

FOR THE MARRIAGE OF DAPHNE AND APOLLO

Let Apollo be man's paradigm: In Rome
He lingers still beyond his pagan past,
Startling in grace like the best Latin, supreme
But human in desire. Man-shaped he roams
The ancient groves and ruins, fondling his dream
Of finding yet in Rome a nymph to grasp.

Recall the god's desires — Daphne his tamer,
Passive like any woman, but how she runs,
Outdistancing the great Apollo's strides
Until her mother Earth reacts and stuns
Apollo with his fate: The scene is summer
And Daphne branching leaves on every side.

Apollo is agape among the leaves,
His body scratched from looking for the face,
At least, of beauty . . . How can knowledge know
The ways of other gods and find its place
In nature? God of healing, of songs that flow
Like winds from Helicon — what had displeased

Old Earth to treat him so? There was the case
Of Hyacinth too, his head become a flower,
With blood marks left to mortify desire . . .
O cruel nature: Apollo can't empower
His own desire as law. His lustful fire
Must burn to ash, a laurel wreath replace

The mouth of Daphne. Ideally now the sun,
Apollo moves beyond the moving earth,
But still his man-sized image finds rebirth:
In Rome the heat advances all the claims
Of young Apollo . . . How can a godling shun
What nature gives and then withholds for shame?

Nor will he shun it but for Daphne's sake:
Let Daphne image Beauty, pure beyond
All other nymphs, Apollo's wife in art
And shadow only. Apollo tunes his heart
Tuning his lyre, transmuting life to mate
Beauty and strength together in one song.

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