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Ovid's Metamorphoses. Book II. The story of Phaeton.

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OVID'S

METAMORPHOSES.

BOOK II.

The Story of PHAETON.

THE Sun's bright palace, on high columns rais'd,
 With burnish'd gold and flaming jewels blaz'd;
 The folding gates diffus'd a silver light,
 And with a milder gleam refresh'd the sight;
 Of polish'd ivory was the cov'ring wrought:
 The matter vied not with the sculptor's thought,
 For in the portal was display'd on high
 (The work of *Vulcan*) a fictitious sky;
 A waving sea th' inferiour earth embrac'd,
 And Gods and Goddeses the waters grac'd.
Ægeon here a mighty whale bestrode;
Triton, and *Proteus* (the deceiving God)
 With *Doris* here were carv'd, and all her train,
 Some loosely swimming in the figur'd main,

While

While some on rocks their dropping hair divide,
 And some on fishes through the waters glide:
 Tho' various features did the Sisters grace,
 A Sister's likeness was in every face.
 On earth a different landskip courts the eyes,
 Men, Towns, and Beasts, in distant prospects rise,
 And Nymphs, and Streams, and Woods, and rural Deities.
 O'er all, the Heav'n's refulgent Image shines;
 On either gate were six engraven signs.

Here *Phaeton*, still gaining on th' ascent,
 To his suspected father's palace went,
 'Till pressing forward through the bright abode,
 He saw at distance the illustrious God:
 He saw at distance, or the dazzling light
 Had flash'd too strongly on his aking sight.

The God sits high, exalted on a throne
 Of blazing gems, with purple garments on;
 The Hours, in order rang'd on either hand,
 And Days, and Months, and Years, and Ages, stand.
 Here Spring appears with flow'ry chaplets bound;
 Here Summer in her wheaten garland crown'd;
 Here Autumn the rich trodden grapes besmear;
 And hoary Winter shivers in the reer.

Phœbus beheld the youth from off his throne;
 That eye, which looks on all, was fix'd in one.
 He saw the boy's confusion in his face,
 Surpriz'd at all the wonders of the place;

And

And cries aloud, "What wants my Son? for know
 " My Son thou art, and I must call thee so.

" Light of the world, the trembling youth replies,
 " Illustrious Parent! since you don't despise
 " The Parent's name, some certain token give,
 " That I may *Chymenè's* proud boast believe,
 " Nor longer under false reproaches grieve.

The tender fire was touch'd with what he said,
 And flung the blaze of glories from his head,
 And bid the youth advance: " My Son, said he,
 " Come to thy Father's arms! for *Chymenè*
 " Has told thee true; a Parent's name I own,
 " And deem thee worthy to be call'd my Son.
 " As a sure proof, make some request, and I,
 " Whate'er it be, with that request comply;
 " By *Styx* I swear, whose waves are hid in night,
 " And roul impervious to my piercing sight.

The youth transported, asks without delay,
 To guide the Sun's bright chariot for a day.

The God repented of the oath he took,
 For anguish thrice his radiant head he shook;
 " My son, says he, some other proof require,
 " Rash was my promise, rash is thy desire.
 " I'd fain deny this wish which thou hast made,
 " Or, what I can't deny, would fain dissuade.

" Too

" Too vast and hazardous the task appears,
 " Nor suited to thy strength, nor to thy years.
 " Thy lot is mortal, but thy wishes fly
 " Beyond the province of mortality :
 " There is not one of all the Gods that dares
 " (However skill'd in other great affairs)
 " To mount the burning axle-tree, but I;
 " Not *Jove* himself, the ruler of the sky,
 " That hurles the three-fork'd thunder from above,
 " Dares try his strength; yet who so strong as *Jove*?
 " The steeds climb up the first ascent with pain:
 " And when the middle firmament they gain,
 " If downward from the heavens my head I bow,
 " And see the earth and ocean hang below,
 " Ev'n I am seiz'd with horror and affright,
 " And my own heart misgives me at the sight.
 " A mighty downfall steeps the ev'ning stage,
 " And stiddy reins must curb the horses' rage.
 " *Tethys* her self has fear'd to see me driv'n
 " Down headlong from the precipice of heav'n.
 " Besides, consider what impetuous force
 " Turns stars and planets in a different course:
 " I steer against their motions; nor am I
 " Born back by all the current of the sky.
 " But how could You resist the orbs that roul
 " In adverse whirls, and stem the rapid pole?
 " But you perhaps may hope for pleasing woods,
 " And stately domes, and cities fill'd with Gods;
 " While through a thousand snares your progress lies,
 " Where forms of starry Monsters stock the skies:

" For, should you hit the doubtful way aright,
 " The *Bull* with stooping horns stands opposite;
 " Next him the bright *Hæmonian Bow* is strung;
 " And next, the *Lion's* grinning visage hung:
 " The *Scorpion's* claws here clasp a wide extent,
 " And here the *Crab's* in lesser clasps are bent.
 " Nor would you find it easie to compose
 " The mettled steeds, when from their nostrils flows
 " The scorching fire, that in their entrails glows.
 " Ev'n I their head-strong fury scarce restrain,
 " When they grow warm and restiff to the rein.
 " Let not my Son a fatal gift require,
 " But, O! in time, recall your rash desire;
 " You ask a gift that may your Parent tell,
 " Let these my Fears your parentage reveal;
 " And learn a Father from a Father's care:
 " Look on my face; or if my heart lay bare,
 " Could you but look, you'd read the Father there,
 " Chuse out a gift from seas, or earth, or skies,
 " For open to your wish all nature lies,
 " Only decline this one unequal task,
 " For 'tis a Mischief, not a Gift you ask;
 " You ask a real Mischief, *Phaeton*:
 " Nay hang not thus about my neck, my Son:
 " I grant your wish, and *Stryx* has heard my voice,
 " Chuse what you will, but make a wiser choice.

Thus did the God th'unwary youth advise;
 But he still longs to travel through the skies.

When

When the fond Father (for in vain he pleads)
 At length to the *Vulcanian* chariot leads.
 A golden axle did the work uphold,
 Gold was the beam, the wheels were orb'd with gold.
 The spokes in rows of silver pleas'd the sight,
 The seat with parti-colour'd gems was bright;
Apollo shin'd amid the glare of light.
 The youth with secret joy the work surveys;
 When now the morn disclos'd her purple rays;
 The stars were fled; for *Lucifer* had chafe'd
 The stars away, and fled himself at last.
 Soon as the Father saw the rosy morn,
 And the moon shining with a blunter horn,
 He bid the nimble *Hours* without delay
 Bring forth the steeds; the nimble *Hours* obey:
 From their full racks the gen'rous steeds retire,
 Dropping ambrosial foams, and snorting fire.
 Still anxious for his Son, the God of day,
 To make him proof against the burning ray,
 His temples with celestial ointment wet,
 Of sov'rain virtue to repel the heat;
 Then fix'd the beamy circle on his head,
 And fetch'd a deep foreboding sigh, and said,

- “ Take this at least, this last advice, my Son:
- “ Keep a stiff rein, and move but gently on:
- “ The coursers of themselves will run too fast,
- “ Your art must be to moderate their haste.
- “ Drive 'em not on Directly through the skies,
- “ But where the *Zodiac's* winding circle lies,

" Along the midmost *Zone*; but fally forth
 " Nor to the distant south, nor stormy north.
 " The horses' hoofs a beaten track will show,
 " But neither mount too high, nor sink too low,
 " That no new fires or heaven or earth infest;
 " Keep the mid way, the middle way is best.
 " Nor, where in radiant folds the *Serpent* twines,
 " Direct your course, nor where the *Altar* shines.
 " Shun both extremes; the rest let Fortune guide,
 " And better for thee than thy self provide!
 " See, while I speak, the shades disperse away,
 " *Aurora* gives the promise of a day;
 " I'm call'd, nor can I make a longer stay.
 " Snatch up the reins; or still th' attempt forsake,
 " And not my Chariot, but my Counsel take,
 " While yet securely on the earth you stand;
 " Nor touch the horses with too rash a hand.
 " Let Me alone to light the world, while you
 " Enjoy those beams which you may safely view.
 He spoke in vain; the youth with active heat
 And sprightly vigour vaults into the seat;
 And joys to hold the reins, and fondly gives
 Those thanks his Father with remorse receives.

Mean while the restless horses neigh'd aloud,
 Breathing out fire, and pawing where they stood.
Tethys, not knowing what had past, gave way,
 And all the waste of heaven before 'em lay.
 They spring together out, and swiftly bear
 The flying youth through clouds and yielding air;
 Along " X With

With wingy speed outstrip the eastern wind,
 And leave the breezes of the morn behind.
 The Youth was light, nor could he fill the feat,
 Or poise the chariot with its wonted weight:
 But as at sea th' unballast'd vessel rides,
 Cast to and fro, the sport of winds and tides;
 So in the bounding chariot tofs'd on high,
 The Youth is hurry'd headlong through the sky.
 Soon as the steeds perceive it, they forsake
 Their stated course, and leave the beaten track.
 The Youth was in a maze, nor did he know
 Which way to turn the reins, or where to go;
 Nor wou'd the horses, had he known, obey.

