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# OVID'S *METAMORPHOSES*,

TR. ANTHONY S. KLINE

A COMPLETE ENGLISH TRANSLATION AND  
MYTHOLOGICAL INDEX<sup>1</sup>

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## BOOK 1

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### THE PRIMAL CHAOS

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I want to speak about bodies changed into new forms. You, gods, since you are the ones who alter these, and all other things, inspire my attempt, and spin out a continuous thread of words, from the world's first origins to my own time.

Before there was earth or sea or the sky that covers everything, Nature appeared the same throughout the whole world: what we call chaos: a raw confused mass, nothing but inert matter, badly combined discordant atoms of things, confused in the one place. There was no Titan yet, shining his light on the world, or waxing Phoebe renewing her white horns, or the earth hovering in surrounding air balanced by her own weight, or watery Amphitrite stretching out her arms along the vast shores of the world. Though there was land and sea and air, it was unstable land, unswimmable water, air needing light. Nothing retained its shape, one thing obstructed another, because in the one body, cold fought with heat, moist with dry, soft with hard, and weight with weightless things.

### SEPARATION OF THE ELEMENTS

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This conflict was ended by a god and a greater order of nature, since he split off the earth from the sky, and the sea from the land, and divided the transparent heavens from the dense air. When he had disentangled the elements, and freed them from the obscure mass, he fixed them in separate spaces in harmonious peace. The weightless fire, that forms the heavens, darted upwards to make

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<sup>1</sup> <http://ovid.lib.virginia.edu/trans/Ovhome.htm#askline>

its home in the furthest heights. Next came air in lightness and place. Earth, heavier than either of these, drew down the largest elements, and was compressed by its own weight. The surrounding water took up the last space and enclosed the solid world.

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## THE EARTH AND SEA. THE FIVE ZONES.

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When whichever god it was had ordered and divided the mass, and collected it into separate parts, he first gathered the earth into a great ball so that it was uniform on all sides. Then he ordered the seas to spread and rise in waves in the flowing winds and pour around the coasts of the encircled land. He added springs and standing pools and lakes, and contained in shelving banks the widely separated rivers, some of which are swallowed by the earth itself, others of which reach the sea and entering the expanse of open waters beat against coastlines instead of riverbanks. He ordered the plains to extend, the valleys to subside, leaves to hide the trees, stony mountains to rise: and just as the heavens are divided into two zones to the north and two to the south, with a fifth and hotter between them, so the god carefully marked out the enclosed matter with the same number, and described as many regions on the earth. The equatorial zone is too hot to be habitable; the two poles are covered by deep snow; and he placed two regions between and gave them a temperate climate mixing heat and cold.

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## THE FOUR WINDS

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Air overhangs them, heavier than fire by as much as water's weight is lighter than earth. There he ordered the clouds and vapours to exist, and thunder to shake the minds of human beings, and winds that create lightning-bolts and flashes.

The world's maker did not allow these, either, to possess the air indiscriminately; as it is they are scarcely prevented from tearing the world apart, each with its blasts steering a separate course: like the discord between brothers. Eurus, the east wind, drew back to the realms of Aurora, to Nabatea, Persia, and the heights under the morning light: Evening, and the coasts that cool in the setting sun, are close to Zephyrus, the west wind. Chill Boreas, the north wind, seized Scythia and the seven stars of the Plough: while the south wind, Auster, drenches the lands opposite with incessant clouds and rain. Above these he placed the transparent, weightless heavens free of the dross of earth.

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## HUMANKIND

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He had barely separated out everything within fixed limits when the constellations that had been hidden for a long time in dark fog began to blaze out throughout the whole sky. And so that no region might lack its own animate beings, the stars and the forms of gods occupied the floor of heaven, the sea gave a home to the shining fish, earth took the wild animals, and the light air flying things.

As yet there was no animal capable of higher thought that could be ruler of all the rest. Then Humankind was born. Either the creator god, source of a better world, seeded it from the divine, or the newborn earth just drawn from the highest heavens still contained fragments related to the skies, so that Prometheus, blending them with streams of rain, moulded them into an image of the all-controlling gods. While other animals look downwards at the ground, he gave human beings an upturned aspect, commanding them to look towards the skies, and, upright, raise their face to the stars. So the earth, that had been, a moment ago, uncarved and imageless, changed and assumed the unknown shapes of human beings.

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## THE GOLDEN AGE

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This was the Golden Age that, without coercion, without laws, spontaneously nurtured the good and the true. There was no fear or punishment: there were no threatening words to be read, fixed in bronze, no crowd of suppliants fearing the judge's face: they lived safely without protection. No pine tree felled in the mountains had yet reached the flowing waves to travel to other lands: human beings only knew their own shores. There were no steep ditches surrounding towns, no straight war-trumpets, no coiled horns, no swords and helmets. Without the use of armies, people passed their lives in gentle peace and security. The earth herself also, freely, without the scars of ploughs, untouched by hoes, produced everything from herself. Contented with food that grew without cultivation, they collected mountain strawberries and the fruit of the strawberry tree, wild cherries, blackberries clinging to the tough brambles, and acorns fallen from Jupiter's spreading oak-tree. Spring was eternal, and gentle breezes caressed with warm air the flowers that grew without being seeded. Then the untilled earth gave of its produce and, without needing renewal, the fields whitened with heavy ears of corn. Sometimes rivers of milk flowed, sometimes streams of nectar, and golden honey trickled from the green holm oak.

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## THE SILVER AGE

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When Saturn was banished to gloomy Tartarus, and Jupiter ruled the world, then came the people of the age of silver that is inferior to gold, more valuable than yellow bronze. Jupiter shortened spring's first duration and made the year consist of four seasons, winter, summer, changeable autumn, and brief spring. Then parched air first glowed white scorched with the heat, and ice hung

down frozen by the wind. Then houses were first made for shelter: before that homes had been made in caves, and dense thickets, or under branches fastened with bark. Then seeds of corn were first buried in the long furrows, and bullocks groaned, burdened under the yoke.

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## THE BRONZE AGE

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Third came the people of the bronze age, with fiercer natures, readier to indulge in savage warfare, but not yet vicious. The harsh iron age was last. Immediately every kind of wickedness erupted into this age of baser natures: truth, shame and honour vanished; in their place were fraud, deceit, and trickery, violence and pernicious desires. They set sails to the wind, though as yet the seamen had poor knowledge of their use, and the ships' keels that once were trees standing amongst high mountains, now leaped through uncharted waves. The land that was once common to all, as the light of the sun is, and the air, was marked out, to its furthest boundaries, by wary surveyors. Not only did they demand the crops and the food the rich soil owed them, but they entered the bowels of the earth, and excavating brought up the wealth it had concealed in Stygian shade, wealth that incites men to crime. And now harmful iron appeared, and gold more harmful than iron. War came, whose struggles employ both, waving clashing arms with bloodstained hands. They lived on plunder: friend was not safe with friend, relative with relative, kindness was rare between brothers. Husbands longed for the death of their wives, wives for the death of their husbands. Murderous stepmothers mixed deadly aconite, and sons inquired into their father's years before their time. Piety was dead, and virgin Astraea, last of all the immortals to depart, herself abandoned the blood-drenched earth.

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## THE GIANTS

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Rendering the heights of heaven no safer than the earth, they say the giants attempted to take the Celestial kingdom, piling mountains up to the distant stars. Then the all-powerful father of the gods hurled his bolt of lightning, fractured Olympus and threw Mount Pelion down from Ossa below. Her sons' dreadful bodies, buried by that mass, drenched Earth with streams of blood, and they say she warmed it to new life, so that a trace of her children might remain, transforming it into the shape of human beings. But these progeny also despising the gods were savage, violent, and eager for slaughter, so that you might know they were born from blood.

When Saturn's son, the father of the gods, saw this from his highest citadel, he groaned, and recalling the vile feast at Lycaon's table, so recent it was still unknown, his mind filled with a great anger fitting for Jupiter, and he called the gods to council, a summons that brooked no delay.

There is a high track, seen when the sky is clear, called the Milky Way, and known for its brightness. This way the gods pass to the palaces and halls of the mighty Thunderer. To right and left are the houses of the greater gods, doors open and crowded. The lesser gods live elsewhere. Here the powerful and distinguished have made their home. This is the place, if I were to be bold, I would not be afraid to call high heaven's Palatine.

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## JUPITER THREATENS TO DESTROY HUMANKIND

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When the gods had taken their seats in the marble council chamber their king, sitting high above them, leaning on his ivory sceptre, shook his formidable mane three times and then a fourth, disturbing the earth, sea and stars. Then he opened his lips in indignation and spoke. 'I was not more troubled than I am now concerning the world's sovereignty than when each of the snake-footed giants prepared to throw his hundred arms around the imprisoned sky. Though they were fierce enemies, still their attack came in one body and from one source. Now I must destroy the human race, wherever Nereus sounds, throughout the world. I swear it by the infernal streams, that glide below the earth through the Stygian groves. All means should first be tried, but the incurable flesh must be excised by the knife, so that the healthy part is not infected. Mine are the demigods, the wild spirits, nymphs, fauns and satyrs, and sylvan deities of the hills. Since we have not yet thought them worth a place in heaven let us at least allow them to live in safety in the lands we have given them. Perhaps you gods believe they will be safe, even when Lycaon, known for his savagery, plays tricks against me, who holds the thunderbolt, and reigns over you.'

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## LYCAON IS TURNED INTO A WOLF

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All the gods murmured aloud and, zealously and eagerly, demanded punishment of the man who committed such actions. When the impious band of conspirators were burning to drown the name of Rome in Caesar's blood, the human race was suddenly terrified by fear of just such a disaster, and the whole world shuddered with horror. Your subjects' loyalty is no less pleasing to you, Augustus, than theirs was to Jupiter. After he had checked their murmuring with voice and gesture, they were all silent. When the noise had subsided, quieted by his royal authority, Jupiter again broke the silence with these words: 'Have no fear, he has indeed been punished, but I will tell you his crime, and what the penalty was. News of these evil times had reached my ears. Hoping it false I left Olympus's heights, and travelled the earth, a god in human form. It would take too long to tell what wickedness I found everywhere. Those rumours were even milder than the truth. I had crossed Maenala, those mountains bristling with wild beasts' lairs, Cyllene, and the pinewoods of chill Lycaeus. Then, as the last shadows gave way to night, I entered the inhospitable house of the Arcadian king. I gave them signs that a god had come, and the people began to worship me. At first Lycaon ridiculed their piety, then exclaimed 'I will prove by a straightforward test whether he is a god or a mortal. The truth will not be in doubt.' He planned to destroy me in the depths of sleep, unexpectedly, by night. That is how he resolved to prove the truth. Not satisfied with this he took a

hostage sent by the Molossi, opened his throat with a knife, and made some of the still warm limbs tender in seething water, roasting others in the fire. No sooner were these placed on the table than I brought the roof down on the household gods, with my avenging flames, those gods worthy of such a master. He himself ran in terror, and reaching the silent fields howled aloud, frustrated of speech. Foaming at the mouth, and greedy as ever for killing, he turned against the sheep, still delighting in blood. His clothes became bristling hair, his arms became legs. He was a wolf, but kept some vestige of his former shape. There were the same grey hairs, the same violent face, the same glittering eyes, the same savage image. One house has fallen, but others deserve to also. Wherever the earth extends the avenging furies rule. You would think men were sworn to crime! Let them all pay the penalty they deserve, and quickly. That is my intent.'

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### JUPITER INVOKES THE FLOODWATERS

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When he had spoken, some of the gods encouraged Jupiter's anger, shouting their approval of his words, while others consented silently. They were all saddened though at this destruction of the human species, and questioned what the future of the world would be free of humanity. Who would honour their altars with incense? Did he mean to surrender the world to the ravages of wild creatures? In answer the king of the gods calmed their anxiety, the rest would be his concern, and he promised them a people different from the first, of a marvellous creation.

Now he was ready to hurl his lightning-bolts at the whole world but feared that the sacred heavens might burst into flame from the fires below, and burn to the furthest pole: and he remembered that a time was fated to come when sea and land, and the untouched courts of the skies would ignite, and the troubled mass of the world be besieged by fire. So he set aside the weapons the Cyclopes forged, and resolved on a different punishment, to send down rain from the whole sky and drown humanity beneath the waves.

