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BOOK VI



Minerva heard the story, and praised the song
 And praised the righteous anger, but was thinking:
 "It is very well, this praise, but I myself
 Deserve some praise; I too should show resentment
 Toward those who flout my power." She was thinking
 About Arachne, a Maeonian girl,
 Who, she had heard, was boasting of her talent,
 Calling it better even than Minerva's,
 In spinning and weaving wool. The girl was no one
 In birth, nor where she came from; her father, Idmon,
 Was a dyer, steeping thirsty wool with crimson.
 Her mother was dead, a common sort of person,
 With the same sort of husband, but the daughter
 Was famous for her skill, and it had traveled
 Through all the Lydian towns, though she herself
 Lived in the little village of Hypaepa.

The nymphs themselves would often watch in wonder,
 Leaving their vineyards or the river waters,
 To see her finished work, or watch her working
 With such deft gracefulness. It did not matter
 Whether she wound the yarn in balls, or shaped it
 With skillful fingers, reaching to the distaff
 For more material, all soft and cloudy,
 Transfigured to long threads, or whether she twisted
 The spindle with quick thumb, or plied the needle.
 You would know, most surely, that Minerva taught her,
 Yet she would not admit it, seemed offended
 At the suggestion of so great a teacher:
 "I challenge her, and if I lose, there's nothing
 I would refuse to pay!"

Disguised, Minerva

Came, an old woman with gray hair, half crippled,
 Hobbling along with a cane to help her footsteps,
 Telling Arachne: "Old age, let me tell you,
 Has some things we should never run away from:
 Experience comes with time; hear my advice:
 Confine your reputation as a weaver
 To human beings, but defer to a goddess,
 Be humble in her presence, ask her pardon,
 You reckless creature, for your arrogance.
 She will be gracious, if you only ask it."
 But no: Arachne glowered, stared her down,
 Let fall her threads to free her hands for striking,
 Controlled herself a little, but spoke in anger:
 "You silly old fool, to come to me! Your trouble

Is having lived too long. Your daughters, maybe,
 Or your sons' wives, perhaps, might listen to you.
 I can look after myself; you are getting nowhere,
 You cannot change my mind with all that nonsense.
 As for your wonderful goddess, why, where is she?
 Why does she dodge the challenge I have offered?"
 "She is here," Minerva answered. She was there,
 No longer an old woman, but a presence
 Whom the nymphs worshipped and the native women.
 Arachne was not awed, though she was startled,
 Blushing and paling, as the sky at morning
 Shows crimson first, then whitens. Still Arachne
 Maintains defiance, with a stupid passion
 Rushing to doom. Minerva takes the challenge,
 Abandons admonition. The looms are set,
 The fine warp stretched, the web is bound to the beam,
 Reeds keep the threads apart, the shuttle threads
 Shrill through the woof, the busy fingers plying.
 With robes tucked up they speed the work, their hands,
 Deft at the task, fly back and forth, the labor
 Made less by eagerness. From the dark purple
 The threads shade off to lighter pastel colors,
 Like rainbow after storm, a thousand colors
 Shining and blending, so the eye could never
 Detect the boundary line, and yet the arcs
 Are altogether different. Threads of gold
 Were woven in, and each loom told a story.

 Minerva showed the hill of Mars in Athens
 And that old conflict over the name of the land.

There sat the twelve great gods of the high Heaven,
 On lofty thrones in majesty, and Jove
 Presiding, royal, above the well-known faces.
 And there stood Neptune, smiting with his trident
 The cliff of rock, and the gush of the sea-water
 Proving his title to the rule of the city.
 To herself Minerva gave the spear, the helmet,
 The aegis for her breastplate, and the earth,
 Under her spear, produced the gray-green olive,
 Hung thick with fruit, and the gods looked on in wonder.
 The work has Victory's ultimatum in it,
 But that her challenger may have full warning
 What her reward will be for her daring rashness,
 In the four corners the goddess weaves four pictures,
 Bright in their color, each one saying *Danger!*
 In miniature design. One corner shows
 Haemus and Rhodope, cold mountains now,
 Who once, audacious mortals, had assumed
 The names of gods most high; a second corner
 Portrays the fate of the Pygmy queen, whom Juno
 Turned into a crane, made to attack the people
 She once ruled over. And she showed, beside,
 Antigone, who dared compete with Juno,
 Whom Juno made a stork, white-winged, and clashing
 Her clacking bill; much good it did her
 That she was born in Troy, or that her father
 Was king Laomedon. In the fourth corner
 Cinyras tried to embrace the temple-steps
 That once had been his daughters; he lies on stone,

He seems to weep. All this the goddess ended
 With a border of peaceful olive-wreath around it,
 Her very signature.

Arachne also

Worked in the gods, and their deceitful business
 With mortal girls. There was Europa, cheated
 By the bull's guise; you would think him real, the creature,
 Real as the waves he breasted, and the girl
 Seems to be looking back to the lands of home,
 Calling her comrades, lifting her feet a little
 To keep them above the lift and surge of the water.
 There was Asterie, held by the eagle,
 And Leda, lying under the wings of the swan,
 Antiope, pregnant with twins, whose father
 Was a satyr, so she thought, but it was really
 Jove in disguise again; he took Alcmena
 In the semblance of Amphitryon; he came
 To Danae in a shower of gold; he was
 A flame to Aegina, to Mnemosyne
 A shepherd, a mottled snake to Deo's daughter.
 Neptune, Jove's brother, was another cheater,
 A bull to one Aeolian girl, a river
 To another, or a ram; a stallion to Ceres,
 The fair-haired gentle mother of the grain;
 The snake-haired mother of the wingèd horse
 Received him as a wingèd bird; Melantho
 Took him as dolphin. To them all Arachne
 Gave their own features and a proper background.
 Apollo, too, was there, a country boy

At times, or a shepherd, deluding Isse so,
 At times a hawk, at times a tawny lion.
 And she worked Bacchus in, whose bunch of grapes
 Deceived Erigone, and there was Saturn,
 As horse, to father Chiron. Flowers and ivy
 Ran round the border as the work was ended.

