

OVID METAMORPHOSES VI

Minerva listened to the Muses' song,
Praising it and their anger. But 'Along
With them I should be praised as well,' said she.
My sacred powers without some penalty
Should not be scorned.' Arachne's happy fate
She scanned, for she would not capitulate
And to her spinning art give due acclaim.
The girl had for her skill attained great fame,
Though obscure otherwise, her family
Unknown, as was her nationality. 10
Her father Idmon's fame had amplified
When with Phocaeen purple stain he dyed
His wool. Her mother had deceased, and she
Was of a low-born family, as was he.
She lived a modest life, though, all the same
In small Hypaepa while eschewing fame.
She had become so famous in the land
Of Lydia, high up, with such command
Of spinning that so many eagerly
Sought out the maid for her dexterity. 20
They left the lush vineyards of Pactolus
And the cool streams of Timolus
To praise the cloth and watch her cleverly
Spinning the wool. Ah, such finesse had she,
Should she be twisting, teasing, softening
Or into equal fibres lengthening
The fleece, twirling the spindle expertly,
Employing her needle – one could surely see
How well Minerva taught her. She'd disclaim
Her teaching, though, so loath to share her fame 30
Was she, and then she said, 'Let her compete
With me, and if I end up in defeat,
I'll yield her all.' Minerva heard and came
To her as some old crone, seemingly lame,
A staff supporting her, for she seemed weak
In limb. And then this crone began to speak
In quavering tones: 'Old age is not the cause
Of every ill - know-how should give us pause
In our advancing years, because to long
For praise from other mortals is not wrong 40
When you are spinning wool so expertly,
but you should not deny he artistry
Of Queen Minerva. Pray she pardons you,
For she will grant your pardon if you do.
Arachne scowled and looked at the goddess,
Who dropped her thread, and barely could suppress
Her threatening hand: with anger trembling,

She gave her answer: Oh, you silly thing,
 You're ancient! That is your adversity!
 Go, profit other folks – your family, 50
 Daughter or daughter-in-law, maybe! But I
 Am wise enough, and so you must deny
 That I can aid you, for I am secure
 In my opinion and will make sure
 Your goddess will accept my invitation
 And hither come!' Then, with no hesitation
 She said, 'Minerva comes to you!' Then she
 Cast off her guise and showed herself to be
 Minerva. Nymphs and matrons deified
 Her then. Arachne, though, alone defied 60
 Them all, although she blushed and then went white,
 Then blushed again, just as at first daylight
 Aurora's blush turns pale. She even brought
 Her own demise, for she so keenly sought
 The palm. Minerva, too, was keen to face
 The challenge. Each of them picked out her place
 And stretched the threads across the web, the reed
 Partitioned from the warp; then they would feed
 The woof into the web with shuttles and
 The threads drawn through the warp were then by hand 70
 Struck into place that the comb's teeth might bite
 Upon them. Then their clothes they gathered tight
 Around their breasts, raising their arms, and hid
 Their weariness with eager work. Amid
 The Tyrian, one could see the royal dyes
 Taken from brazen vessels: so the skies
 Show us the rainbow as it's glittering,
 Through which a thousand tints are mingling,
 And where a thousand separate colours shine,
 Although the changes have so fine a line 80
 That they deceive the eye. There threads of gold
 Are woven, and an ancient tale is told
 Within the web. The Areopagus
 Was Pallas' choice, and she displayed for us
 The fuss about its name. Lord Jupiter bade
 Twelve gods to judge the case: they were portrayed
 So cleverly that it was very clear
 Who each one was. .Lord Jupiter was to hear
 Their reasoning. The guardian of the sea
 Was shown to be involved in rivalry 90
 With Pallas. With his trident Neptune hit
 The rock, at which a wild horse sprang from it.
 He gave it to mankind, then made the claim
 That through the gift he had to right to name
 The city. A self-portrait, furthermore,
 She wove, in which a shield and lance she bore,

