

# **OF BODIES CHANGED**

**Based on Ovid's "Metamorphoses"**

**By Stefanie Giebert**

## Characters

Ovid (middle-aged)  
Cupid (a boyish god)  
Alcyone (a worried wife)  
Ceyx (her husband)  
Daphne (an exhausted nymph)  
Apollo (an arrogant god)  
Echo (a garrulous nymph)  
Juno (a jealous goddess)  
Narcissus (a boy who likes to be alone)  
Niobe (a proud mother)  
Her 7 children  
A policeman (or –woman)  
Niobe's au-pair-girl  
Athena (a haughty goddess)  
Arachne (a self-confident writer)  
A eulogist  
Spectators  
Athena's assistant  
Psyche (a curious girl)  
Corinna (Ovid's mistress)  
Ovid's 3 wives  
Corinna's maid  
Corinna's husband  
Romans  
Emperor Augustus  
Ovid's father

*Stage: We used a big mirror on the floor in the middle of the stage as a pool or river. This is important especially for the Narcissus-scene. But there are certainly other ways to improvise a pool.*

## Scene 1: Introduction

Cupid: The Metamorphoses. By Publius Ovidius Naso.

Alcyone: I am the bird.

Daphne: I am the tree.

Echo: I am the voice among the shadows.

Arachne: I am the spinner of threads.

Niobe: I am the stone.

Ovid: I am the poet.

Of bodies changed to Different forms I sing  
You gods who have yourselves wrought every change

inspire my Venture now  
and lead my lay in one continuous song.

ALL women: How we came to be what we are  
is what we want to tell you.

( *the women go off slowly* )

C.: (*singing*) Love changes, changes everything, love makes you fly – (*stops singing*) for example Alcyone here... but we'll come back to her later – (*resumes the melody*) it can break your wings, love changes... But it also puzzles and humiliates, ridicules and tortures humans and gods alike.

O (*introducing him*): Cupid, god of love.

C.: And one of the key players in the Metamorphoses. So good of you to dedicate an entire epic to me. I really appreciate that.

O: Not for nothing am I known as one of the great love poets of my age... But actually, it's not that easy. Love is not the only theme in the Metamorphoses. A lot of the stories are about hate, greed, vanity etc. and of the transformations imposed on humans by the gods as punishment for their vices. (*frogs croak*) For example this group of Lycian peasants. Turned into frogs because they were unfriendly to the goddess Latona.

Cupid: Oh, big mistake. Never be unfriendly to Latona. She'll always make you pay.

O.: (*resuming his topic*) So, if you asked someone what the metamorphoses are about, he would probably not say – why, that's easy, they're about love! He'll probably say – isn't that the book where people turn into trees?

C.: Yes, but why do they turn into trees? Or birds or bulls or bears? Take a good look and often you'll find me behind all this.

O: You're a conceited little brat.

C.: Why did Daphne turn into a tree? Because of me. Have you forgotten?

O.: Oh, wait, wait, it wasn't that easy. Maybe we should start at the beginning. Are you ready? (*C nods, Ovid gets up and opens the door, introducing*). Daphne... (*Daphne goes to her position on one side of the stage, freeze*)

## **Scene 2: Daphne**

C.: Daughter of the river god Peneus, a nymph.

O.: was Apollo's... (*enter Apollo, walks by Daphne without noticing her, then freeze*)

C.: God of music, healing and divination. An arrogant prig.

Ovid (*clears his throat warningly*): ...first love. It was not brought about by accident, but by the malice of Cupid. (*Cupid assumes his starting position*) Apollo (*unfreeze*) saw the boy playing with his bow and arrows...

*Cupid plays around with his weapon. (We simply used a remote-control in our production.)*

A.: Hey there, little one! Careful with that weapon! You could shoot yourself in the foot any second and then what? Cupid hit by Cupid's arrow? I don't think I could bear you to be anymore in love with yourself than you already are. (*condescendingly*) Yeah, but seriously... What does a little boy want with such high-tech equipment?

C.: Size isn't everything.