Neither Minerva, no, nor even Envy
 Could find a flaw in the work; the fair-haired goddess
 Was angry now, indeed, and tore the web
 That showed the crimes of the gods, and with her shuttle
 Struck at Arachne's head, and kept on striking,
 Until the daughter of Idmon could not bear it,
 Noosed her own neck, and hung herself. Minerva
 At last was moved to pity, and raised her, saying:
 "Live, wicked girl; live on, but hang forever,
 And, just to keep you thoughtful for the future,
 This punishment shall be enforced for always
 On all your generations." As she turned,
 She sprinkled her with hell-bane, and her hair
 Fell off, and nose and ears fell off, and head
 Was shrunken, and the body very tiny,
 Nothing but belly, with little fingers clinging
 Along the side as legs, but from the belly
 She still kept spinning; the spider has not forgotten
 The arts she used to practice.

The Story of Niobe

The story spread

All over Lydia, through the Phrygian towns,
 Through the whole world. Once, long ago,
 Before her marriage, Niobe had known
 Arachne, when the two were girls together
 In the Maeonian country, but the warning,
 Of deference to the gods, restraint of language,
 Was lost on Niobe. Too many things
 Had made her proud, her royal husband's talent,
 High birth, and power of place, and, most of all,
 Her children made her proud: she would have been
 Happiest of all mothers, had she only
 Not thought herself the happiest. And Manto,
 Tiresias' daughter, whose prophetic vision
 Could see the things to come, had tried to tell her,
 Had gone through all the streets of Thebes, proclaiming:
 "Women of Thebes, adore Latona's temple,
 Bring prayers and incense to her and her children,
 Wreath laurel in your hair; Latona orders,
 I bring her message." And they were obedient,
 The women of Thebes, with laurel for the temples,
 And incense for the altar-flame, and prayer.

But here comes Niobe, with a crowd about her
 Streaming along, and wonderful to look at
 In Phrygian robes of gold, and beautiful
 In anger, beautiful, if anger ever
 Lets one be beautiful. Her lovely head
 Is tossed back in a gesture of pride, the hair
 Falling to either shoulder. And she stops,
 Holds herself very tall, lets her proud eyes

Take in the scene. "O citizens, what madness
 Takes hold of you?" she challenges, "Do you really
 Prefer those gods whom you have only heard of
 To those you see? Why is Latona worshipped
 Over her altars, and my own lack incense?
 My father is Tantalus, the only mortal
 Ever permitted to touch the heavenly table
 Where the gods feast. My mother is a sister
 Of the Pleiades. Atlas, who carries Heaven
 On his great shoulders, is one grandsire, Jove
 The other one, and Jove is my husband's father.
 The Phrygians bow before me. I am queen
 Of Cadmus' royal house, and the walls of Thebes,
 Built by the magic of my husband's music,
 And the folk of Thebes accord us royal homage.
 Wherever I turn my eyes, I look on richness
 Tremendous, vast. As for my own appearance,
 It is worthy of a goddess. To all this
 Count, also, seven sons and seven daughters,
 Their wives to be, and husbands. Ask me, therefore,
 What cause I have for pride, and do not dare
 Prefer Latona to me, this Latona,
 Daughter of Coeus, whoever he is, Latona,
 To whom the whole wide world, one time, would give
 No place to bear her children in. Not Heaven,
 Nor earth, nor sea, was hospitable to her,
 This goddess of yours, only a wretched island,
 Delos, like her a wanderer, a vagrant
 By sea, as she by land, took pity on her, gave her

A place at last—how feeble that foundation!
 So there she was a mother, of two children!
 I have seven times as many. I am happy,
 Who can deny it? And I shall be happy,
 Who dares to doubt it? My abundance saves me,
 I am too great for Fortune's power to injure.
 Suppose she takes much from me; there is more
 She will have to leave me still. To count my blessings
 Removes my fear. Imagine it, suppose
 Some of the population of my children
 Were taken from me, even so, could I
 Be so reduced, as she is, that Latona,
 Childless, or might as well be, with that mob
 Of two around her? Go, you foolish people,
 There has been enough of this, remove those laurels
 Out of your hair, stop making sacrifices,
 Be quick about it!" They took off the laurel,
 They left the rites unfinished, but no orders
 Could halt their silent praise and adoration.

Latona, a goddess angered, called her children
 To her on Cynthus: "Here am I, your mother,
 Proud of your birth, deferring to no goddess
 Except the queen of Heaven; doubt has risen
 That I am goddess, and in all the ages
 Worship will be denied Latona's altars,
 Unless my children aid me. What is worse,
 Insult heaped up on injury, Niobe dares
 To think her children better than mine; she calls me
 Childless (the word will be a curse upon her!)

As reckless in her talking as her father."
 There was more she would have added, prayers, entreaties,
 But her son said, "Enough! The longer we listen,
 The later we punish," and her daughter said
 "Enough!" and, veiled in cloud, the two came gliding
 Down to the citadel.

Outside the walls

Lay a wide plain, as hard, almost, as pavement
 From the beat of galloping hoofs and rolling chariots.
 There some of Niobe's seven sons were riding
 On crimson-colored saddle-cloths; the reins,
 The bridles, heavy with gold. The oldest son,
 Ismenus, leaning inward, pulling hard
 On the foaming bit to make a turn, screamed out
 In sudden agony, let fall the reins,
 An arrow in his heart, sank slowly, sidewise,
 Over the horse's shoulder to the ground.
 And Sipylus, his brother, heard the quiver
 Rattle in empty air, and gave full rein,
 Turned on all possible speed, as a ship's master,
 Conscious of storm coming on, at sight of a cloud,
 Crowds on all sail, takes every possible breeze
 To help his scudding home. He gave full rein,
 Drove fast in flight, but the arrow drove much faster,
 The shaft stuck quivering in his neck, the barb
 Came through at the front of the throat. Still leaning forward,
 He made a headlong dive, over the mane,
 Between the galloping legs, and the ground took
 The stain of his warm life-blood. Phaedimus

And Tantalus, named for his mother's father,
 Were winding up their morning's exercise
 In wrestling, and the shining bodies strained
 In close embrace and hold, and a sped arrow
 Fixed them in that embrace and hold; as one,
 They groaned, as one they writhed, and the eyes whitened
 And the last breath left their bodies. And Alphenor,
 Watching them die, came running up to help them,
 To untangle the cold limbs; in that devotion
 Alphenor fell: Apollo's arrow pierced him
 Through chest and lungs, and when he pulled the shaft
 Out of the wound, part of the lungs came with it,
 And the blood followed. The young Damasichthon
 Was hit behind the knee, and as the hand
 Reached down to pull the arrow out, another,
 More accurate, more swift, struck through the throat,
 Emerged with feathers dyed a different color.
 There was only one left now, Ilioneus,
 Who tried, in vain, to pray: "Spare me, O gods,
 All of you, spare me!" He did not seem to know
 He need not pray to all of them; Apollo
 Was moved, a little too late, it seemed, for pity,
 For the arrow had left the bow-string. Still, that wound
 Was the most merciful.