A helmet on her head; an aegis lay
 Upon her breast; into the fertile clay
 She struck her spear, and there, too, olives grew,
 Pale with a wealth of clustered fruits, so new. 100
 The gods judged that the olive had exceeded
 The horse of Neptune and Arachne needed
 To learn from the great deeds in history
 Her folly and what her penance may be.
 And in four corners, too, textured in bright
 Colours, although their size was only slight,
 Pallas had woven contests – in one she
 Showed snow-clad heights, Haemus and Rhodope,
 Which once were mortal, who once used to call
 Themselves with names of gods, such was their gall. 110
 A second showed the miserable fate
 Of the pygmy queen, whom Juno made mutate
 Into a crane and strike at her own nation,
 When Juno beat her in an altercation.
 And in the third she showed Antigone
 Whom Juno turned into a bird, for she
 Had dared to vie with Hera. Laomedon,
 Her father, and the powers of Ilion
 Could not assist her in that state. That done
 In those three corners, there was only one 120
 Remaining, in which Cinyras, bereft,
 Is weeping; there on temple steps he's left,
 The steps that once had been his child. Around
 The edges olive wreaths of peace were found,
 Her own device. The maid initially
 Worked on Europa's bull's duplicity.
 She was so skilled that everything seemed true
 To life. It seemed Europa looked back to
 The land she'd left and called out in alarm
 To her companions as if some harm 130
 She'd suffer from the waves, while on display,
 Held by the eagle, was Asterie;
 And Leda, too, could be identified
 Lying beneath the swan's white wings beside
 The stream, and dancing like a satyr she
 Showed Jove seeking the fair Antiope,
 Who bore twins, when he, as Amphitryon,
 Sought out Alcmena, how he doted on
 Fair Danaë as a golden shower, how he,
 As fire, caught Aegina, Mnemosyne 140
 As a shepherd, Proserpina as a spotted snake;
 The scenes of Neptune, also, she would make -
 First he's a bull, deeply infatuated
 With virgin Arne – then she illustrated
 The sea-god when he changed into the shape

Of Enipeus to facilitate the rape
 That spawned the giant twins, and then when he
 Changed to a ram and sported carnally
 With Bisaltis, then when he was a horse
 And with Ceres let nature take its course, 150
 Then, as a dolphin, with Melantho he
 Once lay. All these were woven expertly
 In proper shades. Apollo, too, she showed,
 As when he once appeared in rustic mode
 And as a hawk and, with its tawny skin,
 A mighty lion, and when he took in
 Isse, a country lad. Bacchus would be
 A bunch of grapes to dupe Erigone
 And she showed Saturn, who became a steed
 To father centaur Chiron. Her last deed 160
 Was flowers and ivy leaves all intertwined
 Upon the edges. Pallas could not find
 A single flaw (for even Jealousy
 Can't censure art performed so perfectly).
 The fair-haired a warrior grieved at its success
 And tore apart the scenes of wickedness
 In gods, and so her boxwood shuttle she
 Took up and struck the maid repeatedly
 On her forehead. Arachne could not brook
 An insult such as that, and so she took 170
 A cord and hanged herself. But, pitying
 The maid, Minerva saved her from the sting
 Of death, yet she said, 'Live! Yet you will be
 Still dangling, and your posterity
 Will ever feel that pain. And as she said
 Those words, before she left her sight she shed
 The juice of Hecate. At once her hair
 Fell out, her nose and ears no longer there.
 Her hand shrank to the smallest size, her frame
 As well, her slender fingers now became 180
 Legs, with the rest all belly, whence the thread
 Was woven. Rumour of her fate soon spread
 To Phrygia. Niobe knew her, though,
 When she dwelt in Meonia long ago,
 But of Arachne's fate she took no note:
 Not honouring the gods, she used to bloat
 Immodestly with pride – her family,
 Her noble realm, her husband's artistry
 She bragged about. But she was, in the way
 She boasted of her children, non-pareil. 190
 Indeed the happiest mother of mankind
 She would be called if she had not been blind
 To pride. Just then Teiresias' progeny,
 Mento, a prophetess, when prophecy

