

Riven

Bernini's sensuous marble belies at first the tragedy
but describes perfectly men's desire—
to touch, to place a hand upon the beautiful, feel
its smoothness on one's fingers as Apollo has done
on Daphne's hip. Her fear could not outrun him.

Transformed by his aggression, Daphne grows roots,
her legs more trunk-like, her soft breasts too rough to fondle.
Branches sprout from her arms, leaves from her hair.
Though she saves her virginity, he steals her humanity.

Today the story of Apollo is played and replayed
as self-made gods feel entitled to harass and abuse women
at will. They pluck and clutch and grope, bury their victim
with fear and walk away, wearing arrogance as a second skin.

The powerful never imagined their downfall would be lack
of imagination—that they would topple like a nursery-rhyme king,
their unruly heap of experience surviving only in bits and pieces,
swept away and dumped in some trash bin.

They never dreamed the 'Daphnes' of the world would begin
to stir in the breeze, a breeze so gentle, at first it is a sigh.

They never believed that women would unwind from
coiled silence and make their unused voices stand strong;
that they would relay the stories of their suppression
and one by one change the myth forever.

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