Rumor of the trouble,
 The grief and lamentation of the people,
 The tears of her own friends, informed the mother
 Of the doom that struck so suddenly. Amphion,
 The husband and the father, had driven the steel

To his own heart, at one blow ending sorrow
 And life together. Niobe, bewildered
 That all of this could happen, was Niobe, angry
 That gods would dare this much, that gods had power
 To execute their daring. A different woman
 This Niobe, from the woman who so lately
 Had driven the people from Latona's altar,
 Striding the streets, with head tossed back, and haughty
 And hated, even by her friends, but now
 A woman even her enemies might pity.
 On the cold bodies she flung herself; she gave them
 The final kisses, gave them with no order,
 No thought of protocol, and from them lifted
 Her arms, bruised by the strain of that embracing,
 And cried to Heaven: "O cruel Latona, feed,
 Feed, batten on my sorrow! Feed the heart
 Whose passion is for bloodshed, feed it full!
 My seven sons are gone, and I have died
 A sevenfold death. Exult, be hateful, triumph!
 You are the winner. Winner, did I say?
 Ha! Wretched as I am, I have more left me
 Than you in all your blessedness. So many
 Are dead, and still I win!"

And the bow made
 Its twanging sound in the air, and all were frightened,
 Not Niobe, whose very loss had made her
 Beside herself with boldness. In black dresses
 The sisters, with their hair let down, were standing
 Before the barrows where their brothers lay,

And one of the girls bent over to pull an arrow
 Out of the body, and herself sank down
 Dead, face to face with brother; and a second
 Offered her mother comfort, and all of a sudden
 Ceased being a comfort, or trying to, jaw and lips
 Set tight, to keep the last breath from escaping.
 And a third daughter tried escape, and fell
 Running, and a fourth tripped over the runner
 And died beside her sister. One tried hiding,
 One tried being brave, in the open; but both trembled,
 Were shaken, died. They were all gone but one,
 The last one, whom the mother tried to cover
 With body bending over, and wide robes spread
 To make some kind of shelter. "Leave me this one,
 The littlest one of all my many children,
 Leave me the littlest one!" But while she prayed
 The littlest one was dying. So she sat there,
 A childless woman among her sons, her daughters,
 Beside her husband, and never moved; no air
 Lifted her hair, the color of her features
 Was waxen, and her eyes were fixed and staring,
 The picture of utter grief, and in the picture
 No sign of life at all: the tongue was frozen
 To the roof of the mouth; no pulse beat in the veins;
 Neck could not bend, nor arms be moved, nor feet
 Go back or forward; and the vitals hardened
 To rock, but still she weeps; and she is carried,
 Caught up in a whirlwind, to her native mountains,
 Where, on a summit, a queen deposed, she rests,

Still weeping: even to this day the marble
 Trickles with tears.

Then, truly, all the people
 Dreaded Latona's wrath, and, more than ever,
 Were zealous in their worship, and, as usual,
 Told the old stories over again. "The Lycians,"
 Said one, "Or, anyway, the Lycian peasants
 Despised her long ago, and suffered for it.
 The story is not well-known, those men were nothing,
 But even so it is a wonderful story.
 I have seen the pool myself, the place made famous
 By the strange thing that happened there. My father
 Was getting on in years, he hated travel,
 And so he gave me orders, to bring down
 Some first-class livestock from that cattle country.
 I had a guide who knew the trails; together
 We crossed some pasture-land, and saw an altar
 In the middle of a lake, an altar, blackened
 With many fires from sacrifices: reeds
 Whispered around it, and he stopped, and whispered
 'Be good to me!' 'Be good to me!' I echoed,
 And then I asked him who it was we prayed to,
 Naiad, or Faun, or local god? He answered:
 'No mountain deity dwells here, young fellow,
 But the great goddess whom the queen of Heaven
 Exiled, one time, from all the world, and Delos,
 The wandering island, welcomed, although Delos
 Came near refusing. There she bore her children
 (For there were twins) on boughs of palm and olive,

And (for she still feared Juno) took them with her,
 And came to Lycia, with the hot sun burning,
 And she was tired and faint and hot and thirsty,
 And the milk gone from her breasts to feed the children.
 She saw a lake, or so it seemed; a pond
 Is all it really was, in a low valley,
 With country people there, gathering rushes,
 Osiers and sedge. Latona came to the water,
 Kneeling to drink, but they were churlish people,
 They tried to keep her off. She pleaded with them:
 "Why am I kept from the water? The use of water
 Is free to all, or should be. Nature never
 Made the sun private, nor the air, nor water,
 Whose gentle blessing I have come for, asking
 Nothing that all men do not own. I beg you
 Let me have a little water, as a favor,
 Not as a privilege. I did not come here
 To wash my weary limbs and my tired body,
 Only to quench my thirst. I can hardly speak.
 My mouth is dry, my throat is dry and burning.
 To me, one drink of water would be nectar,
 It would be life; it is life you would be giving
 With just one drink. Do little children move you?
 Look! Mine reach out their hands in supplication."
 It was chance, I guess, that at that point the babies
 Reached out their little arms; but neither children
 Nor the mother's gentle words had any power.
 They told her, *Go away!* and threats and insults
 Were not enough; they made the water muddy,

Jumping and splashing, exulting in their meanness,
 Until the goddess forgot thirst for anger.
 No daughter of Coeus could keep on being humble
 To louts like these, no goddess fail to speak
 In her full voice. She cursed them: "Live forever
 In that foul puddle!" And it came out that way:
 They live in water and they love it dearly,
 Now diving under, now coming up to the surface
 To stick their ugly heads out, and now swimming,
 Now squatting on the bank, or leaping in
 To the cool water again, and all the time
 Keeping their everlasting quarrels going
 As shameless as they ever were, and cursing,
 Or trying to curse, even when under water.
 They have hoarse voices, and their necks are swollen,
 Their jaws spread wide, their faces bulge, their necks
 Seem to have gone entirely; their backs are green,
 Their bellies, the biggest portion of their bodies,
 Are bloated, white, and in the muddy water
 The new frogs keep on leaping.' "