Straight away he shut up the north winds in Aeolus's caves, with the gales that disperse the gathering clouds, and let loose the south wind, he who flies with dripping wings, his terrible aspect shrouded in pitch-black darkness. His beard is heavy with rain, water streams from his grey hair, mists wreath his forehead, and his feathers and the folds of his robes distil the dew. When he crushes the hanging clouds in his outstretched hand there is a crash, and the dense vapours pour down rain from heaven. Iris, Juno's messenger, dressed in the colours of the rainbow, gathers water and feeds it back to the clouds. The cornfields are flattened and saddening the farmers, the crops, the object of their prayers, are ruined, and the long year's labour wasted.

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### THE FLOOD

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Jupiter's anger is not satisfied with only his own aerial waters: his brother the sea-god helps him, with the ocean waves. He calls the rivers to council, and when they have entered their ruler's house, says 'Now is not the time for long speeches! Exert all your strength. That is what is needed. Throw open your doors, drain the dams, and loose the reins of all your streams!' Those are his commands. The rivers return and uncurb their fountains' mouths, and race an unbridled course to the sea.

Neptune himself strikes the ground with his trident, so that it trembles, and with that blow opens up channels for the waters. Overflowing, the rivers rush across the open plains, sweeping away at the same time not just orchards, flocks, houses and human beings, but sacred temples and their contents. Any building that has stood firm, surviving the great disaster undamaged, still has its roof drowned by the highest waves, and its towers buried below the flood. And now the land and sea are not distinct, all is the sea, the sea without a shore.

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## THE WORLD IS DROWNED

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There one man escapes to a hilltop, while another seated in his rowing boat pulls the oars over places where lately he was ploughing. One man sails over his cornfields or over the roof of his drowned farmhouse, while another man fishes in the topmost branches of an elm. Sometimes, by chance, an anchor embeds itself in a green meadow, or the curved boats graze the tops of vineyards. Where lately lean goats browsed shapeless seals play. The Nereids are astonished to see woodlands, houses and whole towns under the water. There are dolphins in the trees: disturbing the upper branches and stirring the oak-trees as they brush against them. Wolves swim among the sheep, and the waves carry tigers and tawny lions. The boar has no use for his powerful tusks, the deer for its quick legs, both are swept away together, and the circling bird, after a long search for a place to land, falls on tired wings into the water. The sea in unchecked freedom has buried the hills, and fresh waves beat against the mountaintops. The waters wash away most living things, and those the sea spares, lacking food, are defeated by slow starvation.

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## DEUCALION AND HIS WIFE PYRRHA

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Phocis, a fertile country when it was still land, separates Aonia from Oeta, though at that time it was part of the sea, a wide expanse of suddenly created water. There Mount Parnassus lifts its twin steep summits to the stars, its peaks above the clouds. When Deucalion and his wife landed here in their small boat, everywhere else being drowned by the waters, they worshipped the Corycian nymphs, the mountain gods, and the goddess of the oracles, prophetic Themis. No one was more virtuous or fonder of justice than he was, and no woman showed greater reverence for the gods.

When Jupiter saw the earth covered with the clear waters, and that only one man was left of all those thousands of men, only one woman left of all those thousands of women, both innocent and both worshippers of the gods, he scattered the clouds and mist, with the north wind, and revealed the heavens to the earth and the earth to the sky. It was no longer an angry sea, since the king of the oceans putting aside his three-pronged spear calmed the waves, and called sea-dark Triton, showing from the depths his shoulders thick with shells, to blow into his echoing conch and give the rivers and streams the signal to return. He lifted the hollow shell that coils from its base in broad spirals, that shell that filled with his breath in mid-ocean makes the eastern and the western shores sound. So now when it touched the god's mouth, and dripping beard, and sounded out the order for retreat, it was heard by all the waters on earth and in the ocean, and all the waters hearing it were checked. Now the sea has shorelines, the brimming rivers keep to their channels, the floods subside, and hills appear. Earth rises, the soil increasing as the water ebbs, and finally the trees show their naked tops, the slime still clinging to their leaves.

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### THEY ASK THEMIS FOR HELP

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The world was restored. But when Deucalion saw its emptiness, and the deep silence of the desolate lands, he spoke to Pyrrha, through welling tears. 'Wife, cousin, sole surviving woman, joined to me by our shared race, our family origins, then by the marriage bed, and now joined to me in danger, we two are the people of all the countries seen by the setting and the rising sun, the sea took all the rest. Even now our lives are not guaranteed with certainty: the storm clouds still terrify my mind. How would you feel now, poor soul, if the fates had willed you to be saved, but not me? How could you endure your fear alone? Who would comfort your tears? Believe me, dear wife, if the sea had you, I would follow you, and the sea would have me too. If only I, by my father's arts, could recreate earth's peoples, and breathe life into the shaping clay! The human race remains in us. The gods willed it that we are the only examples of mankind left behind.' He spoke and they wept, resolving to appeal to the sky-god, and ask his help by sacred oracles. Immediately they went side by side to the springs of Cephisus that, though still unclear, flowed in its usual course. When they had sprinkled their heads and clothing with its watery libations, they traced their steps to the temple of the sacred goddess, whose pediments were green with disfiguring moss, her altars without fire. When they reached the steps of the sanctuary they fell forward together and lay prone on the ground, and kissing the cold rock with trembling lips, said 'If the gods wills soften, appeased by the prayers of the just, if in this way their anger can be deflected, Themis tell us by what art the damage to our race can be repaired, and bring help, most gentle one, to this drowned world!'

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### THE HUMAN RACE IS RE-CREATED

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The goddess was moved, and uttered oracular speech: 'Leave the temple and with veiled heads and loosened clothes throw behind you the bones of your great mother!' For a long time they stand there, dumbfounded. Pyrrha is first to break the silence: she refuses to obey the goddess's



command. Her lips trembling she asks for pardon, fearing to offend her mother's spirit by scattering her bones. Meanwhile they reconsider the dark words the oracle gave, and their uncertain meaning, turning them over and over in their minds. Then Prometheus's son comforted Epimetheus's daughter with quiet words: 'Either this idea is wrong, or, since oracles are godly and never urge evil, our great mother must be the earth: I think the bones she spoke about are stones in the body of the earth. It is these we are told to throw behind us.'

Though the Titan's daughter is stirred by her husband's thoughts, still hope is uncertain: they are both so unsure of the divine promptings; but what harm can it do to try? They descended the steps, covered their heads and loosened their clothes, and threw the stones needed behind them. The stones, and who would believe it if it were not for ancient tradition, began to lose their rigidity and hardness, and after a while softened, and once softened acquired new form. Then after growing, and ripening in nature, a certain likeness to a human shape could be vaguely seen, like marble statues at first inexact and roughly carved. The earthy part, however, wet with moisture, turned to flesh; what was solid and inflexible mutated to bone; the veins stayed veins; and quickly, through the power of the gods, stones the man threw took on the shapes of men, and women were remade from those thrown by the woman. So the toughness of our race, our ability to endure hard labour, and the proof we give of the source from which we are sprung.

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## OTHER SPECIES ARE GENERATED

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Earth spontaneously created other diverse forms of animal life. After the remaining moisture had warmed in the sun's fire, the wet mud of the marshlands swelled with heat, and the fertile seeds of things, nourished by life-giving soil as if in a mother's womb, grew, and in time acquired a nature. So, when the seven-mouthed Nile retreats from the drowned fields and returns to its former bed, and the fresh mud boils in the sun, farmers find many creatures as they turn the lumps of earth. Amongst them they see some just spawned, on the edge of life, some with incomplete bodies and number of limbs, and often in the same matter one part is alive and the other is raw earth. In fact when heat and moisture are mixed they conceive, and from these two things the whole of life originates. And though fire and water fight each other, heat and moisture create everything, and this discordant union is suitable for growth. So when the earth muddied from the recent flood glowed again heated by the deep heaven-sent light of the sun she produced innumerable species, partly remaking previous forms, partly creating new monsters.

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## PHOEBUS KILLS THE PYTHON AND SEES DAPHNE

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Indeed, though she would not have desired to, she then gave birth to you, great Python, covering so great an area of the mountain slopes, a snake not known before, a terror to the new race of men.

The archer god, with lethal shafts that he had only used before on fleeing red deer and roe deer, with a thousand arrows, almost emptying his quiver, destroyed the creature, the venom running out from its black wounds. Then he founded the sacred Pythian games, celebrated by contests, named from the serpent he had conquered. There the young winners in boxing, in foot and chariot racing, were honoured with oak wreaths. There was no laurel as yet, so Phoebus crowned his temples, his handsome curling hair, with leaves of any tree.

Phoebus's first love was Daphne, daughter of Peneus, and not through chance but because of Cupid's fierce anger. Recently the Delian god, exulting at his victory over the serpent, had seen him bending his tightly strung bow and said 'Impudent boy, what are you doing with a man's weapons? That one is suited to my shoulders, since I can hit wild beasts of a certainty, and wound my enemies, and not long ago destroyed with countless arrows the swollen Python that covered many acres with its plague-ridden belly. You should be intent on stirring the concealed fires of love with your burning brand, not laying claim to my glories!' Venus's son replied 'You may hit every other thing Phoebus, but my bow will strike you: to the degree that all living creatures are less than gods, by that degree is your glory less than mine.' He spoke, and striking the air fiercely with beating wings, he landed on the shady peak of Parnassus, and took two arrows with opposite effects from his full quiver: one kindles love, the other dispels it. The one that kindles is golden with a sharp glistening point, the one that dispels is blunt with lead beneath its shaft. With the second he transfixed Peneus's daughter, but with the first he wounded Apollo piercing him to the marrow of his bones.

### PHOEBUS PURSUES DAPHNE

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Now the one loved, and the other fled from love's name, taking delight in the depths of the woods, and the skins of the wild beasts she caught, emulating virgin Phoebe, a careless ribbon holding back her hair. Many courted her, but she, averse to being wooed, free from men and unable to endure them, roamed the pathless woods, careless of Hymen or Amor, or whatever marriage might be. Her father often said 'Girl you owe me a son-in-law', and again often 'Daughter, you owe me grandsons.' But, hating the wedding torch as if it smacked of crime she would blush red with shame all over her beautiful face, and clinging to her father's neck with coaxing arms, she would say 'Dearest father, let me be a virgin for ever! Diana's father granted it to her.' He yields to that plea, but your beauty itself, Daphne, prevents your wish, and your loveliness opposes your prayer.

Phoebus loves her at first sight, and desires to wed her, and hopes for what he desires, but his own oracular powers fail him. As the light stubble of an empty cornfield blazes; as sparks fire a hedge when a traveller, by mischance, lets them get too close, or forgets them in the morning; so the god was altered by the flames, and all his heart burned, feeding his useless desire with hope. He sees her disordered hair hanging about her neck and sighs 'What if it were properly dressed?' He gazes at her eyes sparkling with the brightness of starlight. He gazes on her lips, where mere gazing does not satisfy. He praises her wrists and hands and fingers, and her arms bare to the shoulder:

whatever is hidden, he imagines more beautiful. But she flees swifter than the lightest breath of air, and resists his words calling her back again.

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### PHOEBUS BEGS DAPHNE TO YIELD TO HIM

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'Wait nymph, daughter of Peneus, I beg you! I who am chasing you am not your enemy. Nymph, Wait! This is the way a sheep runs from the wolf, a deer from the mountain lion, and a dove with fluttering wings flies from the eagle: everything flies from its foes, but it is love that is driving me to follow you! Pity me! I am afraid you might fall headlong or thorns undeservedly scar your legs and I be a cause of grief to you! These are rough places you run through. Slow down, I ask you, check your flight, and I too will slow. At least enquire whom it is you have charmed. I am no mountain man, no shepherd, no rough guardian of the herds and flocks. Rash girl, you do not know, you cannot realise, who you run from, and so you run. Delphi's lands are mine, Claros and Tenedos, and Patara acknowledges me king. Jupiter is my father. Through me what was, what is, and what will be, are revealed. Through me strings sound in harmony, to song. My aim is certain, but an arrow truer than mine, has wounded my free heart! The whole world calls me the bringer of aid; medicine is my invention; my power is in herbs. But love cannot be healed by any herb, nor can the arts that cure others cure their lord!'