Then the *Seven stars* first felt *Apollo's* ray,
 And wish'd to dip in the forbidden sea.
 The folded *Serpent* next the frozen pole,
 Stiff and benum'd before, began to roll,
 And rage'd with inward heat, and threaten'd war,
 And shot a redder light from every star;
 Nay, and 'tis said, *Boötes* too, that fain
 Thou would'st have fled, tho' cumber'd with thy Wain.

Th' unhappy Youth then, bending down his head,
 Saw earth and ocean far beneath him spread:
 His colour chang'd, he startled at the sight,
 And his eyes darken'd by too great a light.
 Now could he wish the fiery steeds untry'd,
 His birth obscure, and his request deny'd:
 Now would he *Merops* for his Father own,
 And quit his boasted kindred to the Sun.

So

So fares the Pilot, when his ship is tost
 In troubled seas, and all its steerage lost,
 He gives her to the winds, and in despair
 Seeks his last refuge in the Gods and Prayer.

What cou'd he do? his eyes, if backward cast,
 Find a long path he had already past;
 If forward, still a longer path they find:
 Both he compares, and measures in his mind;
 And sometimes casts an eye upon the East,
 And sometimes looks on the forbidden West.
 The horse's Names he knew not in the fright:
 Nor wou'd he loose the reins, nor cou'd he hold 'em right.

Now all the horrors of the heavens he spies,
 And monstrous shadows of prodigious size,
 That, deck'd with stars, lie scatter'd o'er the skies.
 There is a place above, where *Scorpio* bent
 In tail and arms surrounds a vast extent;
 In a wide circuit of the heavens he shines,
 And fills the space of two celestial signs.
 Soon as the Youth beheld him, vex'd with heat,
 Brandish his sting, and in his poison sweat,
 Half dead with sudden fear he dropt the reins;
 The horses felt 'em loose upon their mains,
 And, flying out through all the plains above,
 Ran uncontroul'd where-e'er their fury drove;
 Rush'd on the stars, and through a pathless way
 Of unknown regions hurry'd on the day.

And

And now above, and now below they flew,
And near the Earth the burning chariot drew.

The clouds disperse in fumes, the wond'ring Moon
Beholds her brother's steeds beneath her own;
The highlands smoak, cleft by the piercing rays,
Or, clad with woods, in their own fewel blaze.
Next o'er the plains, where ripen'd harvests grow,
The running conflagration spreads below.
But these are trivial ills: whole cities burn,
And peopled kingdoms into ashes turn.

The mountains kindle as the Car draws near,
Athos and *Tmolus* red with fires appear;
Oeagrian Hæmus (then a single name)
And virgin *Helicon* increase the flame;
Taurus and *Oete* glare amid the sky,
And *Ida*, spight of all her fountains, dry.
Eryx, and *Othrys*, and *Cithæron*, glow;
And *Rhodopè*, no longer cloath'd in snow;
High *Pindus*, *Mimas*, and *Parnassus*, sweat,
And *Ætna* rages with redoubled heat.
Even *Scythia*, through her hoary regions warm'd,
In vain with all her native frost was arm'd.
Cover'd with flames, the tow'ring *Appennine*,
And *Caucasus*, and proud *Olympus*, shine;
And, where the long-extended *Alpes* aspire,
Now stands a huge continu'd range of fire.

Th' astonisht Youth, where-e'er his eyes cou'd turn,
Beheld the Universe around him burn: The

The World was in a blaze; nor could he bear
 The sultry vapours and the scorching air,
 Which from below, as from a furnace, flow'd;
 And now the axle-tree beneath him glow'd:
 Lost in the whirling clouds, that round him broke,
 And white with ashes, hov'ring in the smoke,
 He flew where-e'er the Horses drove, nor knew
 Whither the Horses drove, or where he flew.

'Twas then, they say, the swarthy *Moor* begun
 To change his hue, and Blacken in the sun.
 Then *Libya* first, of all her moisture drain'd,
 Became a barren waste, a wild of Sand.
 The Water-nymphs lament their empty urns,
Baotia, robb'd of silver *Dirce*, mourns,
Corinth *Pyrene's* wasted spring bewails,
 And *Argos* grieves whilst *Amymonè* fails.