So that story

Was ended; somebody began another,
 About that satyr whom Latona's son
 Surpassed at playing the flute, and punished, sorely,
 Flaying him, so the skin all left his body,
 So he was one great wound, with the blood flowing,
 The nerves exposed, veins with no cover of skin
 Over their beating surface, lungs and entrails
 Visible as they functioned. The country people,

The woodland gods, the fauns, his brother satyrs,
 The nymphs, and even Olympus, whom he loved
 Through all his agony, all wept for him
 With every shepherd looking after his flocks
 Along those mountainsides. The fruitful earth
 Drank in those tears, and turned them into water,
 And sent them forth to air again, a rill,
 A stream, the clearest of all the running Phrygian rivers,
 Named Marsyas, for the victim.

And the people
 Came back from those old stories to the present
 Mourning the death of Amphion and his children,
 Putting the blame on Niobe, but one man,
 They say, wept for her even then.
 That was her brother Pelops, who, in tearing
 The garments from his breast, exposed his shoulder
 Showing the patch of ivory on the left.
 When he was born, his shoulders both were normal,
 The left the same as the right, and both of flesh,
 But later, when his father cut him to pieces,
 And the gods put him together again, they could not
 Find that one portion anywhere, and made
 An ivory substitute, which served, and Pelops
 Was a whole man again.

The neighboring rulers
 Came, and the neighboring cities sent their kings
 To offer consolation, Argos, Sparta,
 Mycenae, Corinth, fertile Orchomenos,
 Calydon (that was before Diana's anger),

Messene, Patrae, Pylos, many others,
 All except Athens, but Athens was in trouble
 With war at her gates, barbarian invasion
 From over the seas, and could not send a mission—
 Who would believe it?—so great was her own sorrow.
 But Tereus, king of Thrace, had sent an army
 To bring the town relief, to lift the siege,
 And Tereus' name was famous, a great conqueror,
 And he was rich, and strong in men, descended
 From Mars, so Pandion, king of Athens
 Made him a son as well as ally, joining
 His daughter Procne to Tereus in marriage.

The Story of Tereus, Procne, and Philomela

The omens, though, were baleful: neither Juno,
 Nor Hymen, nor the Graces, blessed the marriage;
 The Furies swung, or, maybe, brandished torches
 Snatched from a funeral; the Furies lighted
 The bridal bed; and above the bridal chamber
 Brooded the evil hoot-owl. With such omens
 Tereus and Procne married, with such omens
 The bride and bridegroom soon were father and mother,
 And Thrace rejoiced, and they rejoiced, and offered
 Thanks to the gods, making the day of marriage,
 The day of Itys' birth, both festal days.
 People never know, it seems.

Five years went by,
 And Procne asked a favor of her husband:
 "My lord, if any ways of mine have been

A source of satisfaction to my husband,
 Let me go see my sister, or let her come
 To visit us, with a promise to her father
 Of quick return. The sight of my dear sister
 Would be the finest present you could give me.”
 So Tereus promptly had the ship made ready,
 Sailed off to Athens, landed at Piraeus,
 Found Pandion, and they joined hands in greeting
 And wished each other well, and Tereus started
 To explain the reasons of his coming there,
 His wife’s request, and the expected promise
 Of a stay not over-long, and, as they chatted,
 Here Philomela came, in rich apparel,
 In richer grace, as lovely as the naiads,
 As lovely as the dryads of the woodlands,
 As lovely, rather, as they would be, if only
 They had such clothes as hers, and such a bearing.
 And Tereus looked at her, and in that moment
 Took fire, as ripe grain burns, or dry leaves burn,
 Or hay stored in the hay-mow; and this tribute
 She well deserved, but there were other reasons.
 He was a passionate man, and all the Thracians
 Are all too quick at loving; a double fire
 Burnt in him, his own passion and his nation’s.
 So his first impulse was to bribe her guardians,
 Corrupt her faithful nurse, or by rich presents,
 Even if it cost him all his kingdom, win her,
 Or take her, and defend what he had taken
 By violent war. In that unbridled passion

There was nothing he would not dare, with the flame bursting
 Out of his breast. Delay, delay! He suffered,
 Was all too eager, and when he spoke for Procne
 Spoke for himself. Love made him eloquent,
 If he went too far, he would lay the blame on Procne,
 Saying she wished it so, and he added tears,
 As if the tears were shed at her instructions!
 The hearts of men have such blind darkness in them.
 Tereus seems a most devoted husband,
 So eager to please Procne, and wins praises,
 The secret crime-contriver. Philomela
 Is eager to go, wants the same thing, or seems to,
 Wheedles her father, and fondles him, and coaxes,
 And argues how much good it will do them both,
 Her sister and her self (little she knows!)
 If she can make the visit. And Tereus, watching,
 Sees beyond what he sees: she is in his arms,
 That is not her father whom her arms go around,
 Not her father she is kissing. Everything
 Is fuel to his fire. He would like to be
 Her father, at that moment; and if he were
 He would be as wicked a father as he is husband.
 So Pandion says Yes, and Philomela,
 Poor girl, is happy, and thanks him; both his daughters,
 She thinks, have won; they are losers, both his daughters,
 But how was she to know?

And the Sun’s horses
 Swung low to the West, and there was a great banquet,
 Feasting, and wine in golden cups, then slumber;

And Tereus went to bed, and did not slumber,
 In heat for Philomela, thinking of her,
 The way she looked, the way she moved, her gestures,
 Her visible charms, and what he has not seen,
 Or not yet seen, at least he can imagine,
 And does, and feeds his fires, and cannot slumber.
 And morning came, and the old king and the younger
 Shook hands before the leaving, and the older
 Spoke through his tears: "Dear son, in all devotion,
 Since both the sisters wish it, and since you
 Appear to share their wish, I trust her to you.
 I beg you, by your honor and our kinship,
 Protect her with a father's love, and send her
 Safe home, as soon as may be, the sweet comfort
 Of my declining years. However brief
 Her visit, it will seem to me a long one.
 And you, my Philomela, if you love me,
 Come home to me soon!" And, saying so, he kissed her
 With his last plea, and wept, and hands were joined
 To bind the agreement, and one thing more, he told them,
 Give all my love to Procne and to Itys,
 And his voice broke, and underneath his sorrow
 Foreboding lay.