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### DAPHNE BECOMES THE LAUREL BOUGH

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He would have said more as timid Peneüs ran, still lovely to see, leaving him with his words unfinished. The winds bared her body, the opposing breezes in her way fluttered her clothes, and the light airs threw her streaming hair behind her, her beauty enhanced by flight. But the young god could no longer waste time on further blandishments, urged on by Amor, he ran on at full speed. Like a hound of Gaul starting a hare in an empty field, that heads for its prey, she for safety: he, seeming about to clutch her, thinks now, or now, he has her fast, grazing her heels with his outstretched jaws, while she uncertain whether she is already caught, escaping his bite, spurts from the muzzle touching her. So the virgin and the god: he driven by desire, she by fear. He ran faster, Amor giving him wings, and allowed her no rest, hung on her fleeing shoulders, breathed on the hair flying round her neck. Her strength was gone, she grew pale, overcome by the effort of her rapid flight, and seeing Peneus's waters near cried out 'Help me father! If your streams have divine powers change me, destroy this beauty that pleases too well!' Her prayer was scarcely done when a heavy numbness seized her limbs, thin bark closed over her breast, her hair turned into leaves, her arms into branches, her feet so swift a moment ago stuck fast in slow-growing roots, her face was lost in the canopy. Only her shining beauty was left.

## PHOEBUS HONOURS DAPHNE

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Even like this Phoebus loved her and, placing his hand against the trunk, he felt her heart still quivering under the new bark. He clasped the branches as if they were parts of human arms, and kissed the wood. But even the wood shrank from his kisses, and the god said 'Since you cannot be my bride, you must be my tree! Laurel, with you my hair will be wreathed, with you my lyre, with you my quiver. You will go with the Roman generals when joyful voices acclaim their triumph, and the Capitol witnesses their long processions. You will stand outside Augustus's doorposts, a faithful guardian, and keep watch over the crown of oak between them. And just as my head with its uncropped hair is always young, so you also will wear the beauty of undying leaves.' Paeon had done: the laurel bowed her newly made branches, and seemed to shake her leafy crown like a head giving consent.

## INACHUS MOURNS FOR IO

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There is a grove in Haemonia, closed in on every side by wooded cliffs. They call it Tempe. Through it the river Peneus rolls, with foaming waters, out of the roots of Pindus, and in its violent fall gathers clouds, driving the smoking mists along, raining down spray onto the tree tops, and deafening remoter places with its roar. Here is the house, the home, the innermost sanctuary of the great river. Seated here, in a rocky cavern, he laid down the law to the waters and the nymphs who lived in his streams. Here the rivers of his own country first met, unsure whether to console with or celebrate Daphne's father: Spercheus among poplars, restless Enipeus, gentle Amphrysus, Aëas and ancient Apidanus; and then later all the others that, whichever way their force carries them, bring down their weary wandering waters to the sea. Only Inachus is missing, but hidden in the deepest cave he swells his stream with tears, and in utter misery laments his lost daughter, Io, not knowing if she is alive or among the shades. Since he cannot find her anywhere, he imagines her nowhere, and his heart fears worse than death.

## JUPITER'S RAPE OF IO

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Jupiter first saw her returning from her father's stream, and said 'Virgin, worthy of Jupiter himself, who will make some unknown man happy when you share his bed, while it is hot and the sun is at the highest point of its arc, find shade in the deep woods! (and he showed her the woods' shade). But if you are afraid to enter the wild beasts' lairs, you can go into the remote woods in safety, protected by a god, and not by any lesser god, but by the one who holds the sceptre of heaven in his mighty hand, and who hurls the flickering bolts of lightning. Do not fly from me!' She was already in flight. She had left behind Lerna's pastures, and the Lyrcean plain's wooded fields, when the god hid the wide earth in a covering of fog, caught the fleeing girl, and raped her.

## JUPITER TRANSFORMS IO TO A HEIFER

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Meanwhile Juno looked down into the heart of Argos, surprised that rapid mists had created night in shining daylight. She knew they were not vapours from the river, or breath from the damp earth. She looked around to see where her husband was, knowing by now the intrigues of a spouse so often caught in the act. When she could not find him in the skies, she said 'Either I am wrong, or being wronged' and gliding down from heaven's peak, she stood on earth ordering the clouds to melt. Jupiter had a presage of his wife's arrival and had changed Inachus's daughter into a gleaming heifer. Even in that form she was beautiful. Saturnia approved the animal's looks, though grudgingly, asking, then, whose she was, where from, what herd, as if she did not know. Jupiter, to stop all inquiry, lied, saying she had been born from the earth. Then Saturnia claimed her as a gift. What could he do? Cruel to sacrifice his love, but suspicious not to. Shame urges him to it, Amor urges not. Amor would have conquered Shame, but if he refused so slight a gift as a heifer to the companion of his race and bed, it might appear no heifer!

## JUNO CLAIMS IO AND ARGUS GUARDS HER

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Though her rival was given up the goddess did not abandon her fears at once, cautious of Jupiter and afraid of his trickery, until she had given Io into Argus's keeping, that son of Arestor. Argus had a hundred eyes round his head, that took their rest two at a time in succession while the others kept watch and stayed on guard. Wherever he stood he was looking at Io, and had Io in front of his eyes when his back was turned. He let her graze in the light, but when the sun sank below the earth, he penned her, and fastened a rope round her innocent neck. She grazed on the leaves of trees and bitter herbs. She often lay on the bare ground, and the poor thing drank water from muddy streams. When she wished to stretch her arms out to Argus in supplication, she had no arms to stretch. Trying to complain, a lowing came from her mouth, and she was alarmed and frightened by the sound of her own voice. When she came to Inachus's riverbanks where she often used to play and saw her gaping mouth and her new horns in the water, she grew frightened and fled terrified of herself.

## INACHUS FINDS IO AND GRIEVES FOR HER

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The naiads did not know her: Inachus himself did not know her, but she followed her father, followed her sisters, allowing herself to be petted, and offering herself to be admired. Old Inachus pulled some grasses and held them out to her: she licked her father's hand and kissed his palm,

could not hold back her tears, and if only words could have come she would have begged for help, telling her name and her distress. With letters drawn in the dust with her hoof, instead of words, she traced the sad story of her changed form. 'Pity me!' said her father Inachus, clinging to the groaning heifer's horns and snow-white neck, 'Pity me!' he sighed; 'Are you really my daughter I searched the wide world for? There was less sadness with you lost than found! Without speech, you do not answer in words to mine, only heave deep sighs from your breast, and all you can do is low in reply to me. Unknowingly I was arranging marriage and a marriage-bed for you, hoping for a son-in-law first and then grandchildren. Now you must find a mate from the herd, and from the herd get you a son. I am not allowed by dying to end such sorrow; it is hard to be a god, the door of death closed to me, my grief goes on immortal for ever.' As he mourned, Argus with his star-like eyes drove her to distant pastures, dragging her out of her father's arms. There, sitting at a distance he occupied a high peak of the mountain, where resting he could keep a watch on every side.

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### JUPITER SENDS MERCURY TO KILL ARGUS

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Now the king of the gods can no longer stand Phoronis's great sufferings, and he calls his son, born of the shining Pleiad, and orders him to kill Argus. Mercury, quickly puts on his winged sandals, takes his sleep-inducing wand in his divine hand, and sets his cap on his head. Dressed like this the son of Jupiter touches down on the earth from his father's stronghold. There he takes off his cap, and doffs his wings, only keeping his wand. Taking this, disguised as a shepherd, he drives she-goats, stolen on the way, through solitary lanes, and plays his reed pipe as he goes. Juno's guard is captivated by this new sound. 'You there, whoever you are' Argus calls 'you could sit here beside me on this rock; there's no better grass elsewhere for your flock, and you can see that the shade is fine for shepherds.'

The descendant of Atlas sits down, and passes the day in conversation, talking of many things, and playing on his reed pipe, trying to conquer those watching eyes. Argus however fights to overcome gentle sleep, and though he allows some of his eyes to close, the rest stay vigilant. He even asks, since the reed pipe has only just been invented, how it was invented.

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### MERCURY TELLS THE STORY OF SYRINX

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So the god explained 'On Arcadia's cold mountain slopes among the wood nymphs, the hamadryads, of Mount Nonacris, one was the most celebrated: the nymphs called her Syrinx. She had often escaped from the satyrs chasing her, and from others of the demi-gods that live in shadowy woods and fertile fields. But she followed the worship of the Ortygian goddess in staying

virgin. Her dress caught up like Diana she deceives the eye, and could be mistaken for Leto's daughter, except that her bow is of horn, and the other's is of gold. Even so she is deceptive. Pan, whose head is crowned with a wreath of sharp pine shoots, saw her, coming from Mount Lycaeus, and spoke to her.' Now Mercury still had to relate what Pan said, and how the nymph, despising his entreaties, ran through the wilds till she came to the calm waters of sandy Ladon; and how when the river stopped her flight she begged her sisters of the stream to change her; and how Pan, when he thought he now had Syrinx, found that instead of the nymph's body he only held reeds from the marsh; and, while he sighed there, the wind in the reeds, moving, gave out a clear, plaintive sound. Charmed by this new art and its sweet tones the god said 'This way of communing with you is still left to me' So unequal lengths of reed, joined together with wax, preserved the girl's name.

About to tell all this, Cyllenian Mercury saw that every eye had succumbed and their light was lost in sleep. Quickly he stops speaking and deepens their rest, caressing those drowsy eyes with touches of his magic wand. Then straightaway he strikes the nodding head, where it joins the neck, with his curved sword, and sends it bloody down the rocks, staining the steep cliff. Argus, you are overthrown, the light of your many eyes is extinguished, and one dark sleeps under so many eyelids.

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## IO IS RETURNED TO HUMAN FORM

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Saturnia took his eyes and set them into the feathers of her own bird, and filled the tail with star-like jewels. Immediately she blazed with anger, and did not hold back from its consequences. She set a terrifying Fury in front of the eyes and mind of that 'slut' from the Argolis, buried a tormenting restlessness in her breast, and drove her as a fugitive through the world. You, Nile, put an end to her immeasurable suffering. When she reached you, she fell forward onto her knees on the riverbank and turning back her long neck with her face upwards, in the only way she could, looked to the sky, and with groans and tears and sad lowing seemed to reproach Jupiter and beg him to end her troubles. Jupiter threw his arms round his wife's neck and pleaded for an end to vengeance, saying 'Do not fear, in future she will never be a source of pain' and he called the Stygian waters to witness his words.

As the goddess grows calmer, Io regains her previous appearance, and becomes what she once was. The rough hair leaves her body, the horns disappear, the great eyes grow smaller, the gaping mouth shrinks, the shoulders and hands return, and the hooves vanish, each hoof changing back into five nails. Nothing of the heifer is left except her whiteness. Able to stand on two feet she raises herself erect and fearing to speak in case she lows like a heifer, timidly attempts long neglected words.

## PHAETHON'S PARENTAGE

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Now she is worshipped as a greatly honoured goddess by crowds of linen clad acolytes. In due time she bore a son, Epaphus, who shared the cities' temples with his mother, and was believed to have been conceived from mighty Jupiter's seed. He had a friend, Phaethon, child of the Sun, equal to him in spirit and years, who once boasted proudly that Phoebus was his father, and refused to concede the claim, which Inachus's grandson could not accept. 'You are mad to believe all your mother says, and you have an inflated image of your father.' Phaethon reddened but, from shame, repressed his anger, and went to his mother Clymene with Inachus's reproof. 'To sadden you more, mother, I the free, proud, spirit was silent! I am ashamed that such a reproach can be spoken and not answered. But if I am born at all of divine stock, give me some proof of my high birth, and let me claim my divinity!' So saying he flung his arms round his mother's neck, entreating her, by his own and her husband Merops's life, and by his sisters' marriages, to reveal to him some true sign of his parentage.

## PHAETHON SETS OUT FOR THE PALACE OF THE SUN

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Clymene, moved perhaps by Phaethon's entreaties or more by anger at the words spoken, stretched both arms out to the sky and looking up at the sun's glow said 'By that brightness marked out by glittering rays, that sees us and hears us, I swear to you, my son, that you are the child of the Sun; of that being you see; you are the child of he who governs the world; if I lie, may he himself decline to look on me again, and may this be the last light to reach our eyes! It is no great effort for you yourself to find your father's house. The place he rises from is near our land. If you have it in mind to do so, go and ask the sun himself!' Immediately Phaethon, delighted at his mother's words, imagining the heavens in his mind, darts off and crosses Ethiopia his people's land, then India, land of those bathed in radiant fire, and with energy reaches the East.

## BOOK 2 EXCERPTS

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### JUPITER SEES CALLISTO

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Now the all-powerful father of the gods circuits the vast walls of heaven and examines them to check if anything has been loosened by the violent fires. When he sees they are as solid and robust as ever he inspects the earth and the works of humankind. Arcadia above all is his greatest care. He restores her fountains and streams, that are still hardly daring to flow, gives grass to the bare earth, leaves to the trees, and makes the scorched forests grow green again.