A.: Come on, give that to me. I can make better use of it than you. You know, I've just finished off that monster snake that was all over the land – it was miles long! (*makes the gesture a fisher might make, is echoed by Cupid*) Don't get impertinent, boy! (*tries to catch Cupid, who shakes himself free, not letting his weapon go. Apollo sighs and turns to go*) Okay, okay, I see that charity is obviously not very highly valued among love-gods...

C.: (*gets up*) Your arrows may strike all things else, Apollo, but mine shall strike you.

A.: What?

C.: Wait and see... (*shoots his "arrows", by pointing his remote-control at Apollo and Daphne – Apollo suddenly notices Daphne, Daphne looks away*) So there was Daphne. (*Daphne opens the door, talks to somebody out there*) She was pursued by all kinds of men. But somehow none of them was right for her.

Daphne (*shakes her head*): No, no I'm sorry. No' I don't want to marry you. Please stop calling on me. (*shuts door, knocking is heard*) No, really I mean it. (*shuts door, knocking again, Daphne opens*) No, no, no! I don't want to marry at all! Why don't you understand it? I'm my own person, I don't want to turn into some man's accessory. What? You're not "some man", you're the mayor's son. Fine. That doesn't change anything. (*slams door, turns, leans against it, holding it shut. Meets Apollo's gaze, looks away and goes to sit by down. Apollo comes to sit down next to her.*)

A.: Hello. Have we met before?

D: I don't think so. (*uncertain what to do*)

A.: (*fanning himself*) Is it so hot in here or is that you?

D: What do you want? (*gets up*)

A: Wait! I don't mean any harm! I'm your friend! (*tries to catch her hand*)

D (*frees herself*): That's what they all say.

A.: I love you, that's why I follow you.

D.: I don't want your love. Please go away. (*Daphne walks away, quickly, followed by A.,*)

A.: (*stops*) Careful, you're going to fall!

(*Daphne stops some distance from Apollo*)

A: Hey, you don't know what you're missing! I'm not just some country yokel who's got no style. I'm not like the others! If you knew who I was, you wouldn't be running so fast!  
(*comes nearer again*)

D.: Or maybe even faster...(*starts to walk away again*)

A.: Listen, I'm not some nobody – my father's a really influential person.

D.: (*stops*) Oh, no. How pathetic is a man that needs to refer to his daddy to get ahead with a girl?

A.: Listen, Daphne- (*she stops*)

D (*surprised*): How do you know my name?

A: I know what was, and what is and what will be.

D: And I know what this will not be: A successful effort to chat me up.

A.: I'm sure you love music, don't you? I play the guitar and sing!

D: An artist? Oh no...

A.: You look like a nature-loving girl! I know a lot about herbs and how soothing they can be...

D: Oh, really? You look more like a city-person, actually. I don't really – um, herbs? (*a suspicion dawns*) Um – do you want to sell me anything? I'm sure that must be a misunderstanding...

*Daphne walks away again, Apollo following.*

A (*angrily*): I can't help what I do! It's your beauty! I think you've bewitched me! (*they freeze*)

Cupid: This is called "Blaming the victim." Skirt too short, cleavage too deep, that kind of thing. And later they usually claim that she "wanted it, too". But she didn't.

(*Daphne unfreezes*)

D.: Why do they all want to touch me? I feel their hands all over me. If I was some other shape, something rougher and harder – would they still want to touch me? Oh let me hide somewhere... I'm tired of running away, I don't want to run any more, I don't, I don't want to...

(*she transforms into a tree*)

O: And her wishes were granted – slowly her body grew a protective cover – bark, smooth but solid. Her running feet anchored themselves in earth and put out roots. Her fingers lengthened into twigs and put out shiny dark-green leaves that finally hid her lovely face. She had gotten the better of her pursuer. He couldn't harm her anymore.

*A.: (has watched the transformation helplessly, now leaning towards Daphne and listening for her heartbeat) Beating still... But so faintly... embraces the tree, which seems to shrink back. Apollo then stands there for a moment, at a loss what to do, covering the tree in kisses, rather sad, then turns to go. After a moment he looks back at the leaves and his face lights up because he has had an idea. Well, if you can't be my lover, then you must at least be my holy tree. Your leaves, sweet laurel tree, will adorn my head for all times to come. And as I am forever young, so your leaves shall be forever green. (off)*

C.: Oh, Apollo... You give up easily. Maybe I should give him another love interest? (*goes off*)

Daphne: And now?