And the painted ship went sailing
 Over the sea, and Tereus, the savage,
 Knew he had won, having, as passenger,
 His heart's desire, exults, can wait no more,
 Or almost cannot wait, and looks her over
 The way an eagle does, who has brought home

To his high nest, hooked by the cruel talons,
 The prey, still warm, still living, the poor captive
 Hopeless before the captor's gloating gaze.

And now the voyage ended, and the vessel
 Was worn from travel, and they came stepping down
 To their own shores, and Tereus dragged her with him
 To the deep woods, to some ramshackle building
 Dark in that darkness, and he shut her in there,
 Pale, trembling, fearing everything, and asking
Where was her sister? And he told her then
 What he was going to do, and straightway did it,
 Raped her, a virgin, all alone, and calling
 For her father, for her sister, but most often
 For the great gods. In vain. She shook and trembled
 As a frightened lamb which a gray wolf has mangled
 And cast aside, poor creature, to a safety
 It cannot quite believe. She is like a dove
 With her own blood all over her feathers, fearing
 The talons that have pierced and left her. Soon
 As sense comes back, she tears her loosened hair,
 She beats her breast, wild as a woman in mourning,
 Crying: "O wicked deed! O cruel monster,
 Barbarian, savage! Were my father's orders
 Nothing to you, his tears, my sister's love,
 My own virginity, the bonds of marriage?
 Now it is all confused, mixed up; I am
 My sister's rival, a second-class wife, and you,
 For better and worse, the husband of two women,
 Procne my enemy now, at least she should be.

Why not have been my murderer? That crime
 Would have been cleaner, have no treachery in it,
 And I an innocent ghost. If those on high
 Behold these things, if there are any gods,
 If anything is left, not lost as I am,
 What punishment you will pay me, late or soon!
 Now that I have no shame, I will proclaim it.
 Given the chance, I will go where people are,
 Tell everybody; if you shut me here,
 I will move the very woods and rocks to pity.
 The air of Heaven will hear, and any god,
 If there is any god in Heaven, will hear me."

The words had their effect. The cruel king
 Was moved to a fierce anger, to equal fear;
 The double drive of fear and anger drove him
 To draw the sword, to catch her by the hair,
 To pull the head back, tie the arms behind her,
 And Philomela, at the sight of the blade,
 Was happy, filled with hope, the thought of death
 Most welcome: her throat was ready for the stroke.
 But Tereus did not kill her; he seized her tongue
 With pincers, though it cried against the outrage,
 Babbled and made a sound something like *Father*,
 Till the sword cut it off. The mangled root
 Quivered, the severed tongue along the ground
 Lay quivering, making a little murmur,
 Jerking and twitching, the way a serpent does
 Run over by a wheel, and with its dying movement
 Came to its mistress' feet. And even then—

It seems too much to believe—even then, Tereus
 Took her, and took her again, the injured body
 Still giving satisfaction to his lust.

And after that, Tereus went on to Procne,
 And Procne asked, of course, about her sister
 Asked where she was. And Tereus, with a groan,
 Lamented, wept, and told some kind of story,
 Saying that she was dead, oh, most convincing
 With all his show of sorrow. Therefore Procne
 Tore from her shoulders the robe with golden border,
 Put on plain black, and built a tomb to honor
 The spirit of her sister, and brought gifts
 As funeral offerings to the fictive ghost,
 Mourning a fate that should have been resented
 Rather than mourned for.

And a year went by,
 And what of Philomela? Guarded against flight,
 Stone blocks around her cottage, no power of speech
 To help her tell her wrongs, her grief has taught her
 Sharpness of wit, and cunning comes in trouble.
 She had a loom to work with, and with purple
 On a white background, wove her story in,
 Her story in and out, and when it was finished,
 Gave it to one old woman, with signs and gestures
 To take it to the queen, so it was taken,
 Unrolled and understood. Procne said nothing—
 What could she say?—grief choked her utterance,
 Passion her sense of outrage. There was no room

For tears, but for confusion only, and vengeance,
But something must be done, and in a hurry.

It was the time when all the Thracian mothers
Held festival for Bacchus, and the night
Shared in their secrets; Rhodope by night
Resounded as the brazen cymbals clashed,
And so by night the queen went from her palace,
Armed for the rites of Bacchus, in all the dress
Of frenzy, trailing vines for head-dress, deer-skin
Down the left side, and a spear over the shoulder.
So, swiftly through the forest with attendants,
Comrades and worshippers in throngs, and driven
By madness, terrible in rage and anger,
Went Procne, went the Bacchanal, and came
At last to the hidden cottage, came there shrieking,
"Hail, Bacchus!" broke the doors in, found her sister,
Dressed her like all the others, hid her face
With ivy-leaves, and dragged her on, and brought her
Home to the palace.

And when Philomela
Saw where she was, she trembled and grew pale,
As pale as death, and Procne found her a place,
Took off the Bacchic trappings, and uncovered
Her sister's features, white with shame, and took her
Into her arms, but Philomela could not
So much as lift her eyes to face her sister,
Her sister, whom she knew she had wronged. She kept
Her gaze on the ground, longing with all her heart

To have the power to call the gods to witness
It was not her fault, but something forced upon her.
She tried to say so with her hand. And Procne,
Burning, could not restrain her wrath; she scolded
Her sister's weeping. "This is no time," she told her,
"For tears, but for the sword, for something stronger
Than sword, if you have any such weapon on you.
I am prepared for any crime, my sister,
To burn the palace, and into the flaming ruin
Hurl Tereus, the author of our evils.
I would cut out his tongue, his eyes, cut off
The parts which brought you shame, inflict a thousand
Wounds on his guilty soul. I am prepared
For some great act of boldness, but what it is
I do not know, I wish I did."