Often, as he came and went, he would stop short at the sight of a girl from Nonacris, feeling the fire take in the very marrow of his bones. She was not one to spin soft wool or play with her hair. A clasp fastened her tunic, and a white ribbon held back her loose tresses. Dressed like this, with a spear or a bow in her hand, she was one of Diana's companions. No nymph who roamed Maenalus was dearer to Trivia, goddess of the crossways, than she, Callisto, was. But no favour lasts long.

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## JUPITER RAPES CALLISTO

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The sun was high, just past the zenith, when she entered a grove that had been untouched through the years. Here she took her quiver from her shoulder, unstrung her curved bow, and lay down on the grass, her head resting on her painted quiver. Jupiter, seeing her there weary and unprotected, said 'Here, surely, my wife will not see my cunning, or if she does find out it is, oh it is, worth a quarrel! Quickly he took on the face and dress of Diana, and said 'Oh, girl who follows me, where in my domains have you been hunting?'

The virgin girl got up from the turf replying 'Greetings, goddess greater than Jupiter: I say it even though he himself hears it.' He did hear, and laughed, happy to be judged greater than himself, and gave her kisses unrestrainedly, and not those that virgins give. When she started to say which woods she had hunted he embraced and prevented her and not without committing a crime. Face to face with him, as far as a woman could, (I wish you had seen her Juno: you would have been kinder to her) she fought him, but how could a girl win, and who is more powerful than Jove? Victorious, Jupiter made for the furthest reaches of the sky: while to Callisto the grove was odious and the wood seemed knowing. As she retraced her steps she almost forgot her quiver and its arrows, and the bow she had left hanging.

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## DIANA DISCOVERS CALLISTO'S SHAME

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Behold how Diana, with her band of huntresses, approaching from the heights of Maenalus, magnificent from the kill, spies her there, and seeing her calls out. At the shout she runs, afraid at first in case it is Jupiter disguised, but when she sees the other nymphs come forward she realises there is no trickery and joins their number. Alas! How hard it is not to show one's guilt in one's face! She can scarcely lift her eyes from the ground, not as she used to be, wedded to her goddess's side or first of the whole company, but is silent and by her blushing shows signs of her shame at being attacked. Even if she were not herself virgin, Diana could sense her guilt in a thousand ways. They say all the nymphs could feel it.

Nine crescent moons had since grown full when the goddess faint from the chase in her brother's hot sunlight found a cool grove out of which a murmuring stream ran, winding over fine sand. She loved the place and tested the water with her foot. Pleased with this too she said 'Any witness is far away, let's bathe our bodies naked in the flowing water.' The Arcadian girl blushed: all of them took off their clothes: one of them tried to delay: hesitantly the tunic was removed and there her shame was revealed with her naked body. Terrified she tried to conceal her swollen belly. Diana cried 'Go, far away from here: do not pollute the sacred fountain!' and the Moon-goddess commanded her to leave her band of followers.

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### CALLISTO TURNED INTO A BEAR

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The great Thunderer's wife had known about all this for a long time and had held back her severe punishment until the proper time. Now there was no reason to wait. The girl had given birth to a boy, Arcas, and that in itself enraged Juno. When she turned her angry eyes and mind to thought of him she cried out 'Nothing more was needed, you adulteress, than your fertility, and your marking the insult to me by giving birth, making public my Jupiter's crime. You'll not carry this off safely. Now, insolent girl, I will take that shape away from you, that pleased you and my husband so much!' At this she clutched her in front by the hair of her forehead and pulled her face forwards onto the ground. Callisto stretched out her arms for mercy: those arms began to bristle with coarse black hairs: her hands arched over and changed into curved claws to serve as feet: and her face, that Jupiter had once praised, was disfigured by gaping jaws: and so that her prayers and words of entreaty might not attract him her power of speech was taken from her. An angry, threatening growl, harsh and terrifying, came from her throat. Still her former feelings remained intact though she was now a bear. She showed her misery in continual groaning, raising such hands as she had left to the starry sky, feeling, though she could not speak it, Jupiter's indifference. Ah, how often she wandered near the house and fields that had once been her home, not daring to sleep in the lonely woods! Ah, how often she was driven among the rocks by the baying hounds, and the huntress fled in fear from the hunters! Often she hid at the sight of wild beasts forgetting what she was, and though a bear she shuddered at the sight of other bears on the mountains and feared the wolves though her father Lycaon ran with them.

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### ARCAS AND CALLISTO BECOME CONSTELLATIONS

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And now Arcas, grandson of Lycaon, had reached his fifteenth year ignorant of his parentage. While he was hunting wild animals, while he was finding suitable glades and penning up the Erymanthian groves with woven nets, he came across his mother, who stood still at sight of Arcas and appeared to know him. He shrank back from those unmoving eyes gazing at him so fixedly, uncertain what made him afraid, and when she quickly came nearer he was about to pierce her chest with his lethal spear. All-powerful Jupiter restrained him and in the same moment removed

them and the possibility of that wrong, and together, caught up through the void on the winds, he set them in the heavens and made them similar constellations, the Great and Little Bear.

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## JUNO COMPLAINS TO TETHYS AND OCEANUS

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Juno was angered when she saw his inamorato shining among the stars, and went down into the waters to white-haired Tethys and old Oceanus to whom the gods often make reverence. When they asked her the reason for her visit she began 'You ask me why I, the queen of the gods, have left my home in the heavens to be here? Another has taken my place in the sky! I tell a lie, if you do not see, when night falls and the world darkens, newly exalted stars to wound me, set in the sky, where the remotest and shortest orbit circles the uttermost pole. Why should anyone wish to avoid wounding Juno or dread my enmity if I only benefit those I harm? Oh what a great achievement! Oh what marvellous powers I have! I stopped her being human and she becomes a goddess! This is the punishment I inflict on the guilty! This is my wonderful sovereignty! Let him take away her animal form and restore her former beauty as he did before with that Argive girl, Io. Why not divorce Juno, install her in my place, and let Lycaon be his father-in-law? If this contemptible insult to your foster-child moves you, shut out the seven stars of the Bear from your dark blue waters, repulse this constellation set in the heavens as a reward for her defilement, and do not let my rival dip in your pure flood!'

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## JUPITER'S ABDUCTION OF EUROPA

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When Mercury had inflicted this punishment on the girl for her impious words and thoughts, he left Pallas's land behind and flew to the heavens on outstretched wings. There his father calls him aside, and without revealing love as the reason, says 'Son, faithful worker of my commands, go, quickly in your usual way, fly down to where, in an eastern land, they observe your mother's star, among the Pleiades, (the inhabitants give it the name of Sidon). There drive the herd of royal cattle, that you will see some distance off, grazing the mountain grass, towards the sea shore!' He spoke, and immediately, as he commanded, the cattle, driven from the mountain, headed for the shore, where the great king's daughter, Europa, used to play together with the Tyrian virgins. Royalty and love do not sit well together, nor stay long in the same house. So the father and ruler of the gods, who is armed with the three-forked lightning in his right hand, whose nod shakes the world, setting aside his royal sceptre, took on the shape of a bull, lowed among the other cattle, and, beautiful to look at, wandered in the tender grass.

In colour he was white as the snow that rough feet have not trampled and the rain-filled south wind has not melted. The muscles rounded out his neck, the dewlaps hung down in front, the horns were twisted, but one might argue they were made by hand, purer and brighter than pearl. His forehead was not fearful, his eyes were not formidable, and his expression was peaceful. Agenor's daughter marvelled at how beautiful he was and how unthreatening. But though he seemed so

gentle she was afraid at first to touch him. Soon she drew close and held flowers out to his glistening mouth. The lover was joyful and while he waited for his hoped-for pleasure he kissed her hands. He could scarcely separate then from now. At one moment he frolics and runs riot in the grass, at another he lies down, white as snow on the yellow sands. When her fear has gradually lessened he offers his chest now for virgin hands to pat and now his horns to twine with fresh wreaths of flowers. The royal virgin even dares to sit on the bull's back, not realising whom she presses on, while the god, first from dry land and then from the shoreline, gradually slips his deceitful hooves into the waves. Then he goes further out and carries his prize over the mid-surface of the sea. She is terrified and looks back at the abandoned shore she has been stolen from and her right hand grips a horn, the other his back, her clothes fluttering, winding, behind her in the breeze.

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## BOOK 3

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### CADMUS SEARCHES FOR HIS SISTER EUROPA

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And now the god, dispensing with the deceptive image of the bull, confessed who he was, and made for the fields of Crete. Meanwhile Europa's father, in ignorance of this, orders his son Cadmus to search for the stolen girl, and adds that exile is his punishment if he fails to find her, showing himself, by the same action, both pious and impious. Roaming the world (for who can discover whatever Jupiter has taken?) Agenor's son, the fugitive, shuns his native land and his parent's anger and as a suppliant consults Apollo's oracle and asks in what land he might settle. Phoebus replies 'A heifer will find you in the fields, that has never submitted to the yoke and is unaccustomed to the curved plough. Go where she leads, and where she finds rest on the grass build the walls of Thebes, your city, and call the land Boeotia.'

Cadmus had scarcely left the Castalian cave when he saw an unguarded heifer, moving slowly, and showing no mark of the yoke on her neck. He follows close behind and chooses his steps by the traces of her course, and silently thanks Phoebus, his guide to the way. Now he had passed the fords of Cephisus and the fields of Panope: the heifer stopped, and lifting her beautiful head with its noble horns to the sky stirred the air with her lowings. Then looking back, to see her companion following, she sank her hindquarters on the ground and lowered her body onto the tender grass. Cadmus gave thanks, pressing his lips to the foreign soil and welcoming the unknown hills and fields.

Intending to offer a sacrifice to Jupiter, he ordered his attendants to go in search of water from a running stream for a libation. There was an ancient wood there, free from desecration, and, in the centre of it, a chasm thick with bushes and willow branches, framed in effect by stones making a low arch, and rich with copious springs. There was a snake sacred to Mars concealed in this cave,

with a prominent golden crest. Fire flickered in its eyes, its whole body was swollen with venom, its three-forked tongue flickered, and its teeth were set in a triple row.

After the people of Tyre, setting out, a fatal step, reached the grove, and let their pitchers down into the water, it gave out a reverberation. The dark green snake thrust his head out of the deep cavern, hissing awesomely. The pitchers fell from their hands, the blood left their bodies, and, terrified, a sudden tremor took possession of their limbs. The snake winds his scaly coils in restless writhings, and, shooting upwards, curves into a huge arc. With half its length raised into thin air, it peers down over the whole wood, its body as great, seen in its entirety, as that Dragon that separates the twin constellations of the Bear. Without pause he takes the Phoenicians, whether they prepare to fight, run, or are held by fear itself. Some he slays with his bite, some he kills in his deep embraces, others with the corrupting putrefaction of his venomous breath.

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### CADMUS KILLS THE DRAGON

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The sun had reached the heights of the sky, and driven away the shadows. And now the son of Agenor, wondering what has delayed his friends, searches for the men. He is covered with the pelt stripped from a lion. His sword is tipped with glittering iron. He has a spear, and better still a spirit superior to all. When he enters the wood and sees the dead bodies, and over them the victorious enemy, with its vast body, licking at their sad wounds with a bloody tongue, he cries out 'Faithful hearts, I shall either be the avenger of your deaths, or become your companion'.

So saying he lifted a massive rock with his right hand and with great effort hurled the huge weight. Steep walls with their high turrets, would have been shattered by the force of the blow, but the snake remained unwounded, protected by its scales like a breastplate, and its dark, hard skin repelled the powerful stroke.

But that same hardness cannot keep out the spear that defeats it, that is fixed in a curve of its pliant back, and sinks its whole iron blade into its entrails. The creature maddened with pain twists its head over its back, sees the wound, and bites at the shaft lodged there. Even when the snake had loosened its hold all round by its powerful efforts, it could scarcely rip it from its flesh and the iron stayed fixed in its spine. Then indeed new purpose was added to its usual wrath: its throat swells, the veins fill, and white spume flecks its baleful jaws. The earth resounds to its scaly scraping and a black breath like that from the mouth of the Styx fouls the corrupted air. At one instant it coils in vast spiraling circles, at another rears up straighter than a high tree. Again it rushes on like a rain-filled river and knocks down all the trees obstructing it in front. The son of Agenor gives way a little withstanding its attacks by means of the lion's skin and keeps back the ravening jaws by thrusting forward the point of his sword. The snake is maddened and bites uselessly at the hard iron and only drives the sharp point between its teeth.

