

INTOXICATED//*shot with a poisoned arrow*

The scene opens on a morning stroll in the woodland:
Apollo is singing a song of his own devising
a small boy playing with bow and arrows trails the archer-god
full of admiration An irritation

The god stops abruptly;
a pebble in his sandal

He shakes loose the offender
and peevish turns

*Cheeky lad,
those aren't toys.
I'll show you how to use them
When you grow-up.*

Well,
with that he turns his back and walks on
he is trying to remember that melody he had hold of
before the interruption, before the pebble

It was a mistake, of course, to diss the boy.

He carries two arrows, one gold tipped
the other of base metal

One attracts
The other repels
He never misses.

After a morning swim
Daphne sits beside the pleasant stream

Plaiting her long, thick coil of copper hair.
She is thinking of her friends, woodland nymphs,
young and lovely as they will always be

A chill passes over her;
at the identical moment
Apollo wipes a hand across his brow, his head dizzy

A vast warmth and happiness hither to unknown
sweeps through his body Daphne
Daphne sunlight dancing upon her skin

*Dear Heart, he begins,
stepping into the open She
wide-eyed Jumps to her feet.
Dear Heart! Don't run away!*

But that is exactly what she does.

Daphne flees his hot breath, his ardent reaching arms
She flees this beauteous god who pursues her
as if she were a doe and he
the long-legged hound, lips flecked with foam
panting at her heels

Ah, Daphne,
her friends will later say among themselves,
She disdained the boys, you know
Woodland nymphs take their pleasure where they choose
She'd sworn not to wed *Yes, it was bad luck*

The gods can be such dicks!

Swift with urgency, her feet carry her
beyond the Umbrella pines and past promontories
where islands slip and slide outside sight lines

But who can out-run the gods?

Tiring, throat burning, scent of wild thyme beneath her feet
She stops.

Calls out to her father, Penthes, a minor river god:
.....*I don't want him!*

O father, Help me
I don't want him!

Of course, there was little he could do, Olympian gods and
goddesses being who and what they are with their spitefulness,
their petty jealousies; warlike; made by men in their image, but
more beautiful, unutterably so.

Penthes roused himself

My daughter,
It is in my power to change your earthly form, but once only.
Is that what you want?

YES! YES, OH YES! Hurry, please, he's almost here!

In that instant a strangeness embraced her from head to toe.

At first it felt expansive, defining itself moment by moment, nerves and sinews fluctuating at the cellular level; then it was confining, both rooting her to where she stood and reaching skyward, a cry to heaven; soft, supple skin became silvery-grey bark, while from out her fingers leaves evergreen shot like flames engulfing her entirely. Gone was the copper hair.

She ceased to speak.

Her voice now but a whispering among the leaves

Impatient Apollo arrives

nonplussed

confused

He wept

He swore

Understanding brought him to his knees

Sorrow and regret joined hands in his heart

Kneeling, the god fashioned a wreath from the laurel's leaves.

He brought it to his lips, then placed it carefully on his brow.