The answer

Came to her as her son came in, young Itys.
She looked at him with pitiless eyes; she thought
How like his father he is! That was enough,
She knew, now, what she had to do, all burning
With rage inside her, but when the little fellow
Came close and put both arms around his mother,
And kissed her in appealing boyish fashion,
She was moved to tenderness; against her will,
Her eyes filled up with tears, her purpose wavered.
She knew it, and she looked at Philomela,
No more at Itys, then from one to the other,
Saying: "And why should one make pretty speeches,
The other be dumb, and ravished tongue unable

To tell of ravish? Since he calls me mother,
 Why does she not say Sister? Whose wife are you,
 Daughter of Pandion? Will you disgrace him,
 Your husband, Tereus? But devotion to him
 Is a worse crime." Without more words, a tigress
 With a young fawn, she dragged the youngster with her
 To a dark corner somewhere in the palace,
 And Itys, who seemed to see his doom approaching,
 Screamed, and held out his hands, with *Mother, Mother!*
 And tried to put his little arms around her
 But she, with never a change in her expression,
 Drove the knife home through breast, through side, one wound,
 Enough to kill him, but she made another,
 Cutting the throat, and they cut up the body
 Still living, still keeping something of the spirit,
 And part of the flesh leaped in the boiling kettles,
 Part hissed on turning skewers, and the room
 Dripped blood.

And this was the feast they served to Tereus,
 Who did not know, for the queen made up some story
 About a ritual meal, for husbands only,
 Which even servants might not watch. High in the chair
 Sat Tereus, proud, and feasting, almost greedy
 On the flesh of his own flesh, and in his darkness
 Of mind, he calls: "Bring Itys here!" and Procne
 Cannot conceal her cruel joy; she is eager
 To be the herald of her bloody murder.
 "He has come in," she answers, and he looks
 Around, asks where the boy is, asks again,

Keeps calling, and Philomela, with hair all bloody,
 Springs at him, and hurls the bloody head of Itys
 Full in his father's face. There was no time, ever,
 When she would rather have had the use of her tongue,
 The power to speak, to express her full rejoicing.
 With a great cry he turns the table over,
 Summons the snaky Furies from their valley
 Deep in the pit of Styx. Now, if he could,
 If he only could, he would open up his belly,
 Eject the terrible feast: all he can do
 Is weep, call himself the pitiful resting-place
 Of his dear son. He draws the sword, pursues them,
 Both Pandion's daughters. They went flying from him
 As if they were on wings. They were on wings!
 One flew to the woods, the other to the roof-top,
 And even so the red marks of the murder
 Stayed on their breasts; the feathers were blood-colored.
 Tereus, swift in grief and lust for vengeance,
 Himself becomes a bird: a stiff crest rises
 Upon his head, and a huge beak juts forward,
 Not too unlike a sword. He is the hoopoe,
 The bird who looks like war.

This sorrow shortened
 Old Pandion's days, and his state and sceptre fell
 To one Erechtheus, mighty in arms and justice.
 He had four sons, four daughters; one of these,
 Procris, wed Cephalus, Aeolus' grandson.
 Another, Orithyia, lovely as her sister,
 Had Boreas as suitor, but he came

From the north country and the Thracian homeland
 Where Tereus had reigned. So Boreas
 Was kept away, and could not have her, and tried
 To win by pleading, and accomplished nothing
 With all his gentleness; then his natural manner,
 Rough anger, rose up in him, the wind of the north,
 And he growled and blustered: "This is what I get,
 What I deserve! I have thrown down my weapons,
 Fierceness and violence and angry spirit
 Fine things to exchange for prayers! What use are they
 To me? How unbecoming! Violence
 Is my right weapon, violence that drives
 The gloomy clouds, shakes up the sea, turns over
 Gnarled oak-trees, packs the snow, and pelts the earth
 With the rattle of hail-stones. When I meet my brothers
 In the open sky, on the chosen battle-ground,
 I wrestle so fiercely that the heavens thunder,
 Fire flashes from the hollow cloud. When I
 Go down below the hollows of earth, and brace
 My back against the walls of her deepest caverns,
 I frighten the shades and the whole world with my heaving.
 All this is how I should have sought my woman,

I should not have asked Erectheus, but told him,
 To be my father-in-law, and made him do it."
 So, blustering, Boreas shook his wings, and earth
 Blew in the blast of those pinions, and the ocean
 Shuddered and swelled. He trailed his dusty garments
 Brushing the mountain-tops, and, wrapped in darkness,
 Seized Orithyia, fearful, trembling, held her,
 Rough lover that he was, in tawny wings,
 And as he flew, his passion burned the stronger,
 And so he flew, until he came to Athens,
 Where Orithyia was the cold king's bride
 And mother of his sons, twin boys, who had
 Their mother's looks, their father's wings; the wings,
 So people say, were not born with their bodies.
 While they were beardless youngsters, neither of them,
 Zetes nor Calais, had wings, but later,
 When hair began to grow, the sign of manhood
 On face and bodies, the spreading wings were noticed.
 They grew to manhood, and over an unknown sea
 Accompanied the Minyans on their voyage
 In the first ship for the gleaming fleece of gold.

GLOSSARY AND INDEX

The index that appeared in the print version of this title was intentionally removed from the eBook. Please use the search function on your eReading device to search for terms of interest. For your reference, the terms that appear in the print index are listed below.

SINCE THIS index is not intended as a complete mythological dictionary, the explanations given here include only important information not readily available in the text itself. Names in parentheses are alternative Latin names, unless they are preceded by the abbreviation *Gr.*; *Gr.* indicates the name of the corresponding Greek divinity. The index includes cross-references for all alternative names.