Now the blood begins to drip from its venomous throat and soak the green grass with its spattering. But the wound is slight, because the serpent draws back from the thrust, pulling its wounded neck away, and, conceding its wound, keeps back the sword, and does not let it sink deeper. But the son of Agenor following it all the time presses the embedded iron into its throat, until an oak-tree blocks its backward course and neck and tree are pinned together. The tree bends under the serpent's weight and the trunk of the oak groans with the lashing of its tail.

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### CADMUS SOWS THE DRAGON'S TEETH

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While the conqueror stares at the vast bulk of his conquered enemy, suddenly a voice is heard. It is not easy to imagine where it comes from, but it is heard. 'Why gaze, son of Agenor, at the serpent you have killed? You too shall be a serpent to be gazed on.' For a long time he stands there quaking, and at the same time loses colour in his face, and his hair stands on end in cold terror. Then, behold, Pallas, the hero's guardian approaches, sinking down through the upper air, and orders him to turn the earth and sow the dragon's teeth, destined to generate a people. He obeys, and opening the furrows with a slice of his plough, sows the teeth in the ground, as human seed. Then, almost beyond belief, the cultivated earth begins to move, and first spear points appear among the furrows, next helmets nodding their painted crests, then chests and shoulders spring up, and arms weighed down with spears, and the field is thick with the round shields of warriors. Just as at festivals in the theatre, when the curtain is lifted at the end, designs rise in the air, first revealing faces and then gradually the rest, until, raised gently and steadily, they are seen whole, and at last their feet rest on the lower border.

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### CADMUS FOUNDS THEBES

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Alarmed by this new enemy Cadmus was about to take up his weapons: 'Keep away' one of the army, that the earth had produced, cried at him 'and take no part in our internal wars!' So saying he raised his sharp sword against one of his earth-born brothers nearby, then, himself, fell to a spear thrown from far off. But the one who killed him lived no longer than he did and breathed out the air he had just breathed in. This example stirred them all equally, as if at a storm-wind, and, in their warring, these brothers of a moment were felled by mutual wounds. And now these youths, who were allowed such brief lives, were drumming on their mother's breast hot with their blood. Five were still standing, one of whom was Echion. He, at a warning from Pallas, threw his weapons on the ground and sought assurances of peace from his brothers, and gave them in return. The Sidonian wanderer had these men as companions in his task when he founded the city commanded by Apollo's oracle.

Now Thebes stands, and now you might be seen as happy, in your exile, Cadmus. You have Mars and Venus as your bride's parents, and added to this the children of so noble a wife, so many sons and daughters, and dearly loved descendants, your grandchildren, who now are young men. But in truth we should always wait for a man's last day, for that time when he has paid his last debt, and we should call no man's life happy until he is dead.

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### ACTAEON RETURNS FROM THE HUNT

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Actaeon, one of your grandsons, was your first reason for grief, in all your happiness, Cadmus. Strange horns appeared on his forehead, and his hunting dogs sated themselves on the blood of their master. But if you look carefully, you will find that it was the fault of chance and not wickedness: what wickedness is there in error? It happened on a mountain, stained with the blood of many creatures, and midday had contracted every shadow and the sun was equidistant from either end of his journey. Then Actaeon, the young Boeotian, with a quiet expression, spoke to his companions in the hunt as they wandered through the solitary wilds 'Friends, our spears and nets are drenched with the blood of our victims, and the day has been fortunate enough. When Aurora in her golden chariot brings another day we will resume our purpose. Now Phoebus is also between the limits of his task, and is splitting open the earth with his heat. Finish your present task and carry home the netted meshes' The men obeyed his order and left off their labour.

There was a valley there called Gargaphie, dense with pine trees and sharp cypresses, sacred to Diana of the high-girded tunic, where, in the depths, there is a wooded cave, not fashioned by art. But ingenious nature had imitated art. She had made a natural arch out of native pumice and porous tufa. On the right, a spring of bright clear water murmured into a widening pool, enclosed by grassy banks. Here the woodland goddess, weary from the chase, would bathe her virgin limbs in the crystal liquid.

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### ACTAEON SEES DIANA NAKED AND IS TURNED INTO A STAG.

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Having reached the place, she gives her spear, quiver and unstrung bow to one of the nymphs, her weapon-bearer. Another takes her robe over her arm, while two unfasten the sandals on her feet. Then, more skilful than the rest, Theban Crocale gathers the hair strewn around her neck into a knot, while her own is still loose. Nephele, Hyale, Rhanis, Psecas and Phiale draw water, and pour it over their mistress out of the deep jars.

While Titania is bathing there, in her accustomed place, Cadmus's grandson, free of his share of the labour, strays with aimless steps through the strange wood, and enters the sacred grove. So the

fates would have it. As soon as he reaches the cave mouth dampened by the fountain, the naked nymphs, seeing a man's face, beat at their breasts and filling the whole wood with their sudden outcry, crowd round Diana to hide her with their bodies. But the goddess stood head and shoulders above all the others. Diana's face, seen there, while she herself was naked, was the colour of clouds stained by the opposing shafts of sun, or Aurora's brightness.

However, though her band of nymphs gathered in confusion around her, she stood turning to one side, and looking back, and wishing she had her arrows to hand. She caught up a handful of the water that she did have, and threw it in the man's face. And as she sprinkled his hair with the vengeful drops she added these words, harbingers of his coming ruin, 'Now you may tell, if you can tell that is, of having seen me naked!' Without more threats, she gave the horns of a mature stag to the head she had sprinkled, lengthening his neck, making his ear-tips pointed, changing feet for hands, long legs for arms, and covering his body with a dappled hide. And then she added fear. Autoon's brave son flies off, marvelling at such swift speed, within himself. But when he sees his head and horns reflected for certain in the water, he tries to say 'Oh, look at me! but no voice follows. He groans: that is his voice, and tears run down his altered face. Only his mind remains unchanged. What can he do? Shall he return to his home and the royal palace, or lie hidden in the woods? Shame prevents the one, and fear the other.

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## ACTAEON IS PURSUED BY HIS HOUNDS

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While he hesitates his dogs catch sight of him. First 'Black-foot', Melampus, and keen-scented Ichnobates, 'Tracker', signal him with baying, Ichnobates out of Crete, Melampus, Sparta. Then others rush at him swift as the wind, 'Greedy', Pamphagus, Dorceus, 'Gazelle', Oribasos, 'Mountaineer', all out of Arcady: powerful 'Deerslayer', Nebrophonos, savage Theron, 'Whirlwind', and Laelape, 'Hunter'.

Then swift-footed Pterelas, 'Wings', and trail-scenting Agre, 'Chaser', fierce Hylaeus, 'Woody', lately gored by a boar, the wolf-born Nape, 'Valley', Poemenis, the trusty 'Shepherd', and Harpyia, 'Snatcher', with her two pups. There is thin-flanked Sicyonian Ladon, 'Catcher', Dromas, 'Runner', 'Grinder', Canache, Sticte 'Spot', Tigris 'Tigress', Alce, 'Strong', and white-haired Leucon, 'Whitey', and black-haired Asbolus, 'Soot'.

Lacon, 'Spartan', follows them, a dog well known for his strength, and strong-running Aello, 'Storm'. Then Thoos, 'Swift', and speedy Lycisce, 'Wolf', with her brother Cyprius 'Cyprian'. Next 'Grasper', Harpalos, with a distinguishing mark of white, in the centre of his black forehead, 'Black', Melaneus, and Lachne, 'Shaggy', with hairy pelt, Labros, 'Fury', and Argiodus, 'White-tooth', born of a Cretan sire and Spartan dam, keen-voiced Hylactor, 'Barker', and others there is no need to name. The pack of them, greedy for the prey follow over cliffs and crags, and inaccessible rocks, where the



way is hard or there is no way at all. He runs, over the places where he has often chased, flying, alas, from his own hounds. He longs to shout 'I am Actaeon! Know your own master!' but words fail him, the air echoes to the baying.

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### ACTAEON IS KILLED BY THE DOGS

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First 'Black-hair', Melanchaetes, wounds his back, then 'Killer', Theridamas, and Oresitrophos, the 'Climber', clings to his shoulder. They had set out late but outflanked the route by a shortcut over the mountains. While they hold their master the whole pack gathers and they sink their teeth in his body till there is no place left to wound him. He groans and makes a noise, not human, but still not one a deer could make, and fills familiar heights with mournful cries. And on his knees, like a suppliant begging, he turns his wordless head from side to side, as if he were stretching arms out towards them.

Now his friends, unknowingly, urge the ravening crowd of dogs on with their usual cries, looking out for Actaeon, and shouting, in emulation, for absent Actaeon (he turning his head at the sound of his name) complaining he is not there, and through his slowness is missing the spectacle offered by their prey. He might wish to be absent it's true, but he is here: he might wish to see and not feel the fierce doings of his own hounds. They surround him on every side, sinking their jaws into his flesh, tearing their master to pieces in the deceptive shape of the deer. They say Diana the Quiver-bearer's anger was not appeased, until his life had ended in innumerable wounds.

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### JUNO SETS OUT TO PUNISH SEMELE

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The debate is undecided: to some the punishment is more violent than just, merely for seeing the face of a goddess, others approve it and call it fitting because of her strict vow of virginity, and both can make a case. Only Jupiter's wife was saying nothing, neither of praise or blame. She was glad of the disaster that had come down on the house of Agenor, and had transferred her hatred from Europa, to those who were allied to the Tyrian girl by birth. Then there was a fresh wrong added to the first. She was grieved by the fact that Semele was pregnant, with the seed of mighty Jove. Swallowing words of reproach, she said 'What, in truth, have I gained from frequent reproaches? I must attack her. If I am rightly to be called most powerful Juno, if it is right for me to hold the jewelled sceptre in my hand, if I am queen, and sister and wife of Jove, sister at least, then it is her I must destroy. Yet I think she is content with her secret, and the injury to my marriage will be brief. But she has conceived – and that damages me – and makes her crime visible in her swollen belly, and wants, what I have barely achieved, to be confirmed as the mother of Jupiter's child, so great is her faith in her beauty. I will render that faith hollow. I am not Saturnia if she does not plunge into the Stygian waters, overwhelmed by Jove himself.'

## SEMELE IS CONSUMED BY JUPITER'S FIRE.

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At this she rose from her seat and cloaked in a dark cloud she came to Semele's threshold. But before she removed the cloud she disguised herself as an old woman, ageing her hair, ploughing her skin with wrinkles, and walking with bowed legs and tottering steps. She made her voice sound old and was herself Beroë, Semele's Epidaurian nurse. So, when they came to Jupiter's name, in the midst of their lengthy gossiping, she sighed, and said 'I hope, for your sake, that it really is Jupiter, 'but I am suspicious of all that sort of thing. Many men have entered the bedrooms of chaste women in the name of the gods. It's not good enough for him merely to be Jove: he must give a proof of his love if it truly is him. Beg him to assume all his powers before he embraces you, and be just as glorious as when Juno welcomes him on high.

With such words Juno gulled the unsuspecting daughter of Cadmus. Semele asked Jupiter for an unspecified gift. 'Choose!' said the god, 'Nothing will be refused, and, so that you may believe it more firmly, I swear it by the Stygian torrent, that is the divine conscience, the fear, and god, of all the gods.' Pleased by her misfortune, too successful, and doomed to be undone by her lover's indulgence, Semele said 'As Saturnia is used to your embrace, when you enter into the pact of Venus, give yourself to me!' The god would have stopped her lips as she spoke: but her voice had already rushed into the air.

He groans, since she cannot un-wish it or he un-swear it. So, most sorrowfully, he climbs the heights of heaven, and, with a look, gathered the trailing clouds, then added their vapours to lightning mixed with storm-winds, and thunder and fateful lightning bolts. Still, he tries to reduce his power in whatever way he can, and does not arm himself with that lightning with which he deposed hundred-handed Typhoeus: it is too savage in his grasp. There is a lighter dart to which the Cyclops's hands gave a less violent fire, a lesser anger. The gods call these his secondary weapons. Taking these he enters Agenor's house. But still Semele's mortal body could not endure the storm, and she was consumed, by the fire of her nuptial gift.

The infant Bacchus, still unfinished, is torn from the mother's womb, and (if it can be believed) is sewn into his father's thigh to complete his full term. Ino, his mother's sister reared him secretly, in infancy, and then he was given to the nymphs of Mount Nysa who hid him in their cave and fed him on milk.

