she was, but she, disconsolate,
 Followed her sisters, followed her father, let
 Them stroke her, offered herself to be admired.
 Old Inachus picked grass and held it out;
 She licked her father's hand, cow-kissed his palms;
 Her tears rolled down; if only words would come,
 She'd speak her name, tell all, implore their aid.
 For words her hoof traced letters* in the dust—
 I, O—sad tidings of her body's change.
 'Alas, alack!' her father cried, and clasped
 The moaning heifer's horns and snow-white neck.
 'Alas, alack!' he groaned: 'Are you the child
 I sought through all the world? Oh, lighter grief
 You were unfound than found. You give no answer;
 Silent, but from your heart so deep a sigh!
 A moo—all you can say—is your reply!
 I, knowing naught, made ready for your marriage,
 Hoped for a son-in-law and grandchildren.
 But now the herd must find your husband, find
 Your child. For me death cannot end my woes.
 Sad bane to be a god! The gates of death

Are shut, my grief endures for evermore,
 As thus they grieved, Argus, star-eyed, drove off
 Daughter from father, hurrying her away
 To distant pastures. Then himself, afar,
 High on a mountain top sat sentinel
 To keep his scrutiny on every side.
 But now heaven's master could no more endure
 Io's distress, and summoned Mercury,
 His son, whom the bright shining Pleiad bore,*
 And charged him to accomplish Argus' death.
 Promptly he fastened on his ankle-wings,
 Grasped in his fist the wand that charms to sleep,
 Put on his magic cap, and thus arrayed
 Love's son sprang from his father's citadel
 Down to the earth. There he removed his cap,
 Laid by his wings; only his wand he kept.
 A herdsman now,* he drove a flock of goats
 Through the green byways, gathered as he went,
 And played his pipes of reed. The strange sweet skill
 Charmed Juno's guardian. 'My friend', he called,
 'Whoever you are, well might you sit with me
 Here on this rock; nowhere is lusher grass
 To feed your flock, and see how cool the shade
 Extends congenial for a shepherd's seat.'
 So Mercury joined him, and with many a tale
 He stayed the passing hours and on his reeds
 Played soft refrains to lull the watching eyes.
 But Argus fought to keep at bay the charms
 Of slumber and, though many of his eyes
 Were closed in sleep, still many kept their guard.
 He asked too by what means this new design
 (For new it was), the pipe of reeds, was found.
 Then Mercury told this story: 'Once there lived
 On the cold mountainsides of Arcady
 A Naiad, who among the forest sprites
 Of lofty Nonacris was most renowned.
 Syrinx the Naiads called her. Many a time
 She foiled the chasing satyrs and those gods
 Who haunt the shady copses and the coverts
 Of the lush countryside. In her pursuits—

And in her chastity—Syrinx revered
 Diana; girt like her she well might seem
 (So easy to mistake) Diana's self,
 Were not her bow of horn, Diana's gold.
 Indeed she was mistaken. Pan returning
 From Mount Lycaeus, crowned with his wreath of pine,
 Saw Syrinx once and said—'but what he said
 Remained to tell, and how* the scornful nymph
 Flew through the wilderness and came at last
 To Ladon's peaceful sandy stream, and there,
 Her flight barred by the river, begged her sisters,
 The water-nymphs, to change her; and, when Pan
 Thought he had captured her, he held instead
 Only the tall marsh reeds, and, while he sighed,
 The soft wind stirring in the reeds sent forth
 A thin and plaintive sound; and he, entranced
 By this new music and its witching tones,
 Cried 'You and I shall stay in unison!'
 And waxed together reeds of different lengths
 And made the pipes that keep his darling's name.
 The tale remained untold; for Mercury saw
 All Argus' eyelids closed and every eye
 Vanquished in sleep. He stopped and with his wand,
 His magic wand, soothed the tired resting eyes
 And sealed their slumber; quick then with his sword
 Struck off the nodding head and from the rock
 Threw it all bloody, spattering the cliff with gore.
 Argus lay dead: so many eyes, so bright
 Quenched, and all hundred shrouded in one night.
 Juno retrieved those eyes to set in place
 Among the feathers of her bird* and filled
 His tail with starry jewels. At once her wrath
 Flared up and soon her anger was fulfilled.
 Before her rival's eyes and in her mind
 She set a frightful Fury* and deep down
 Plunged blinding goads of fear; and lo fled
 A cowering fugitive through all the world.
 Her boundless travails found their end at last
 Beside the Nile; there, falling on her knees,
 Her head thrown back, she raised towards the stars

All she could raise, her face, her groans and tears,
 Her wild grief-laden lowings seemed to send
 A prayer to Jove to end her sufferings.
 And Jove pleaded with Juno, throwing his arms
 Around her neck, to end the punishment
 At last. 'Lay fear aside; never again',
 He swore, 'shall I give you cause to grieve',
 And charged the pools of Styx to attest his oath.
 The goddess was appeased. Io regained
 Her shape, became once more what once she was.
 The hair falls from her hide, her horns are gone,
 Her great wide eyes contract, her gaping mouth
 Shrinks small again, her arms and hands return,
 Her cloven hoofs resume their fivefold form.
 The heifer vanished, save her fair white grace.
 The nymph, content to use two legs again,
 Now walked erect, yet still afraid to speak
 Lest, cow-like, she might moo, and timorously
 Essayed the syllables so long disused.
 She is a goddess now, famous, divine,
 And linen-robed adorners through her shrine.
 To her a son was born, young Epaphus,
 Sprung, it was thought, at last from Jove's begetting.
 And in each town he shared his mother's shrines.

PHAETHON

His peer in pride and years was Phaethon,
 Child of the Sun, whose arrogance one day
 And boasts of his high parentage were more
 Than Epaphus could bear. 'You fool', he said,
 'To credit all your mother says; that birth
 You boast about is false.' Then Phaethon
 Flushed (though shame checked his rage) and took those taunts
 To Clymene, his mother. 'And to grieve
 You more, dear mother, I so frank', he said,
 'So fiery, stood there silent. I'm ashamed
 That he could so insult me and that I
 Could not repulse him. But, if I indeed
 Am sprung from heavenly stock, give me sure proof