O.: Now you're a laurel tree. (*Ovid talks to himself*) Trees don't have stories. And now I've got some more writing to do.

*A wolf howls.*

O.: Lycaon.

*Bats pass nearby (we did this by using shadowplay against a screen)*

Ovid: The daughters of Minyas

*nightingale sings*

Ovid: Philomela

*Sound of a discus flying, a cry of pain from somewhere off (Cupid who has returned in between, looks pained and puts a pot with a hyacinth somewhere)*

C.: Oh Apollo... You're not very lucky in love, it seems to me...

Ovid: Hyakinthos.

C: Accidentally killed by his lover, the great Apollo.

*A caterpillar crawls along and turns into a butterfly.*

Ovid *looks startled*: Hmmm. Not included

Cupid: Mother Nature provides the most wonderful metamorphoses.

Ovid: Yes, but... Where's the story behind it?

Cupid: Oh, it's the story of a small caterpillar, who ate a lot and grew bigger and bigger and then-

Ovid: No. Too simple. That's a story you could tell to children. More complexity please! Human drama!

Cupid: Hm. How about the story of a girl who did another girl a favour and distracted a goddess from finding out about the adulteries of her husband, and then-

Ovid: Sounds good. Sounds like the prelude to the story of Echo and Narcissus.

Cupid: Could be...

### **Echo I**

*Echo enters, with a telephone.*

Echo: Yes? Oh really? You've got a date tonight? Congratulations! Who is it?

E.: What? Jupiter again? But he's a married man!

E: (*sighing*) Yes, I know that she likes me. Okay. What shall I do?

E: Okay, okay, I'll be a good friend and take old Juno for a shopping trip. How much time do you need?

E.: Three to six. Alright. I'll see what I can do. Have fun.

E: Oh, I bet you will.

*She goes off*

*A clock strikes three, Echo and Juno enter, Echo is enthusing about something she sees in a shop window*

E: Now look at that exquisite little handbag! Isn't it sweet? And it would be just right for your blue costume.

J: It is pretty. But do you really think?

E: Well, a closer look won't hurt anyone. Oh, come on! (*they enter the store*)

*They come out of the store again, with shopping bags*

E: Ouch, my feet are killing me.

J: That was a good thing of you to do, Echo. Taking your old aunt out for a shopping trip.

E: I think uncle Jo will be relieved that you had a nice afternoon. He's so busy I heard.

*(a shadow passes over Juno's face)* Juno: Oh yes, I guess so... Anyway, why don't we look for a nice little café where we can finish off the afternoon? *(Echo nods approval)*

*(thunder is heard, it is starting to rain)*

J.: Oh no, my dress... *(runs off, to shelter somewhere)*

E: *A clock strikes six, looks at the sky and at her watch, saying to no one in particular:* Good timing...

Cupid enters: That means his business is finished, eh?

E.: What?

C.: I am the love god – am I not? So I do take a kind of professional interest in these matters. Like for example which nymph the great Jupiter is having fun with presently...

E.: And what do you want from me, then?

C.: I was thinking... What about you, little Echo? *(playing with his arrows)* Wouldn't you like to be the lucky one for a change?

Echo: With Jupiter? No, thank you, he's not my type.

C.: Maybe I can find you one you like better? *(she has gone off inside)* Echo? Echo! *(goes off after her)*

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## **Arachne**

*(the sound of thunder and rain turn into applause and clicking of flashlights)*

*Arachne, the eulogist and a number of celebrators enter, they are applauding her*

Eulogist: Now, ladies and gentlemen! I have the honor of eulogizing this young lady. Winner of this year's Parnassus prize for her first novel. A fascinating colorful tapestry with a great eye for historical detail, this book is really a deserving winner of this prize for promising young authors. And I am sure that Arachne is going to give us many more enthralling reads in the future. Given her – relatively – tender age, I must say I am impressed at her supreme craftsmanship in drawing out life-like characters and spinning complicated plotlines, weaving it all together into a panorama of, I must, almost say, epic dimensions. And if it weren't a bit sacrilegious, I'd almost say that here is a serious rival for Athena Pallas, the queen of the genre, our unofficial "goddess". But I don't want to trouble this celebration by conjuring up imagined rivalries. This is a night for joy – so once again, my congratulations!