ACHAMENIDES. Former follower of Ulysses, rescued by Aeneas ACHELOUS. River god; rival of Hercules for the hand of Deianira ACHILLES. Greek hero of the Trojan War

ACIS. Rival of the Cyclops, Polyphemus, for the hand of Galatea

ACMON. Follower of Diomedes

ACOETES. A faithful devotee of Bacchus

ACTAEON

ADONIS. Son of Myrrha, by her father Cinyras; loved by Venus

AEACUS. King of Aegina; after death he became one of the three judges of the dead in the lower world

AEGEUS. King of Athens; father of Theseus

AENEAS. Trojan warrior; son of Anchises and Venus; sea-faring survivor of the Trojan War, he eventually landed in Latium, helped found Rome

AESACUS. Son of Priam and a nymph

AESCULAPIUS (*Gr.* Asclepius). God of medicine and healing; son of Apollo

AESON. Father of Jason; made young again by Medea

AGAMEMNON. King of Mycenae; commander-in-chief of the Greek forces in the Trojan War

AGLAUROS

AJAX. Son of Telamon; brave Greek warrior in the Trojan War

ALCMENA. Mother of Hercules

ALCYONE. Wife of Ceyx

ALTHEA. Queen of Calydon; mother and murderer of Meleager

AMMON. A spring in the Oasis of Siwa

ANAXARETE. A princess loved by Iphis, a youth of common birth

ANDROMEDA

ANIUS. King of Delos; priest of Apollo

APHRODITE. *See* Venus

APOLLO (Phoebus). God of music, poetry, medicine, and prophecy; also god of the sun

ARACHNE. A girl turned into a spider by Minerva

ARCADY. A pastoral region in the central Peloponnesus, Greece

ARCAS

ARDEA. City of Latium, turned into a heron

ARETHUSA. A woodland nymph changed into a fountain ARGUS. Hundred-eyed giant ordered by Juno to watch Io ARTEMIS. See Diana

ASCANIUS. SeeIulus

ATALANTA. A beautiful, swift-footed, warrior maiden

METAMORPHOSES

ATHAMAS

ATHENA. See Minerva

ATLAS

AUGUSTUS. See Caesar

AURORA (*Gr.* Eos). Goddess of dawn

BACCHUS (*Gr.* Dionysus). God of wine

BATTUS

BAUCIS. Wife of Philemon; rewarded by Jove for hospitality to him

BOREAS. God of the north wind

BYBLIS

CADMUS

CAENEUS. The woman, Caenis, changed into a man by Neptune CAESAR. Family name of GaiusJulius and later of Augustus CALCHAS. Priest of Apollo

CALLIOPEThe Muse of eloquence and epic poetry

CALYDON . Ancient Greek city in Aetolia

CANENS. A river nymph; wife of Ficus

CASSANDRA. Daughter of Priam and Hecuba (she possessed prophetic power which no one would believe)

CAUNUS

CENTAUR. Monster with the head, trunk, and arms of a man, and the body and legs of a horse; offspring of Ixion

CEPHALUS. Husband of Procris, sister of Procne and Philomela CERES (*Gr.* Demeter). Goddess of agriculture, mother of Proserpina CEYX. Son of Lucifer; King ofTrachis

CHARYBDIS. Guardian of the whirlpool off the coast ofSicily

CHIONE. Daughter of Daedalion; loved by Apollo and Mercury

CHIRON. Wisest of all Centaurs, trainer of Achilles, Aesculapius, and Hercules

CINYRAS. Father of Adonis by his daughter, Myrrha

CIPUS

CIRCE. Enchantress who turned meninto beasts CLAROS. Town in Asia Minor, with an oracle of Apollo CLYMENE . Mother of Phaethon, son of

Apollo

CRONUS. **See** Saturn

CUMAE. Ancient city in southwestern Italy

CUPID. Son of Venus; god of love

CYANE. A nymph changed by Pluto into a pool; the pool

CYBELE (*Gr.* Rhea). Goddess of nature; sometimes considered mother of the gods

CYGNUS King of the Ligurians who turned into a swan and was placed among the stars. Son of Neptune; Trojan hero

CYLLARUS Handsome young centaur

CYPARISSUS

DAEDALION. Brother of Ceyx

DAEDALUS. Artist and inventor who built the labyrinth for King Minos in Crete DAPHNE. A nymph who evaded Apollo's advances by becoming a laurel tree

DEIANIRA. Second wife of Hercules, whom she accidentally killed

DELOS. Small island in the Aegean; birthplace of Diana and Apollo DELPHI. City in Greece, site of the famous oracle of Apollo DEMETER. **See** Ceres

DEUCALION. A son of Prometheus, he and his wife Pyrrha were the only survivors of the flood inflicted by Zeus because of man's wickedness

DIANA (*Gr.* Artemis). Sister of Apollo; goddess of the moon and of hunting; patroness of virgins

DIOMEDES. Greek hero in the Trojan War; founder of the city Arpi

DIONYSUS. **See** Bacchus

DRYOPE

METAMORPHOSES

ECHO

EGERIA. Wife of Numa

ENVY

ERYSICHTHON. King who was punished for scorning the gods

EUROPA. Phoenician princess EURYDICE. Wife of Orpheus EURYTUS. **A centaur**

EVENUS. Flooding river which nearly caused Hercules to lose his wife Deianira

FAUNUS. **See** Pan

GALANTHIS. Alcmena's maid, who was turned into a weasel

GALATEA. A Nereid, loved by Cyclops. Pygmalion's statue, turned into a live woman by Venus

GANYMEDE. Cupbearer to the gods

GLAUCUS. A sea-god

HECUBA. Wife of Priam; queen of Troy; mother of Hector, Paris, Polyxena, Polydorus

HERCULES. Son of Jove and Alcmena, who was known for his great strength

HERMAPHRODITUS

HERMES. *See* Mercury

HERSILIA. Wife of Romulus

HESPERIA. Daughter of Cebren, a river-god

HESTIA. *See* Vesta

HIPPODAME. Wife of Pirithous

HIPPOLYTUS. Son of Theseus; name changed to Virbius

HIPPOMENES. Winning suitor of Atalanta

HORA. Name of Hersilia, wife of Romulus, after her deification

HYACINTHUS

HYLONOME. Fairest of the female centaurs

IANTHE

ICARUS. Son of Daedalus

ILIA (Rhea Silvia). Mother of Romulus

INDIGES. Name of Aeneas after deification

INO. Sister of Bacchus' mother

IO. Daughter of Inachus; maiden loved by Jove, turned into a heifer to protect her from the jealousy of Juno

IPHIGENIA. Daughter of Agamemnon, who offered her as sacrifice to Diana

IPHIS. A girl in Crete. A youth of common birth in love with a princess, Anaxarete

IRIS. Goddess of the rainbow; assistant to Juno

ITYS. Son of Procne and Tereus

IULUS (Ascanius). Son of Aeneas; king of Latium and Alba

JASON. Leader of the Argonauts, who, with the help of Medea, got the Golden Fleece

JOVE (Jupiter; *Gr.* Zeus). Son of Saturn; chief of the gods, ruler of gods and men