Gave her her inspiration, rushed outside
 And yelled, 'Ismenian women, go, provide
 Incense and prayers to Queen Latona, who
 Sits on her throne, and to her children, too,
 And wreath your hair in laurel as you pray.
 Give heed to me, for what I have to say 200
 Was ordained by Latona!' Then, as fast
 As possible they wreathed their brows and cast
 The incense in the flames in supplication.
 Niobe joined them in their veneration
 With her adherents, most conspicuous
 Dressed in her purple robe, so beauteous
 With threads of gold. Though angry, she was fair.
 She tossed her head back, and her radiant hair
 Shone on her shoulders. She spoke haughtily
 With taunting words: 'Ah, what insanity 210
 To worship gods you know but by hearsay.
 And yet the gods who dwell on earth and may
 Be seen are disregarded. Come, therefore,
 Why can it be you worship and adore
 Latona while you do not offer me
 Incense, despite that my divinity
 Is known to you? For it must be said
 That Tantalus begot me, he who fed
 Among the heavenly gods (and only he!),
 And, furthermore, I am the progeny 220
 Of Atlas' daughter; I may also say
 My grandfather was Jupiter; I may
 Say he's my father-in-law. The Phrygian nation
 Looks on my dominance with trepidation.
 I rule the house of Cadmus, which arose
 To his sweet music and we all rule those
 Who live within our walls. There is no place
 Where wealth cannot be witnessed. In my face
 You see a beauty that belongs in Heaven.
 I have full seven sons and daughters seven, 230
 And soon I'll have a larger family.
 My pride is warranted, as you must see,
 Yet over me you choose that Titaness,
 The child of Coeus (you would have to guess
 Who *he* might be!). To her once the wide earth
 Refused a piece of ground to give her birth!
 The air, together with the land and sea,
 Compelled her to meander hopelessly
 Till Delos, sorry for the vagrant, said,
 'I roam the seas, the land it is you tread.' 240
 And yet her lodgings were precarious.
 I bore two children, but, compared to us,
 That's merely one in seven. Who can doubt

My future? Who can be unsure about
 My destiny? No, I remain secure.
 The wealth of my abundance is too sure
 For bad luck to assail me. Of my store
 She may take much, but there will be much more
 That yet remains, for I've survived the blight
 Of apprehension. Even if I might 250
 Lose some of my fair children, I possess
 More than but two, all that that Titaness
 Possesses, for she might as well have none.
 Leave this insensate sacrifice! Go! Run!
 Off with those laurels now!' They then took heed
 Obediently and left, although indeed
 With quiet murmurings they adulated
 Latona, who became infuriated,
 Hearing Niobe – flying to the peak
 Of Mt. Cynthus, she then began to speak 260
 To her two children. 'I am proud,' said she,
 'Of both of you. I will not fawningly
 Yield to another goddess, save alone
 Juno. Debased, I'm driven from my own
 Unless you give me aid. Nor is this all -
 That Tantalus's daughter had the gall
 To add foul curses to her villainy
 With a tongue as wicked as her father's. She
 Raised her base brood above mine and she stated
 That I am childless. So she should be fated 270
 With such a destiny. Such fate I pray
 May be hers, too! Phoebus had this to say:
 'Enough! She *will* be punished.' Phoebe said
 The same. Through the surrounding clouds they sped
 To Thebes, where they caught sight of, far beneath,
 Sweeping around the walls a level heath
 Where steeds and countless wheels had smoothed the ground.
 The older sons of Niobe they found
 On brightly emblazoned steeds, circling about.
 The eldest one, Ismenus, bellowed out, 280
 Checking his foaming horse's mouth, for he
 Had been pierced by a spear: immediately
 He dropped the reins and fell down to the ground.
 His brother Sipylus heard the whistling sound
 As it impaled him and urged on the horse'
 As pilots, wary of a typhoon's course,
 Put up their sails that they might not evade
 A momentary draught of wind, he made
 His flight. The shaft, however, as he fled,
 Flew on, transfixing him, and left him dead, 290
 His neck impaled, and in his flight he fell

Across the horse's neck and dropped pell-mell
 Onto the ground, staining it with his gore.
 Then Phaedimus and Tantalus, two more
 (That name the latter had inherited
 From his mother's father) their task now had shed
 And, smeared with oil, joined in the wrestling,
 And while they struggled there came hurtling
 A dart and pierced them as they, breast to breast,
 Were clinched. The groans they uttered coalesced. 300
 Convulsed with pain, they fell upon the ground -
 In their distress their eyeballs rolled around
 As they sobbed out their lives. Beating his breast,
 Alphenor saw this happen and, distressed,
 He ran to raise them up and, just as he
 Tried to perform this act of piety,
 He fell among them. Delian Apollo then
 Tore at his guts with deadly steel, and when
 He pulled the shaft away, part of his lung
 Was drawn away with it as there it hung 310
 Upon the barb while blood was spouting high
 As he gave up his soul. The next to die
 Was youthful Damasichthon who was hit
 First in the thigh, then, as he tugged at it,
 Deep in the neck. The blood, though, drove it out
 As crimson jets appeared with many a spout.
 The youngest, Ilioneus, cried in prayer,
 'Immortal deities, I beg you, spare
 My life!' Too late! Phoebus could not hold sway
 Against a shaft already on its way, 320
 Yet he made certain to retard its flight,
 Killing him with a wound that was but slight
 And did not pierce the heart. This tragedy,
 The grief, the tears of her own family
 Confirmed Niobe's fate but left her mind
 Bewildered and enraged that she would find
 The gods could challenge her. His iron blade
 Amphion thrust into his heart and made
 An end. That once proud, haughty Niobe
 Who from Latona's altars recently 330
 Drove everyone away as through the crowd
 She moved, hearing her friends proclaim out loud
 Their envy, now hears her own enemies
 Pity her. Her maternal miseries
 Forced her to fall upon the wretched pile
 Of the corpses of her sons, kissing the while
 Their senseless lips. She railed upon her foe,
 Accusing all of Heaven for her woe:
 'Glut your revenge! Glut, too, your indignation,
 Latona! And relish my lamentation! 340