Arachne: Thank you! Thank you. I'm almost at a loss for words. And even though I might regret it later, when they print it in the press, in my present state I'm tempted to say that, indeed, sometimes in writing – or weaving my stories, as you so aptly called it, I feel touched by something like a divine spark. I know it's silly to say. But, oh, anyway –thank you so much!

*(The people applaud again, congratulate Arachne, then embrace for goodbye and leave Arachne.)*

*(Athena enters.)*

Athena: Good evening.

Arachne: Hello.

Athena: Hello. You don't know me?

Arachne: No – I'm sorry. Should I?

Athena: Yes, I think it would have been better for you if you had acknowledged my existence and shown a bit more respect.

Arachne: I'm sorry?

Athena: It has been reported to me that you have claimed to be better than I am. I'm very unhappy to hear that. You have insulted me.

Arachne: Who are you?

Athena: Let's say... a successful weaver? Or would "a bestselling author" be more precise? I am called the "goddess". I'm sure you've heard of me. And my craft is certainly better than that of you. You're an amateur...

Arachne *(realising who this is)*: Okay, okay. I'm sure you're a superb craftswoman. But I have read your novels. And I think they sometimes lack a certain... daring? Maybe it is time you had a rival worthy of you. Competition enlivens the business.

Athena: Competition?

Arachne: Yes. Let's have a competition.

Athena: Are you quite aware what you are proposing? This means certain failure for you.

Arachne: Well, if you really do better than me, I'll never write another thing. But that won't happen.

Athena: Right. I take you at your word. There will be a competition between us. We will both do... a historical tapestry, I mean, a novel.

Arachne: Fine with me.

*(Athena goes off)*

Ovid: And so Arachne started spinning her threads and weaving them together into stories. *(Arachne picks up pieces of paper, writing on them, producing a whole heap of paper, obviously enjoying herself)* She wrote a historical novel about a girl who went bull-riding and got raped, a woman who was seduced by a man who was disguised as her husband but was

really someone quite different, a girl who was showered in gold by a mysterious lover, a girl who fell in love with a shepherd who was in reality nothing quite so humble, a woman who went swimming with dolphins and was raped, though if by a dolphin or a man she could not really say later on. And many, many more. Stories, which, despite their historical setting, the readers would know, depicted the numerous romantic – or not always quite so romantic – affairs of a group of high and mighty people, who went about seducing whatever girl suited them and leaving behind them a trail of ruined lives. So what Arachne had woven, was...

*(Athena comes in again with a book, with an assistant)*

Athena: A roman à clef! She's written a novel about us! She's just changed the names. That's taking it too far!

Assistant: But it's really well written!

Athena: It's cleverly done, yes, I see that.

Assistant: It would be a pity-

Athena: It's exposing our whole upper class as... as rapists! The impudence! And don't you see what that might lead to? The outcry it would cause in the media...

Assistant: Hm. She could always claim that it's just fiction... But of course this book is threatening your position as *the* top-author in the genre, isn't it?

Athena: All the more reason. Call my lawyer. I want to see her hang. *(they go off)*

*Arachne enters in a state of shock: Destroy all copies? A libel suit? My life won't be long enough to get the money to pay that. She can't mean that. (Pause) No. No. She won't get me. I'll see to that. (Arachne fetches a piece of (elastic) rope, and puts it round her neck) You won't get me Athena!*

*(Arachne looks for a place to hang up the rope, but slows down, looking at her papers, changes her mind, cannot bear to let all this go. Meanwhile Athena has entered again, unseen by Arachne, watches Arachne)*

Arachne: No. No, I can't do this.

*(Arachne takes the chord off her neck but keeps it in her hand, it trails after her as she moves. Athena stands on the end of the trailing chord or ties it down somewhere. Arachne paces the room, passing corners, where the rope gets stuck without her noticing (we did this by having stage-hands hold on to the cord), thus beginning to make a kind of net, Arachne kneels down amidst her papers, crouching, crawling, picking up papers, gathering together, wanting to protect them (she does not see Athena). Arachne entangles herself more and more in her own net, until she stops, exhausted and sees Athena for the first time.*

Athena: Good luck, Spiderwoman... *(starts to go off)*

Cupid: Oh Athena... why so hateful? You couldn't bear to be beaten and so you ruined the life of a girl? Come on old girl - make love, not war!