JUNO (*Gr.* Hera). Wife of Jove; queen of the gods; goddess of marriage

JUPITER. *See* Jove

LAELAPS. Cephalus' hound, turned to stone during a chase

LAOMEDON. Founder of Troy; father of Priam LATONA (*Gr.* Leto). Mother of Apollo and Diana LATREUS. Centaur killed by Caeneus

LETO. *See* Latona

LEUCOTHOE LICHAS

LYCAON. A king of Arcadia, whom Jove turned into a wolf

MACAREUS. Greek warrior who traveled with Ulysses

MAENAD. Female follower of Bacchus

MARS. God of war

MEDEA. Sorceress who helped Jason get the Golden Fleece

MEDUSA

MELEAGER. An Argonaut, son of Althea, queen of Calydon

MEMNON. Trojan warrior; son of Aurora

MERCURY (*Gr.* Hermes). Messenger of the gods, agent of Jove

MIDAS. King of Phrygia

MINERVA (*Gr.* Pallas Athena). Goddess of wisdom, technical skill, and invention; patron goddess of Athens

MINOS. King of Crete; son of Zeus by Europa

MORPHEUS. God of dreams; son of the god of sleep

MYRMIDONS. A tribe of Thessalian warriors, transformed from ants into human beings

MYRRHA. In love with her father, Cinyras; mother of Adonis

MYSCELU. Greek who founded the Italian town of Crotona

NARCISSUS

NEPTUNE (*Gr.* Poseidon). God of the sea

NESSUS. Centaur, who loved Deianira, wife of Hercules

NESTOR. Wise old counselor, who fought with the Greeks at Troy

NIOBE. Mother whose children were slain by Latona and Apollo because of her arrogance; she was turned into a stone by Jove

NUMA. King of Rome following Romulus

NUMICIUS. River-god in Latium, who purified Aeneas

OCYRHOE

ODYSSEUS. See Ulysses

ORITHYIA. Wife of Boreas

ORPHEUS. Musician whose music possessed magic power

OSSA. A mountain in Greece, in Thessaly near Pelion

PAEON. Son of Apollo; possessor of magic healing ability

PALLAS. See Minerva

PAN (Faunus). God of fields, forests, wild animals, flocks, and shepherds, represented with the legs, ears, horns, and beard of a goat

PANCHAIA. Island in the Arabian Sea, famous for perfumes

PARIS. Son of Priam; killer of Achilles; his kidnaping of Helen, wife of Menelaus, caused the Trojan War

PELEUS. Father of Achilles, by the goddess Thetis

PELIAS. King of Thessaly; uncle and guardian of Jason, murdered by Medea

PELION. A mountain in Greece, in Thessaly near Ossa

PENTHEUS

PERDIX. An inventor, turned into a partridge by Minerva to save him from the wrath of Daedalus

PERSEPHONE. See Proserpina

PERSEUS. Son of Zeus and Danae; slayer of Medusa PHAEDRA. Wife of Theseus; mother of Hippolytus PHAETHON. Son of Apollo

PHILEMON. Husband of Baucis; the couple were rewarded by Jove for their hospitality

PHILOMELA. Daughter of Pandion; transformed into a nightingale

PHOENIX. Legendary Egyptian bird which could renew its life after dying by fire

PICUS. Son of Saturn; father of Faunus; grandfather of Latinus; early king of Latium

PIRITHOUS. King of the Lapithae

PLUTO. God of the underworld, called Hades or Dis

POLYDORUS. Son of Priam, king of Troy; murdered by Polymestor

POLYMESTOR. King of Thrace during the Trojan War

POLYPHEMUS. A Cyclops, in love with Galatea

METAMORPHOSES

POLYXENA. Daughter of Priam who was betrothed to Achilles

POMONA. A wood-nymph in Latium

POSEIDON. See Neptune

PRIAM. Last king of Troy, who reigned during the Trojan War; father of Hector and Paris

PROCNE. Daughter of Pandion; wife of Tereus; transformed into a swallow

PROCRIS. Wife of Cephalus; sister of Procne and Philomela PROSERPINA (*Gr.* Persephone). Wife of Pluto; daughter of Ceres PYGMALION. King of Cyprus; sculptor; fell in love with a statue

PYRAMUS

PYRENEUS. King of Thrace

PYRRHA. See Deucalion

PYTHAGORAS. Greek philosopher and mathematician, 6th century B.C.

PYTHON. A huge serpent born soon after the flood; killed by Apollo

QUIRINUS. Name of Romulus after his deification

RHEA. See Cybele

RHEA SILVIA. See Ilia

ROME

ROMULUS. Legendary founder of Rome

SALMACIS. A fountain whose waters make men weak

SAMOS. Greek island off Asia Minor; birthplace of Pythagoras

SATURN (*Gr.* Cronus). God of agriculture; son of Uranus and father of Jove

SCYLLA. Daughter of King Nisus; lover of King Minos. Guardian of a dangerous rock in the Straits of Messina

SEMELE. Daughter of Cadmus; mother of Jove's son, Bacchus

SIBYL. A prophetess consulted by Aeneas

SYRIN X. Nymph chased by Pan; just as he caught her, she turned into reeds

TEMPE. A lovely valley, sacred to Apollo, located between Mounts Ossa and Olympus, in Thessaly, Greece

TEREUS. Descendant of Mars; husband of Procne

THEBES. Ancient city of Greece in Boeotia THEMIS. Goddess of law and justice THESEUS. Hero of Attica; son of Aegeus

THESSALY. Ancient region in northeastern Greece

THETIS. Mother of Achilles; chief of the Nereids

THISBE

THRACE. Ancient region of the Balkan Peninsula, between Macedonia and the Black Sea

TIMOLUS. Mountain in Lydia, Asia Minor TIRESIAS. Blind soothsayer of Thebes TISIPHONE. One of the Furies

TROY. Ancient city in northwestern Asia Minor; scene of the Trojan War

ULYSSES (*Gr.* Odysseus). One of the Greek chiefs in the Trojan War

URANIA. The Muse of astronomy

VENUS (*Gr.* Aphrodite). Goddess of love and beauty

VERTUMNUS. A satyr in love with the nymph Pomona

VESTA (*Gr.* Hestia). Goddess of the hearth and the hearth fire

VIRBIUS. *See* Hippolytus

VULCAN (*Gr.* Hephaestus). God of fire and metalworking; husband of Venus

ZEUS. *See* Jove