Go, satiate your flinty heart with what
 You see before you! Are my seven sons not
 All dead? And do I not remain to be
 Interrred myself? Enjoy your victory!
 And yet – what victory? In my distress
 I have more than you in your happiness.
 No sooner had she spoken than the twang
 Of Phoebus' ever-ready bow now sang
 A fatal air that scared them all, except
 Niobe, for, despite the woe that swept 350
 Across her mind, was bold nevertheless.
 The sisters, clothed in black in their distress,
 Stood by the biers, their hair in disarray.
 One of those sisters promptly passed away
 While plucking from the brother's heart the cause
 Of his demise; another, taking pause
 To soothe her mother, was quite suddenly
 Struck with a wound she could not see, and she
 Compressed her lips till she ran out of breath.
 Another tried to rush away from death 360
 And yet was caught: her sister fell upon
 Her corpse; one tried to hide; another one
 Quaked in full view. Six out of seven died,
 Each in a different way. Just one beside
 Was left. The mother covered her, in dread,
 With all her garments, wailing, as she said,
 'Leave me this one – the youngest!' But, as she
 Entreated, she lost this one progeny.
 Now childless, she sat crouching there beside
 Her family, of whom each one had died. 370
 The breeze does not disturb a single hair,
 Her cheeks are bloodless and her fixed eyes stare
 Unmoving, for across her flesh the chill
 Of marble now is spread; her eyes are still,
 Her tongue and lovely veins solidified.
 And yet her tears were falling. As she wept,
 Enveloped in a tempest, she was swept
 Far to her native land, where she was set
 Upon a mountain-summit, weeping yet, 380
 And to this day she weeps. Ever since then
 Latona's wrath by all women and men
 Was feared - they worshipped her more zealously,
 The mother of twins, and they accordingly
 Thought of the other deeds that she had done,
 And, of the many, they recalled this one:
 Long past, some Lycian rustics heedlessly
 Insulted her, incurring injury
 Therefrom. You may not know of it, for they
 Are not well-known: however, I can say 390

This wondrous thing is true, for I have been
To where it all occurred and I have seen
The pool. My aged father, because he
Could then no longer travel, ordered me
To fetch some pure-bred cattle from that land
And granted me a Lycian guide. I spanned
The pastures with the man who was my guide
And, as it chanced, an ancient shrine I spied,
Filthy with ashes in a large pool, where
The sedge and reeds were quivering in the air. 400
My guide in fear said, 'Have mercy on me!'
And I responded to him similarly.

I asked my guide whose would the altar be -
Fauns, naiads, maybe local gods. But he
Said, 'None of them! She whom the royal queen
Drove off to roam abroad has ever been
The only one to let this altar here
Be used – she whom the isle of Delos near
Refused refuge. Between the olive-tree
Of Queen Athena and the date-palm she 410
Bore twins. Her harsh stepmother, Juno, though,
Compelled Latona, with her twins, to go
From there. Beneath the fierce sun the goddess,
Weary and parched, felt thirst in her distress.
Her twins had drunk her milk. In a deep ravine
She saw a little lake, and there were seen
Some countrymen engaged in gathering
Rushes and sedge. Latona went, kneeling
To drink out of the lake, but as she tried
To take a sip, the countrymen denied 420
Her drink. The goddess cried, 'What wicked deed
Is this? Why countermand my desperate need?
For water is to all humanity