## THE JUDGEMENT OF TIRESIAS

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While these things were brought about on earth because of that fatal oath, and while twice-born Bacchus's cradle remained safe, they say that Jupiter, expansive with wine, set aside his onerous duties, and relaxing, exchanging pleasantries, with Juno, said 'You gain more than we do from the pleasures of love.' She denied it. They agreed to ask learned Tiresias for his opinion. He had known Venus in both ways.

Once, with a blow of his stick, he had disturbed two large snakes mating in the green forest, and, marvellous to tell, he was changed from a man to a woman, and lived as such for seven years. In the eighth year he saw the same snakes again and said 'Since there is such power in plaguing you that it changes the giver of a blow to the opposite sex, I will strike you again, now.' He struck the snakes and regained his former shape, and returned to the sex he was born with.

As the arbiter of the light-hearted dispute he confirmed Jupiter's words. Saturnia, it is said, was more deeply upset than was justified and than the dispute warranted, and damned the one who had made the judgement to eternal night. But, since no god has the right to void what another god has done, the all-powerful father of the gods gave Tiresias knowledge of the future, in exchange for his lost sight, and lightened the punishment with honour.

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## BOOK 6 EXCERPTS

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### THE MARRIAGE OF PROCNE AND TEREUS

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From such tales as these the company turns immediately to the present, and mourns the loss of Amphion and his children. The mother was blamed, though even then one man, her brother Pelops, is said to have wept for her and, after taking off his tunic, to have shown the ivory, of his left shoulder. This was of flesh, and the same colour as his right shoulder, at the time of his birth. Later, when he had been cut in pieces, by his father, it is said that the gods fitted his limbs together again. They found the pieces, but one was lost, between the upper arm and the neck. Ivory was used in place of the missing part, and by means of that Pelops was made whole.

The princes, of countries to the southwest, near neighbours of Thebes, gathered, and the cities related to Thebes urged their kings to go and offer sympathy. Argos and Sparta, and Peloponnesian Mycenae, Calydon not yet cursed for rejecting Diana, fertile Orchomenos, and Corinth famous for bronze; warlike Messene, Patrae, and low-lying Cleonae, Nelean Pylos, and Troezen not yet ruled by Pittheus; and whichever of the other cities were southwest of the Isthmus, lying between its two seas, or seen to the northeast of the Isthmus, lying between its two seas. But who can believe this? Athens, alone, did nothing. War prevented them doing so. A Barbarian army had crossed the sea and brought terror to the walls of the city of Mopsopius.

Tereus of Thrace routed these Barbarians, with his army of auxiliaries, and won a great name by his victory. Since Tereus was a master of men and riches, and happened to trace his descent from mighty Mars himself, Pandion, king of Athens, made them allies, by giving him his daughter Procne in marriage. Neither Juno, who attends on brides, nor Hymen, nor the three Graces, was there. The Eumenides, the Furies, held torches snatched from a funeral. The Eumenides, the Furies, prepared their marriage bed, and the unholy screech owl brooded over their house, and sat on the roof of their chamber. By this bird-omen, Procne and Tereus were joined. By this bird-omen, they were made parents. Thrace of course rejoiced with them, and they themselves gave thanks to the gods, and the day when Pandion's daughter married her illustrious king, and the day on which Itys their son was born, they commanded to be celebrated as festivals: so, always, our real advantages escape us.

### TEREUS'S PASSION FOR PROCNE'S SISTER PHILOMELA

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Now, Titan, the sun, had guided the turning year through five autumns when Procne said, coaxingly to her husband, 'If any thanks are due me, either send me to see my sister, or let my sister come here. You can promise my father she will return after a brief stay. It would be worth a great deal to me, if you allowed me to see Philomela.' Tereus ordered his ship to sea, and with sail and oar reached the harbour of Cecrops, and landed on the shore of Piraeus.

As soon as he gained access to his father-in-law, right hand was joined to right hand, and they began by wishing each other favourable omens. Tereus had started to tell of the reason for his visit, his wife's request, and promise a speedy return if she were sent back with him, when, see, Philomela entered, dressed in rich robes, and richer beauty, walking as we are used to being told the naiads and dryads of the deep woods do, if only one were to give them like her culture and dress. Seeing the girl, Tereus took fire, just as if someone touched a flame to corn stubble, or burned the leaves, or hay stored in a loft. Her beauty was worthy of it, but he was driven by his natural passion, and the inclination of the people of his region is towards lust: he burnt with his own vice and his nation's. His impulse was to erode her attendants care, and her nurse's loyalty, even seduce the girl herself with rich gifts, to the extent of his kingdom, or rape her and defend the rape in savage war. There was nothing he would not dare, possessed by unbridled desire, nor could he contain the flame in his heart.

Now he suffered from impatience, and eagerly returned to Procne's request, pursuing his own wishes as hers. Desire made him eloquent, and whenever he petitioned more strongly than was seemly, he would make out that Procne wished it so. He even embellished his speeches with tears, as though she had commissioned him to do that too. You gods, what secret darknesses human hearts hide! Due to his efforts, Tereus is viewed as faithful, in his deceit, and is praised for his crime. Moreover Philomela wishes his request granted, and resting her forearms on her father's shoulders, coaxing him to let her go to visit her sister, she urges it, in her own interest, and against it. Tereus gazes at her, and imagining her as already his, watching her kisses, and her arms encircling her

father's neck, it all spurs him on, food and fuel to his frenzy. Whenever she embraces her father, he wishes he were that father: though of course his intentions would be no less wicked. The father is won over by the twin entreaties. The girl is overjoyed, and thanks her father, and thinks, poor wretch, that what will bring sorrow to both sisters is actually a success for both.

## TEREUS FORCES PHILOMELA

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Now little was left of Phoebus's daily labour, and his horses were treading the spaces of the western sky. A royal feast was served at Pandion's table, with wine in golden goblets. Then their bodies sated, they gave themselves to quiet sleep. But though the Thracian king retired to bed, he was disturbed by thoughts of her, and remembering her features, her gestures, her hands, he imagined the rest that he had not yet seen, as he would wish, and fuelled his own fires, in sleepless restlessness. Day broke, and Pandion, clasping his son-in-law's right hand, in parting, with tears welling in his eyes, entrusted his daughter to him. 'Dear son, since affectionate reasons compel it, and both of them desire it (you too have desired it, Tereus), I give her over to you, and by your honour, by the entreaty of a heart joined to yours, and by the gods above, I beg you, protect her with a father's love, and send back to me, as soon as is possible (it will be all too long a wait for me), this sweet comfort of my old age. You too, as soon as is possible (it is enough that your sister is so far away), if you are at all dutiful, Philomela, return to me!'

So he commanded his daughter and kissed her, and soft tears mingled with his commands. As a token of their promise he took their two right hands and linked them together, and asked them, with a prayer, to remember to greet his absent daughter, and grandson, for him. His mouth sobbing, he could barely say a last farewell, and he feared the forebodings in his mind.

As soon as Philomela was on board the brightly painted ship, and the sea was churned by the oars, and the land left behind them, the barbarian king cried 'I have won! I carry with me what I wished for! He exults, and his passion can scarcely wait for its satisfaction. He never turns his eyes away from her, no differently than when Jupiter's eagle deposits a hare, caught by the curved talons, in its high eyrie: there is no escape for the captive, and the raptor gazes at its prize.

Now they had completed their journey, and disembarked from the wave-worn ship, on the shores of his country. The king took her to a high-walled building, hidden in an ancient forest, and there he locked her away, she, pale and trembling, fearing everything, in tears now, begging to know where her sister was. Then, confessing his evil intent, he overcame her by force, she a virgin and alone, as she called out, again and again, in vain, to her father, her sister, and most of all to the great gods. She quivered like a frightened lamb, that fails to realise it is free, wounded and discarded by a grey wolf, or like a dove trembling, its feathers stained with its blood, still fearing the rapacious claws that gripped it. After a brief while, when she had come to her senses, she dragged at her dishevelled hair, and like a mourner, clawed at her arms, beating them against her breasts. Hands outstretched, she shouted 'Oh, you savage. Oh, what an evil, cruel, thing you have done. Did you care nothing for my

father's trust, sealed with holy tears, my sister's affection, my own virginity, your marriage vows? You have confounded everything. I have been forced to become my sister's rival. You are joined to both. Now Procne will be my enemy! Why not rob me of life as well, you traitor, so that no crime escapes you? If only you had done it before that impious act. Then my shade would have been free of guilt. Yet, if the gods above witness such things, if the powers of heaven mean anything, if all is not lost, as I am, then one day you will pay me for this! I, without shame, will tell what you have done. If I get the chance it will be in front of everyone. If I am kept imprisoned in these woods, I will fill the woods with it, and move the stones, that know of my guilt, to pity. The skies will hear of it, and any god that may be there!

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### PHILOMELA IS MUTILATED

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The king's anger was stirred by these words, and his fear also. Goaded by both, he freed the sword from its sheath by his side, and seizing her hair gathered it together, to use as a tie, to tether her arms behind her back. Philomela, seeing the sword, and hoping only for death, offered up her throat. But he severed her tongue with his savage blade, holding it with pincers, as she struggled to speak in her indignation, calling out her father's name repeatedly. Her tongue's root was left quivering, while the rest of it lay on the dark soil, vibrating and trembling, and, as though it were the tail of a mutilated snake moving, it writhed, as if, in dying, it was searching for some sign of her. They say (though I scarcely dare credit it) that even after this crime, he still assailed her wounded body, repeatedly, in his lust.

He controlled himself sufficiently to return to Procne, who, seeing him returned, asked where her sister was. He, with false mourning, told of a fictitious funeral, and tears gave it credence. Procne tore her glistening clothes, with their gold hems, from her shoulders, and put on black robes, and built an empty tomb, and mistakenly brought offerings, and lamented the fate of a sister, not yet due to be lamented in that way.

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### THE TRUTH IS REVEALED

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The sun-god has circled the twelve signs, and a year is past. What can Philomela do? A guard prevents her escape; the thick walls of the building are made of solid stone; her mute mouth can yield no token of the facts. Great trouble is inventive, and ingenuity arises in difficult times. Cleverly, she fastens her thread to a barbarian's loom, and weaves purple designs on a white background, revealing the crime. She entrusts it, when complete, to a servant, and asks her, by means of gestures, to take it to her mistress. She, as she is asked, takes it to Procne, not knowing what it carries inside. The wife of the savage king unrolls the cloth, and reads her sister's terrible fate, and by a miracle keeps silent. Grief restrains her lips, her tongue seeking to form words

adequate to her indignation, fails. She has no time for tears, but rushes off, in a confusion of right and wrong, her mind filled with thoughts of vengeance.

It was the time when the young Thracian women used to celebrate the triennial festival of Bacchus. (Night knew their holy rites: by night, Mount Rhodope rang with the high-pitched clashing of bronze). By night the queen left her palace, prepared herself for the rites of the god, and took up the weapons of that frenzied religion. Tendrils of vine wreathed her head; a deerskin was draped over her left side; a light javelin rested on her shoulder. Hurtling through the woods with a crowd of her companions, terrifying, driven by maddening grief, Procne embodies you, Bacchus. She comes at last to the building in the wilderness, and howls out loud, giving the ecstatic cry of Euhoe, breaks the door down, seizes her sister, disguises her with the tokens of a wild Bacchante, hides her face with ivy leaves, and dragging her along with her, frightened out of her wits, leads her inside the palace walls.

When Philomela realised that she had reached that accursed house, the wretched girl shuddered in horror, and her whole face grew deathly pale. Procne, once there, took off the religious trappings; uncovered the downcast face of her unhappy sister, and clutched her in her arms. But Philomela could not bear to lift her eyes, seeing herself as her sister's betrayer. With her face turned towards the ground, wanting to swear by the gods, and call them to witness, that her shame had been visited on her by force, she made signs with her hands in place of speech. Procne burned, and could not control her anger, reproaching her sister for weeping, saying 'Now is not the time for tears, but for the sword, or for what overcomes the sword, if you know of such a thing. I am prepared for any wickedness, sister; to set the palace alight with a torch, and throw Tereus, the author of this, into the midst of the flames; or to cut out his eyes and tongue, and the parts which brought shame to you; or to force out his guilty spirit through a thousand wounds! I am ready for any enormity: but what it should be, I still do not know yet.'

## THE PITILESS FEAST

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While Procne was going over these things, Itys came to his mother. His arrival suggested what she might do, and regarding him with a cold gaze, she said 'Ah! How like your father you are!' Without speaking further, seething in silent indignation, she began to conceive her tragic plan. Yet, when the boy approached, and greeted his mother, and put his little arms round her neck, and kissed her with childish endearments, she was moved, her anger was checked, and her eyes were wet with the tears that gathered against her will. But, realising that her mind was wavering through excess affection, she turned away from him, and turned to look at her sister's face again, till, gazing at both in turn, she said 'Why should the one be able to speak his endearments, while the other is silent, her tongue torn out?'