The floods are drain'd from every distant coast,
 Even *Tanais*, tho' fix'd in ice, was lost.
 Enrage'd *Caicus* and *Lycormas* roar,
 And *Xanthus*, fated to be burnt once more.
 The fam'd *Meander*, that unwearied strays
 Through mazy windings, smokes in every maze.
 From his lov'd *Babylon* *Euphrates* flies;
 The big-swoln *Ganges* and the *Danube* rise
 In thick'ning fumes, and darken half the skies.
 In flames *Ismenos* and the *Phasis* roul'd,
 And *Tagus* floating in his melted gold.
 The Swans, that on *Caÿster* often try'd
 Their tuneful songs, now sung their last and dy'd.

The frighted *Nile* ran off, and under ground
 Conceal'd his head, nor can it yet be found:
 His seven divided currents all are dry,
 And where they rould, seven gaping trenches lye.
 No more the *Rhine* or *Rhone* their course maintain,
 Nor *Tiber*, of his promis'd empire vain.

The ground, deep-cleft, admits the dazling ray,
 And startles *Pluto* with the flash of day.
 The seas shrink in, and to the sight disclose
 Wide naked plains, where once their billows rose;
 Their rocks are all discover'd, and increase
 The number of the scatter'd *Cyclades*.
 The fish in shoals about the bottom creep,
 Nor longer dares the crooked *Dolphin* leap:
 Gasping for breath, th' unshapen *Phocæ* die,
 And on the boiling wave extended lye.
Nereus, and *Doris* with her virgin train,
 Seek out the last recesses of the main;
 Beneath unfathomable depths they faint,
 And secret in their gloomy caverns pant.
 Stern *Neptune* thrice above the waves upheld
 His face, and thrice was by the flames repell'd.

The *Earth* at length, on every side embrace'd
 With scalding seas, that floated round her waist,
 When now she felt the springs and rivers come,
 And crowd within the hollow of her womb,
 Up-lifted to the heavens her blasted head,
 And clapt her hand upon her brows, and said;

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(But

(But first, impatient of the sultry heat,
Sunk deeper down, and sought a cooler seat:)
 " If you, great King of Gods, my death approve,
 " And I deserve it, let me die by *Jove*;
 " If I must perish by the force of fire,
 " Let me transfix'd with thunderbolts expire.
 " See, whilst I speak, my breath the vapours choke,
 (For now her face lay wrapt in clouds of smoke)
 " See my singe'd hair, behold my faded eye,
 " And wither'd face, where heaps of cinders lye!
 " And does the plow for this my body tear?
 " This the reward for all the fruits I bear,
 " Tortur'd with rakes, and harass'd all the year?
 " That herbs for cattle daily I renew,
 " And food for man, and frankincense for you?
 " But grant Me guilty; what has *Neptune* done?
 " Why are his waters boiling in the sun?
 " The wavy empire, which by lot was given,
 " Why does it waste, and further shrink from heaven?
 " If I nor He your pity can provoke,
 " See your own Heavens, the heavens begin to smoke!
 " Shou'd once the sparkles catch those bright abodes,
 " Destruction seizes on the heavens and gods;
 " *Atlas* becomes unequal to his freight,
 " And almost faints beneath the glowing weight.
 " If heaven, and earth, and sea, together burn,
 " All must again into their chaos turn.
 " Apply some speedy cure, prevent our fate,
 " And succour nature, e'er it be too late.

She ceas'd; for choak'd with vapours round her spread,
Down to the deepest shades she sunk her head.

Jove call'd to witness every Power above,
And even the God, whose Son the Chariot drove,
That what he acts he is compell'd to do,
Or universal ruine must ensue.
Strait he ascends the high Ethereal throne,
From whence he us'd to dart his thunder down,
From whence his showers and storms he us'd to pour,
But now could meet with neither storm nor shower.
Then, aiming at the youth, with lifted hand,
Full at his head he hurl'd the forky brand,
In dreadful thund'rings. Thus th' Almighty Sire
Suppress'd the raging of the fires with fire.

At once from life, and from the chariot driven,
Th' ambitious boy fell thunder-struck from heaven.
The horses started with a sudden bound,
And flung the reins and chariot to the ground:
The studded harness from their necks they broke,
Here fell a wheel, and here a silver spoke,
Here were the beam and axle torn away;
And, scatter'd o'er the earth, the shining fragments lay.
The breathless *Phaeton*, with flaming hair,
Shot from the chariot, like a falling star,
That in a summer's evening from the top
Of heaven drops down, or seems at least to drop;
'Till on the *Po* his blasted corps was hurl'd,
Far from his country, in the western world.