A sacred right, for not exclusively
For but one creature was the sun, the air,
The water Nature's gift – that's hardly fair!
Allow me access to the water! I
Don't mean to bathe here, just to satisfy
My raging thirst, and even as I say
These words, my lips are so cracked dry that they 430
Almost deny me words. One drink would be
Like nectar, for it would bring life to me.
Let my babes move your hearts as they hold out
Their tiny arms to you!' There is no doubt
That none could not feel sympathy to hear
Such words. And yet they still would persevere
In threatening her. Worst yet, they would begrime
The pool by dredging up the filthy slime.
No longer thirsty, she could not now bear

To stoop to begging them – she did not care 440
 To lower herself, so angrily she cried,
 Her hands stretched out, 'Henceforth may you reside
 In that foul pool!' And then, no sooner than
 The curse took hold, each one of them began
 To swim beneath the water and to leap
 And plunge about, now rising from the deep,
 Now squatting on the bank, now plummeting
 Once more into the depths, now quarrelling
 With croaking voices while their necks are seen
 To puff out, and with venting of their spleen 450
 Their widened jaws are made much wider yet.
 Their backs so closely to their hands are set
 Their necks are hidden, while those backs are green,
 Their bellies, largest part that can be seen,
 Are white. The foolish frogs ever since that day
 Muddy their own pools, where they leap and play.
 After the ruin of the Lycian men
 Had been narrated by that fellow, then
 Another told Marsyas' story thus:
 'The flautist Marsyas, adventurous 460
 In rivalry against Apollo's lyre,
 Lost the contest. The consequence was dire,
 For they'd agreed that he who lost would be
 The victor's prey.' Why do you punish me? Ah, I repent -
 My music is not worth this punishment,'
 He said to Phoebus. His flesh ripped away,
 His innards were on barbarous display.
 Each faun and every woodland deity
 And every satyr wept in misery, 470
 Olympus, too, his pupil and his friend,
 And all the nymphs accustomed there to tend
 Their mountain-sheep and -cattle. As they wept,
 The earth absorbed the bitter tears that kept
 On falling. In a stream into the air
 It rushed: within its sloping banks from there
 It ran out to the sea and thus became
 The river that embraced Marsyas' name.
 And then Amphion and his progeny
 Were mourned: the blame, though, fell on Niobe; 480
 But even her brother Pelops, so it's said,
 Wept for his sister and, once he had shed
 His tunic, he displayed the ivory
 That had been formed on his left shoulder. He,
 At birth, possessed a shoulder that was white,
 Which was the very colour of the right,
 But when his father tore his limbs apart
 And the gods restored his life, then every part
 Was rightly joined except for that one bit:

Some ivory, therefore, supplanted it. 490
 The city lords in the vicinity
 Assembled to beseech the monarchy
 To grieve for Pelops – each and every lord
 Of Argos and Mycenae they implored,
 Sparta and Calydon, before it drew
 Diana's bitterness, and Corinth, too,
 Wealthy in brass, fertile Orchomenus,
 Patrae, Cleone and the dangerous
 Messene, Troezen, not beneath the sway
 Of Pittheus yet, Pylos and towns that lay 500
 Southwest of the isthmus, bounded by two seas,
 And other cities which were seen from these.
 Athens alone, though, unbelievably,
 Did nothing, for she had an enemy
 She warred against, a foe from a distant land,
 Who savagely assailed the walls and banned
 The chance of mourning. Tereus, king of Thrace,
 Came to her aid against that savage race
 And by his deeds achieved a glorious fame,
 And since he boasted that his kinship came 510
 From Mars he owned much property. The king
 Of Athens made them allies, marrying
 Him to his daughter Procne. But Juno
 Did not attend, nor did the graces go,
 Nor Hymenaeus. And yet brands of fire
 Taken from every burning funeral pyre
 The Furies brandished. Then the nuptial bed
 They readied when an owl flew overhead
 And sat upon the roof, an augury
 Of doom, yet Tereus married sad Procne. 520
 These omens on all of the household cast
 A gloom until a child was born at last.
 There was rejoicing in the whole of Thrace,
 And to the gods the people offered grace
 The day Itys was born, and every year
 His birth is praised with gaiety and cheer,
 Hiding our future woes. Titan had brought
 Five autumns to the world when Procne sought
 Tereus and gently said, 'If you love me,
 My darling one, grant me the liberty 530
 To visit my dear sister or concede
 That she may visit us and may with speed
 Return. If you agree, my heart will bless
 You as I bless the gods. With hastiness
 He charged the ships to launch with sail and oar,
 And on the open sea he reached the shore
 Of Athens. His father-in-law and he
 Shook hands at the first opportunity.