Though he calls me mother, why can she not call me sister? Look at the husband you are bride to, Pandion's daughter! This is unworthy of you! Affection is criminal in a wife of Tereus'

Without delay, she dragged Itys off, as a tigress does an unweaned fawn, in the dark forests of the Ganges. As they reached a remote part of the great palace, Procne, with an unchanging expression, struck him with a knife, in the side close to the heart, while he stretched out his hands, knowing his fate at the last, crying out 'Mother! Mother!', and reaching out for her neck. That one wound was probably enough to seal his fate, but Philomela opened his throat with the knife. While the limbs were still warm, and retained some life, they tore them to pieces. Part bubble in bronze cauldrons, part hiss on the spit: and the distant rooms drip with grease.

The wife invites the unsuspecting Tereus to the feast, and giving out that it is a sacred rite, practised in her country, where it is only lawful for the husband to be present, she sends away their followers and servants. Tereus eats by himself, seated in his tall ancestral chair, and fills his belly with his own child. And in the darkness of his understanding cries 'Fetch Ithys here'.

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## THEY ARE TRANSFORMED INTO BIRDS

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Procne cannot hide her cruel exultation, and now, eager to be, herself, the messenger of destruction, she cries 'You have him there, inside, the one you ask for.' He looks around and questions where the boy is. And then while he is calling out and seeking him, Philomela, springs forward, her hair wet with the dew of that frenzied murder, and hurls the bloodstained head of Itys in his father's face. Nor was there a time when she wished more strongly to have the power of speech, and to declare her exultation in fitting words.

The Thracian king pushed back the table with a great cry, calling on the Furies, the snake-haired sisters of the vale of Styx. Now if he could, he would tear open his body, and reveal the dreadful substance of the feast, and his half-consumed child. Then he weeps, and calls himself the sepulchre of his unhappy son, and now pursues, with naked sword, the daughters of Pandion.

You might think the Athenian women have taken wing: they have taken wings. One of them, a nightingale, Procne, makes for the woods. The other, a swallow, Philomela, flies to the eaves of the palace, and even now her throat has not lost the stain of that murder, and the soft down bears witness to the blood. Tereus swift in his grief and desire for revenge, is himself changed to a bird, with a feathered crest on its head. An immoderate, elongated, beak juts out, like a long spear. The name of the bird is the hoopoe, and it looks as though it is armed.



## BOOK 7 EXCERPTS

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### MEDEA AGONISES OVER HER LOVE FOR JASON

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And now the Argonauts were ploughing through the sea in their ship, built in Thessalian Pagasae. They had visited Phineus, king of Thracian Salmydessus, living out a useless old age in perpetual blindness, and the winged sons of Boreas had driven the birdlike Harpies from the presence of the unhappy, aged man. At last, after enduring many trials, under their famous leader, Jason, they reached the turbulent river-waters of the muddy Phasis, in the land of Colchis. While they were standing before King Aetes, of Aea, requesting the return of the Golden Fleece, taken from the divine ram that carried Phrixus, and while extreme terms were being imposed, involving daunting tasks, Medea, the daughter of the king, conceived an overwhelming passion for Jason. She fought against it for a time, but when reason could not overcome desire, she debated with herself.

‘Medea, you struggle in vain: some god, I do not know which, opposes you. I wonder if this, or something, like this, is what people indeed call love? Or why would the tasks my father demands of Jason seem so hard? They are more than hard! Why am I afraid of his death, when I have scarcely seen him? What is the cause of all this fear? Quench, if you can, unhappy girl, these flames that you feel in your virgin heart! If I could, I would be wiser! But a strange power draws me to him against my will. Love urges one thing: reason another. I see, and I desire the better: I follow the worse. Why do you burn for a stranger, royal virgin, and dream of marriage in an alien land? This earth can also give you what you can love. Whether he lives or dies, is in the hands of the gods. Let him live! I can pray for this even if I may not love him: what is Jason guilty of? Who, but the heartless, would not be touched by Jason’s youth, and birth, and courage? Who, though the other qualities were absent, could not be stirred by his beauty?

He has stirred my heart, indeed. And unless I offer my help, he will feel the fiery breath of the bronze-footed bulls; have to meet that enemy, sprung from the soil, born of his own sowing; or be given as captured prey to the dragon’s greed. If I allow this, then I am born of the tigress: then I show I have a heart of stone and iron! Why can I not watch him die, and shame my eyes by seeing? Why do I not urge the bulls on, to meet him, and the wild earth-born warriors, and the unsleeping dragon? Let the gods also desire the better! Though it is not for me to pray for, but to bring about.

Shall I betray my father’s country? Shall some unknown be saved by my powers, and unhurt because of me, without me, set his sails to the wind, and be husband to another, leaving Medea to be punished? If he could do that, if he could set another woman above me, let him die, the ungrateful man! But his look, his nobility of spirit, and his graceful form, do not make me fear deceit or forgetfulness of my kindness. And he will give me his word beforehand, and I will gather the gods to witness our pledge. Why fear when it is certain? Prepare yourself, and dispel all delay: Jason will be

for ever in your debt, take you to himself in sacred marriage, and through the cities of Pelasgian Greece, the crowds of women will glorify you as his saviour.

Carried by the winds, shall I leave my native country, my sister, my brother, my father, and my gods? Well then, my father is barbarous, and my country is savage, and my brother is still a child: my sister's prayers are for me, and the greatest god is within! I will not be leaving greatness behind, but pursuing greatness: honour as a saviour of these Achaean people, familiarity with a better land and with cities whose fame is flourishing even here, the culture and arts of those places, and the man, the son of Aeson, for whom I would barter those things that the wide world owns, joined to whom I will be called fortunate, dear to the gods, and my head will be crowned with the stars.

What of the stories of mountains that clash together in mid-ocean, and Charybdis the bane of sailors, now sucking in, now spewing out the sea, and rapacious dog-headed Scylla, yelping over the Sicilian deeps? Well, holding what I love, clinging to Jason's breast, I shall be carried over the wide seas: in his arms, I will fear nothing, or if I am afraid, I will only be afraid for him.

But do you call that marriage, Medea, and clothe your fault with fair names? Consider instead, how great a sin you are near to, and while you can, shun the crime!' She spoke, and in front of her eyes, were rectitude, piety, modesty: and now, Cupid, defeated, was turning away.

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## JASON PROMISES TO MARRY MEDEA

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She went to the ancient altars of Hecate, daughter of the Titan Perses, that the shadowy grove conceals, in the remote forest. And now she was strong and her passion, now conquered, had ebbed, when she saw the son of Aeson and the flame, that was dead, relit. Her cheeks flushed, and then her whole face became pallid. Just as a tiny spark that lies buried under the ashes, takes life from a breath of air, and grows and, living, regains its previous strength, so now her calmed passion, that you would have thought had dulled, when she saw the young hero, flared up at his visible presence.

It chanced that Aeson's son was more than usually handsome that day: you could forgive her for loving him. She gazed at him, and fixed her eyes on him as if she had never looked at him before, and in her infatuation, seeing his face, could not believe him mortal, nor could she turn away. So that when, indeed, the stranger grasped her right hand, and began to speak, and in a submissive voice asked for her help, promising marriage, she replied in a flood of tears. 'I see what I am doing: it is not ignorance of the truth that ensnares me, but love. Your salvation is in my gift, but being saved, remember your promise!'

He swore by the sacred rites of the Triple Goddess, by the divine presence of the grove, by the all-seeing Sun, who was the father of King Aetes, his father-in-law to be, and by his own good fortune, and by his great danger. Immediately, as he was now trusted, he accepted the magic herbs from her, and learnt their use, and returned to the palace, joyfully.

## JASON WINS THE GOLDEN FLEECE

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The next day's dawn dispelled the glittering stars. Then the people gathered on the sacred field of Mars and took up their position on the ridge. The king was seated in the middle, clothed in purple, and distinguished by his ivory sceptre. Behold, the bronze-footed bulls, breathing Vulcan's fire from nostrils of steel. At the touch of their heat the grass shrivels, and as stoked fires roar, or as broken limestone, that has absorbed the heat inside an earthen furnace, hisses explosively, when cool water is scattered over it, so the flames sounded, pent up in their heaving chests and burning throats. Still the son of Aeson went out to meet them.

As he came to them, the fierce creatures, with their iron-tipped horns, turned their terrible gaze towards him, pawed the dusty ground with their cloven feet, and filled the air with the steam of their bellowing. The Minyans were frozen in fear. He went up to the bulls, not feeling their fiery breath (so great is the power of magic drugs!), and stroking their hanging dewlaps, with a bold hand, yoked them together, and forced them to pull the heavy blade, and till the virgin field with the iron plough. The Colchians were stunned, but the Argonauts increased their shouting, and heightened his courage.

Then he took the dragon's teeth from the bronze helmet, and scattered them over the turned earth. The soil softened the seeds that had been steeped in virulent poison, and they sprouted, and the teeth, freshly sown, produced new bodies. As an embryo takes on human form in the mother's womb, and is fully developed there in every aspect, not emerging to the living air until it is complete, so when those shapes of men had been made in the bowels of the pregnant earth, they surged from the teeming soil, and, what is even more wonderful, clashed weapons, created with them. The Pelasgians' faces fell in fear, and their courage failed them, when they saw these warriors preparing to hurl their sharp spears, at the head of the Haemonian hero. She also, who had rendered him safe, was afraid. When she saw the solitary youth attacked by so many enemies, she grew pale, and sat there, suddenly cold and bloodless. And in case the herbs she had given him had not been potent enough, she chanted a spell to support them, and called on her secret arts.

He threw a boulder into the midst of his enemies, and this turned their attack, on him, against themselves. The earth-born brothers died at each other's hands, and fell as in civil war. The Achaeans cheered, and clung to the victor, and hugged him in eager embraces. You also, princess among the Barbarians, longed to hold the victorious man: but modesty prevented it. Still, you might

have held him, but concern for your reputation stopped you from doing so. What you might fittingly do you did, rejoicing silently, giving thanks, for your incantations, and the gods who inspired them.

The final task was to put the dragon to sleep with the magic drugs. Known for its crest, its triple tongues and curved fangs, it was the dread guardian of the tree's gold. But when Jason had sprinkled it with the Lethean juice of a certain herb, and three times repeated the words that bring tranquil sleep, that calm the rough seas and turbulent rivers, sleep came to those sleepless eyes, and the heroic son of Aeson gained the Golden Fleece. Proud of his prize, and taking with him a further prize, the one who had helped him gain it, the hero, and his wife Medea, returned to the harbour at Iolchos.

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### JASON ASKS MEDEA TO LENGTHEN AESON'S LIFE

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The elderly Haemonian mothers and fathers bring offerings to mark their sons' return, and melt incense heaped in the flames. The sacrifice, with gilded horns, that they have dedicated, is led in and killed. But Aeson is absent from the rejoicing, now near death, and weary with the long years. Then Jason, his son, said 'O my wife, to whom I confess I owe my life, though you have already given me everything, and the total of all your kindnesses is beyond any promises we made, let your incantations, if they can (what indeed can they not do?) reduce my own years and add them to my father's!' He could not restrain his tears. Medea was moved by the loving request, and the contrast with Aetes, abandoned by her, came to mind. Yet, not allowing herself to be affected by such thoughts, she answered 'Husband, what dreadful words have escaped your lips? Do you think I can transfer any part of your life to another? Hecate would not allow it: nor is yours a just request. But I will try to grant a greater gift than the one you ask for, Jason. If only the Triple Goddess will aid me, and give her assent in person to this great act of daring, I will attempt to renew your father's length of years, without need for yours.'

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### MEDEA SUMMONS THE POWERS AND GATHERS HERBS

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Three nights were lacking before the moon's horns met, to make their complete orb. When it was shining at its fullest, and gazed on the earth, with perfect form, Medea left the palace, dressed in unclasped robes. Her feet were bare, her unbound hair streamed down, over her shoulders, and she wandered, companionless, through midnight's still silence. Men, beasts, and birds were freed in deep sleep. There were no murmurs in the hedgerows: the still leaves were silent, in silent, dew-filled, air. Only the flickering stars moved. Stretching her arms to them she three times turned herself about, three times sprinkled her head, with water from the running stream, three times let out a wailing cry, then knelt on the hard earth, and prayed:

'Night, most faithful keeper of our secret rites;  
Stars, that, with the golden moon, succeed the fires of light;  
Triple Hecate, you who know all our undertakings,  
and come, to aid the witches' art, and all our incantations:  
You, Earth, who yield the sorceress herbs of magic force:  
You, airs and breezes, pools and hills, and every watercourse;  
Be here; all you Gods of Night, and Gods of Groves endorse.  
Streams, at will, by banks amazed, turn backwards to their source.  
I calm rough seas, and stir the calm by my magic spells:  
bring clouds, disperse the clouds, raise storms and storms dispel;  
and, with my incantations, I break the serpent's teeth;  
and root up nature's oaks, and rocks, from their native heath;  
and move the forests, and command the mountain tops to shake,  
earth to groan, and from their tombs the sleeping dead to wake.  
You also, Luna, I draw down, eclipsed, from heaven's stain,  
though bronzes of Temese clash, to take away your pains;  
and at my chant, the chariot of the Sun-god, my grandsire,  
grows pale: Aurora, at my poisons, dims her morning fire.  
You quench the bulls' hot flame for me: force their necks to bow,  
beneath the heavy yoke, that never pulled the curving plough:  
You turn the savage warfare, born of the serpent's teeth,  
against itself, and lull the watcher, innocent of sleep;  
that guard deceived, bring golden spoil, to the towns of Greece.  
Now I need the juice by which old age may be renewed,

that can regain the prime of years, return the flower of youth,  
and You will grant it. Not in vain, stars glittered in reply:  
not in vain, winged dragons bring my chariot, through the sky.'

There, sent from the sky, was her chariot. When she had mounted, stroked the dragons' bridled necks, and shaken the light reins in her hands, she was snatched up on high. She looked down on Thessalian Tempe far below, and sent the dragons to certain places that she knew. She considered those herbs that grow on Mount Ossa, those of Mount Pelion, Othrys and Pindus, and higher Olympus, and of those that pleased her, plucked some by the roots, and cut others, with a curved pruning-knife of bronze. Many she chose, as well, from the banks of the Apidanus. Many she chose, as well, from the Amphrysus. Nor did she omit the Enipeus. Peneus, and Spercheus's waters gave something, and the reedy shores of Boebe. And at Anthedon, by Euboea, she picked a plant of long life, not yet famous for the change it made in Glaucus's body.

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### MEDEA REJUVENATES AESON

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Then she returned, after nine days and nine nights surveying all the lands she had crossed, from her chariot, drawn by the winged dragons. The dragons had only smelt the herbs, yet they shed their skins of many years. Reaching her door and threshold, she stopped on the outside, and under the open sky, avoiding contact with any man, she set up two altars of turf, one on the right to Hecate, one on the left to Youth. She wreathed them with sacred boughs from the wildwood, then dug two trenches near by in the earth, and performed the sacrifice, plunging her knife into the throat of a black-fleeced sheep, and drenching the wide ditches with blood. She poured over it cups of pure honey, and again she poured over it cups of warm milk, uttering words as she did so, calling on the spirits of the earth, and begging the shadowy king and his stolen bride, not to be too quick to steal life from the old man's limbs.

When she had appeased the gods by prayer and murmured a while, she ordered Aeson's exhausted body to be carried into the air, and freeing him to deep sleep with her spells, she stretched him out like a corpse on a bed of herbs. She ordered Jason, his son, to go far off, and the attendants to go far off, and warned them to keep profane eyes away from the mysteries. They went as she had ordered. Medea, with streaming hair, circled the burning altars, like a Bacchante, and dipping many-branched torches into the black ditches filled with blood, she lit them, once they were darkened, at the twin altars. Three times with fire, three times with water, three times with sulphur, she purified the old man.

Meanwhile a potent mixture is heating in a bronze cauldron set on the flames, bubbling, and seething, white with turbulent froth. She boils there, roots dug from a Thessalian valley, seeds, flowerheads, and dark juices. She throws in precious stones searched for in the distant east, and

sands that the ebbing tide of ocean washes. She adds hoar-frost collected by night under the moon, the wings and flesh of a vile screech-owl, and the slavering foam of a sacrificed were-wolf, that can change its savage features to those of a man. She does not forget the scaly skin of a thin Cinyphian water-snake, the liver of a long-lived stag, the eggs and the head of a crow that has lived for nine human life-times.

With these, and a thousand other nameless things, the barbarian witch pursued her greater than mortal purpose. She stirred it all with a long-dry branch of a fruitful olive, mixing the depths with the surface. Look! The ancient staff turned in the hot cauldron, first grew green again, then in a short time sprouted leaves, and was, suddenly, heavily loaded with olives. And whenever the flames caused froth to spatter from the hollow bronze, and warm drops to fall on the earth, the soil blossomed, and flowers and soft grasses grew.

As soon as she saw this, Medea unsheathed a knife, and cut the old man's throat, and letting the old blood out, filled the dry veins with the juice. When Aeson had absorbed it, part through his mouth, and part through the wound, the white of his hair and beard quickly vanished, and a dark colour took its place. At a stroke his leanness went, and his pallor and dullness of mind. The deep hollows were filled with rounded flesh, and his limbs expanded. Aeson marvelled, recalling that this was his self of forty years ago.

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## MEDEA'S DESTRUCTION OF PELIAS

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Bacchus saw this wondrous miracle from heaven's heights, and realising from it, that the Nymphs of Mount Nysa, who had nursed him, could have their youth restored, he secured that gift from the witch of Colchis. There was no end to her magic. Phasian Medea, pretending to a sham quarrel with her husband, fled as a suppliant to Pelias's threshold, he who had usurped Aeson's throne. There, the king's daughters received her, since he himself was weighed down by the years. The lying Colchian soon won them over by a skilful show of friendship, and when she told them of one of her greatest gifts, the removal of Aeson's many years, and lingered over it, hope was aroused in Pelias's daughters that similar magic arts might rejuvenate their father.

They begged her, and told her to set a price however great. She was silent for a moment, and appeared to hesitate, keeping the minds of her petitioners in suspense by a show of solemn pretence. When, eventually, she promised to do it, she said 'To give you greater confidence in my gift, your oldest ram, the leader of your flocks, will by turned into a young lamb again, by my magic drugs.' Straight away the woolly creature, worn out by innumerable years, was dragged forward, his horns curving round his hollow temples. When the witch had cut his wizened throat with her Thessalian knife, hardly staining the blade with blood, she immersed the sheep's carcass in the bronze cauldron, along with her powerful magic herbs. These shrank its limbs, melted away its

horns, and, with its horns, the years. A high-pitched bleating came from inside the vessel, and while they were wondering at the bleating, a lamb leapt out, and frisked away, seeking the udder and milk.

Pelias's daughters were stunned, and now the truth of her promise had been displayed, they insisted even more eagerly. Three times Phoebus had unyoked his horses, after their plunge into the western ocean, and on the fourth night the stars were glittering in all their radiance, when the deceitful daughter of Aetes set clear water, and herbs, but ineffectual ones, over a blazing fire. And now the king and his guards also were deep in death-like sleep, achieved by her incantations and the power of her magic spells. The king's daughters, at her command, crossed the threshold, with the Colchian witch, and stood around his bed. 'Why do you hesitate, so timidly?' she said. 'Un-sheath your blades, and let out the old blood, so that I can fill the empty veins with new! You father's life and youth are in your hands. If you have any filial affection, if those are not vain hopes that stir you, render your father this service, banish old age with your weapons, and drive out his poisoned blood with a stroke of the iron blade!'

Urged on by these words, the more love each had for him, the quicker she was to act without love, and did evil, to avoid greater evil. Nevertheless they could not bear to see their own blows, and turned their eyes away, and with averted faces, wounded him blindly with cruel hands. Streaming blood, the old man still raised himself on his elbow, and, though mutilated, tried to rise from his bed. Stretching his pallid hands out among the many weapons, he cried 'Daughters, why are you doing this? What has made you take up weapons against your father's life?' Their strength and courage vanished. But as he was about to utter more words, the Colchian witch cut his throat, and plunged his torn body into the seething water.

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## MEDEA FLEES AND REACHES ATHENS

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She would not have escaped punishment had she not taken to the air, with her winged dragons. Through the high sky, clockwise, she fled, over the shadowy slopes of Pelion, Chiron's home; over Othrys and the places made famous by the ancient fate of Cerambus, who, aided by the nymphs and changed to a winged scarab beetle, lifted into the air, when the all-powerful sea drowned the solid earth, and so escaped un-drowned from Deucalion's flood. She passed Aeolian Pitane on the left, with its huge stone serpent image, and Ida's grove where Liber concealed, in the deceptive shape of a stag, the bullock stolen by his son. She passed the place where the father of Corythus, Paris, lay, buried under a little sand; and where Hecuba, changed to a black bitch of Hecate, Maera, spread terror through the fields with her strange barking.

She flew over Astypalaea, the city of Eurypylus, where the women of the island, of Cos, acquired horns when they abused Hercules, as he and his company departed: over Rhodes, beloved of



Phoebus: and the Telchines of the city of Ialysos on Rhodes, whose eyes corrupted everything they looked on, so that Jupiter, disgusted with them, sank them under his brother's ocean waves. She passed the walls of ancient Carthaea, on the island of Ceos, where Alcidamas, as a father, would marvel, one day, that a peace-loving dove could spring from the body of his daughter, Ctesylla.

Then she saw Lake Hyrie, and Cycnean Tempe, made famous suddenly by a swan. There Phylus, at the boy Cycnus's command, brought him birds and a fierce lion he had tamed. Ordered to overcome a wild bull as well, he did overcome him, but angry that his love was rejected so often, he refused to grant this last gift of a bull, when asked. Cycnus, angered, said 'You will wish you had' and leapt from a high cliff. All thought he had fallen, but changed to a swan he beat through the air on white wings, though his mother, Hyrie, not knowing he was safe, pined away with weeping, and became the lake that carries her name.

Near there was the city of Pleuron, where Combe the daughter of Ophius, on flickering wings, escaped death at the hands of her sons, the Aetolian Curetes. And then Medea looked down at the fields of Calaurea's isle, sacred to Leto, whose king and queen were also changed to birds. On her right was Cyllene, where Menephron lay with his mother, as though he were a wild beast. Further on she sees the Cephissus, the river-god lamenting his grandson's fate, changed by Apollo into a lumbering seal, and the home of Eumelus, mourning his son Botres, reborn as a bird, the bee-eater, in the air.

At last, the dragon's wings brought her to Corinth, the ancient Ephyre, and its Pirenian spring. Here, tradition says, that in earliest times, human bodies sprang from fungi, swollen by rain. After Jason's new bride Glauce had been consumed by the fires of vengeful Colchian witchcraft and both the Isthmus's gulfs had witnessed flame consuming the king's palace, Medea impiously bathed her sword in the blood of their sons. Then, after performing this evil act, she fled from Jason's wrath. Carried by her dragons that are born of the Titans, she reached Pallas's citadel of Athens. This once knew you Phene, the most righteous, and you old Periphas, both flying in the air, as birds, the eagle and the osprey: and Alcyone, granddaughter of Polypemon, resting on strange new wings. It was Aegeus who gave Medea sanctuary there, damned thereafter by that one action: and not content with taking her in, he even entered into a contract of marriage with her.

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## MEDEA ATTEMPTS THESEUS'S LIFE, THEN VANISHES

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Now Theseus came to Athens, Aegeus's son, but as yet unknown to him. He, by his courage, had brought peace to the Isthmus between the two gulfs. Medea, seeking his destruction, prepared a mixture of poisonous aconite, she had brought with her from the coast of Scythia. This poison is said to have dripped from the teeth of Cerberus, the Echidnean dog. There is a dark cavern with a gaping mouth, and a path into the depths, up which Hercules, hero of Tiryns, dragged the dog, tied

with steel chains, resisting and twisting its eyes away from the daylight and the shining rays. Cerberus, provoked to a rabid frenzy, filled all the air with his simultaneous three-headed howling, and spattered the green fields with white flecks of foam. These are supposed to have congealed and found food to multiply, gaining harmful strength from the rich soil. Because they are long-lived, springing from the hard rock, the country people call these shoots, of wolf-bane, 'soil-less' aconites. Through his wife's cunning Aegeus, the father, himself offered the poison to his son, as if he were a stranger. Theseus, unwittingly, had taken the cup he was given in his right hand, when his father recognised the emblems of his own house, on the ivory hilt of his son's sword, and knocked the evil drink away from his mouth. But she escaped death, in a dark mist, raised by her incantations.