He told him why they'd come and that he'd said
 To Procne that her sister would be sped 540
 Back soon, when Philomela entered, dressed
 In costly raiments, yet more richly blessed
 With charm and beauty, as we're wont to hear
 Naiads and dryads wander far and near
 In woods, garbed thus. When Tereus once had spied
 The maid, he was directly occupied with love,
 As when white corn or arid leaves or hay
 Are kindled; and, though one could surely say
 Her face could lure love, his infatuation
 Proceeded from his base and wicked nation. 550
 His wicked heart persuaded him that he
 Could taint her trusted maid, her coterie
 Of servants and her, too, with gifts - he'd spend
 A fortune on his kingdom to that end,
 Though risking war, and he, that he might feed
 His raging flame, would stop at nought – indeed
 He wouldn't wait, and so he urged a plea
 For her, though all the while pretending he
 Meant Procne. Lust had made him eloquent,
 And when he went too far, he's represent 560
 The words as Procne's. Hypocritically,
 His eyes filled up with tears. How deviously
 Some mortals act! Though he was villainous,
 Those who praised him were multitudinous,
 Thinking that he bore great love for his wife.
 But even Philomela lost her life,
 Begging her father that he might agree
 That she should journey far across the sea
 To see her sister, for with many a kiss
 She wheedled. Tereus thought about such bliss 570
 Were he her father – no less impious, though,
 Would Tereus have appeared had this been so.
 Her father gave consent, and joyously
 She thanked him for what was about to be
 The downfall of both sisters. Now the day
 Declined as Phoebus made his weary way
 Across the sky. The guests about to dine
 Upon the regal feast, the sparkling wine
 Was poured in golden vessels. Merrily
 It went until the happy company 580
 Retired. Not so the love-hot Thracian king,
 Who tossed and turned in bed, imagining
 Philomela's beauty: in his memory
 Her saw her fair hands' movement, frenziedly
 Incapable of sleep. Then at daybreak
 The king, while weeping, bade his farewell. 'Take
 Care of my child, ' he said, 'for I comply

For pious reasons. By the gods on high,
 Protect her with a father's love, and when
 The opportunity arises, then 590
 Have her conveyed back here. It will to me
 Seem long as I approach senility.
 Dear Philomela, if you love me, please
 Do not delay too long but give me ease,
 For it's enough to cause me such dismay
 And suffering while Procne stays away.
 The old king made them promise while he wept
 And kissed his child while making sure they kept
 Their promise as he joined their hands, then he,
 Now confident of their fidelity, 600
 He gave his blessing, his voice trembling
 With sobs, for he could hardly say a thing.
 A fearful instinct had assailed his heart.
 Now, once the vessel's crew had made a start
 With Philomela safely stowed aboard,
 The land they'd left not able to afford
 A focussed view, Tereus exultantly
 Thought, 'All's well – Philomela sails with me
 While others ply the oars.' With his hot eyes
 He watched her and could scarcely exercise 610
 Power upon his lust. As the poor hare
 The eagle drops into its nest where there
 Is no escape, he gloats upon what he
 Anticipates what he eventually
 Will overcome, He finally saw the strand
 That showed him that he'd reached his native land.
 He with the maiden, now assailed with dread,
 Into an old, wild, silent forest sped
 And locked her in a lofty house, while she,
 Now ghastly, colourless and shivery 620
 With fright, cried for her sister. He was grim -
 Her piteous wailing would not soften him.
 But even while she screamed out for the aid
 Of Procne and their father and vainly made
 Attempts to call upon the heavens, she
 Was overcome by his brutality.
 She trembled like a frightened lamb, poor child,
 That has just been discarded by a wild
 And grey-haired wolf and does not as yet know
 That she is free. Alas, she trembled so, 630
 Just like an injured dove that fears to see
 The talons of the hawk which happily
 She has escaped. But as her consciousness
 Returned, she stretched her arms in her distress.
 She beat those arms and tore her streaming hair
 And cried out, 'There's no monster anywhere

As barbarous as you! It could not be
 That my poor father's parting words to me
 And his foreboding weeping could curtail
 Your lust. It seems that you completely fail 640
 Your wife, my sister, my virginity,
 Your marriage vows. For you have thoroughly
 Spoiled everything. Now I have been compelled
 To be my sister's rival – I'll be held
 To be her enemy. So leave undone
 No sin! Finish me off – the final one
 To be your victim! If you'd slaughtered me
 Before you had besmirched my purity,
 My shade would be unsullied from that day.
 If there's a heaven, and, if my dismay 650
 Had not wrecked all the world, you'd have to bear
 The punishment. Your foul sin I'll declare
 To all the world. Be sure that my own shame,
 To have revenge on you, I will proclaim.
 I'll confront everybody, if I may
 Do so, and if forever I must stay
 Within these woods, I'll fill them with what you
 Have done. I'll move the rocks to pity, too.
 The skies and any god who's there will know
 Your sin.' The tyrant heard her cries of woe: 660
 He drew his sword, angry yet full of fright
 That people would be shocked, then, pulling tight
 Her hair, he bound her up with chains. When first
 She saw the sword above her head, her thirst
 For death was strong, and therefore she laid bare
 Her throat while struggling and screaming there
 And calling on her father. Pitilessly
 He caught her tongue with pincers, and then he
 Severed it with his sword. The root remained,
 Though quivering, but her tongue fell down and stained 670
 The floor, still murmuring; as on the ground
 A slain snake's tail writhes, so the tongue was found
 To do so, and before it died it went
 Towards her as if it were its intent
 To find her feet. It's said the monster then,
 Not satisfied with this, raped her again.
 He went back to his wife, who anxiously
 Enquired about her sister, at which he
 Told her she'd died – a total fabrication,
 Though all believed his bogus lamentation. 680
 She took her golden robe with many a sigh
 Of utter sadness and then put out it by,
 Assuming funeral clothes, and then she made
 A sepulchre and to her sister's shade
 Brought pious offerings. A year passed by,

But what could Philomela hope or try
 To do? She might have been locked in a cell -
 The house's walls had been constructed well
 With massive stones, and guards were everywhere,
 And, with her tongue cut out, she could not share 690
 Her woes. And yet one's ingenuity
 May help to shelter one from injury:
 A purple thread upon a white background
 She wove by which the culprit could be found
 And gave it to a servant, anxiously
 Enjoining her to take it secretly
 To Procne, though no words were written there,
 Who understood that message of despair.
 She had no words to utter what she thought,
 The sorrow that she felt being all too fraught 700
 With frenzy to cause tears. Her rapid mind
 In her demented anger now combined
 Both right and wrong as she sought to demand
 Revenge. The Bacchic rituals in the land
 Of Thrace were held just then (every third year
 Did they occur) and nightly one could hear
 Shrill cymbals on the slopes of Rhodope,
 And thus it was that Procne frantically,
 In Bacchic clothing, to the wasteland sped
 With festal vine-leaves covering her head, 710
 Her native deer skin hanging by her side,
 A light spear on her shoulder. Thus supplied,
 The vengeful Procne rushed in Bacchic guise
 Through the dark woods and uttered Bacchic cries.
 She forced the doors and seized her sister; then
 She hid her face in ivy leaves, and when
 She'd done this, mad with rage she ran to where
 She and her husband dwelt. Arriving there,
 Philomela turned more pale in misery
 And fright while quivering convulsively.
 Her Bacchic garb then Procne took away
 And bared her sister's face, which showed dismay, 720
 Embracing her. Her sister, though, in shame
 Dared not look up, believing that all blame
 Was on her side. Up high she raised her hand
 As if to beg the gods to understand
 Her innocence and know that it was she
 Who had been found to suffer injury.
 Aflame with anger, Procne cut her off
 To curb her sister's terror, saying, 'Doff
 Your weeping! We must act! There is no time!
 Take up a sword! The very vilest crime 730
 I'm ready to commit. Come, let's with speed
 Burn down the palace! Yes, and let us feed

Tereus with iron! Let us quench his eyes,
Cut out *his* tongue and watch him as he fries!
Deal him a thousand wounds! Let's see that he
Is killed with every death the misery
Of hate affords! While she was saying this
In her insanity her son, Itys,
Ran to her, and there came into her head
The thought of vicious punishment – she said, 740
'He is his father's image!' Instantly
She readied a most dreadful penalty.
But when the child went up to her and called
Her “mother” and around her neck had hauled
His little arms and kissed her smilingly,
The instinct of her true maternity
Pulsed in her veins, and she began to weep,
To pity moved, feeling the impulse sweep
Through her, and it unnerved her. But she then
Looked at her sister, and then, once again, 750
At her dear son. 'With pretty words I see
My little one's prevailing over me,
Though Philomena's silent. Oh, how base
My husband is! I must be a disgrace,
As hard as flint. My piety's a crime.'
Having said this, she wasted no more time,
But, like the Indian tigress rapidly
Seizes the hind's still-suckling progeny
And drags it through the forest to her den,
So Procne seized the frightened boy and then 760
Dragged him away till, finding a remote
Part of the palace, with her sword she smote
The boy, who stretched his arms up high and cried,
'Mother! Ah, mother!' clinging to her side.
Her eyes were fixed and staring horribly
As with wild strokes she lashed out manically
As she lopped off his limbs. Her sister, though,
Cut through the infant's tender throat. And so
They mangled his remains which quivered yet
With shreds of life. In steaming pots they set 770
Some parts of his him, which bubbled with his gore,
And then on hissing spits they roasted more.
Then Procne bade Tereus, her spouse, to eat
At that vile feast, arranging with deceit
Some sacred rites – in her land, she professed,
The husband was to be the only guest
At such a feast – and so she banished all
The rest. Then Tereus, seated in his tall
Ancestral chair, in his gross gluttony
Devoured his son and then called, 'Bring to me 780
Itys to share this feast!' Then, with a joy

She could not hide, Procne cried out, 'Your boy
 Is inside you!' Amazed, he looked around
 And called his son again. Then, with a bound,
 Philomena, with her hair in disarray,
 All stained with blood, unable still to say
 A word, hurled Itys' head into his face,
 Longing for fitting words. That man from Thrace
 Now overturned the table as he called
 Upon the Furies; he was so appalled 790
 That he was quite prepared to lacerate
 His body to reveal what he of late
 Had eaten. 'I'm my own son's tomb,' said he
 And wept the hot tears of insanity.
 Then with his sword he made a rush at those
 Two sisters, and it seemed that they arose
 Up in the air on wings, and it was true,
 For they'd been changed to birds, and now they flew.
 Philomena in the trees found her protection
 While Procne hid beneath a roof's projection. 800
 And one can always find a sort of crest
 Of murder marked upon a swallow's breast
 And blood-red feathers. Tereus, agitated
 And thirsting for revenge, was now mutated
 Into a bird that sports a long, sharp bill
 Instead of a sword, and thus he always will
 Be called a hoopoe, and he seems to be
 Weaponed against a future enemy.
 Before his old age Pandion was sent
 To Tartarus because of this event. 810
 Erechtheus, next in line, ruled on the throne
 Left vacant by the good king Pandion.
 There were eight children in his family,
 Four girls, four boys, and of his progeny
 Two girls were fair, of whom one girl became
 Cephalus' wife. But Boreas was aflame
 For Orithyia but was forced to be
 To Tereus and his land an enemy,
 Although he wooed his loved one but with prayer,
 Not violence. When he was quite aware 820
 That he was getting nowhere, he declared
 With a rough anger that so often flared
 In him, 'I well deserve it. Why did I
 Not take my weapons? Why did I put by
 My threats, my anger, my ferocity
 And turn to prayers, incongruous in me?
 By force I drive the clouds, by force I smite
 The sea and topple oak-trees and pack tight
 The snow, by force the earth with hail I pound,
 And when upon this heavenly battleground 830

Of mine, I meet my brothers, mightily
I strive with them in our fierce rivalry,
The heavens clash, and from each hollow cloud
I hurl my flames and thunder bursts out loud.
The caverns of the earth I penetrate
And all the shades of Hell I irritate,
Casting death-dealing earthquakes everywhere.
Such powers I should use, renouncing prayer -
That is the way I should have sought a wife,
For violence provides the law of life!"
Then mighty Boreas his wings unfurled,
By beating which he stirred the entire world,
And wrapped the untrod mountain peaks on high
With swirling dust, descending through the sky.
He caught his trembling loved one to his breast
With his dark wings, and he refused to rest
Until he found the Thracian walls, and there
He wed the maiden, who went on to bear
Twin brothers, Calais and Zetes, who
At first were lacking wings, but when they grew
To manhood, wings appeared upon each frame,
And then they joined the Argonauts and fame
Was theirs as in the first ship they would be
The finders of the fleece across the sea.

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