Athena: When it comes to ruining lives you're not entirely without blame, my boy. Always enticing people to start extramarital affairs, aren't you? And as we all know you're not even content with mortals, no, if you had your will, the whole pantheon would be making fools of themselves for love. *(off)*

Cupid *(looking offstage)*: Oh, maybe they already do... I believe the great Jupiter might have some trouble at home at the moment... I'd better get out of the way... *(goes to the side of the stage)*

## **Echo II**

*Echo with telephone*

Echo: Yes, I can imagine that you're in trouble now. But how could she find out? Did you leave your panties on their sofa or what? *(/Pause/)* Have you realised what this means for me? *(Pause)* Yes, well – now I'm in trouble too, because now she knows why I was always so keen on going shopping with her –

*Juno enters and starts attacking Echo*: So he could have his affairs with these impudent girls! And you were there to distract me! Aren't you ashamed of yourself?

Echo: But I-

Juno: Don't you contradict me, missy!

Echo: I only-

Juno: You'll regret this. Oh, I'll see to it that you regret this! *(they go off arguing)*

Ovid: Provoke the great ones and you'll be punished – that's life.

Cupid: But why so serious? Why doesn't Juno relax a little? Have a nice ménage à trois?

Ovid: Oh come on... If Juno took it all so very easy, where'd be the drama in all that? As it is, it makes for great story-telling material, anything else wouldn't do. Those scandal-loving Romans will devour it all...

Cupid: I'm beginning to understand... Any more ruined lives in store?

Ovid: Oh, plenty. Come on, help me. *(Ovid and Cupid put chair and table on stage, children can be heard shouting from offstage.)*

Cupid: Who's that?

Ovid: Niobe and her children. *(Ovid is taking his narrator's position, Cupid off)*

## **Niobe**

Niobe *(entering with child1, packing a sports bag)*: Larissa! Where's that girl got to?

The au-pair girl *enters*: Yes, madam?

Niobe: I hope you haven't forgotten that you promised to take Chloris to her ballet class? You understand? Take – Chloris – to ballet class. Okay? (*the au-pair nods*) Here are the car keys. Drive carefully! Chloris, don't forget to take off your sweaty tricot after the lesson, right? We don't want to have you catch cold again. Off you go. (*sees child 1 and au-pair girl off*)

*Child2, carrying a ball, has come in in the mean-time, crying: Mama!*

Niobe: What is it love? (*child points at his bleeding knee*) Oh, wait, I'll get a plaster. (*while she puts the plaster on, the phone rings, Niobe takes the phone*) Hello? Yes, darling. Yes of course you can stay to lunch. But be home by five. And don't forget to do your homework. Bye-bye. (*child2 runs off, playing with the ball*)

*Child3: (running in) Mama, I can't find my piano notes! My lesson starts in half an hour!*

Niobe: Look on the sideboard. (*child runs off*) I'm sure I saw Larissa putting them there. Thank god that the girl is at least tidy. Even if her English is not too good yet. But of course, one of her aims is to improve it here. I wouldn't know what to do without her. I mean, seven children... You really need a reliable au-pair to manage all of them. (*child walks across stage with piano notes*) Have you found them honey? (*child nods and goes off*) Yes, without professional help I'd certainly not be able to reconcile my children and my job. But... It is possible. (*child 4 calling: Mama!*) Never mind what all those cowardly women who don't want children because it might endanger their career. A big family and a successful life is possible. Look at me. I'm the best example

*Child4 and 5 come in arguing over some toy*

Child4: I had it first!

Child5: No! Me! You're stupid!

Child4: Stupid yourself!

Niobe: Children! Shh. Why don't you-

*Child 6 (teenaged) comes in, carrying shopping bags: Hi mum! Hi brats! (her siblings are not overjoyed) Do you know what I found at the summer sale! The most incredible skirt! And a fitting top! But mum... (looking at her mother pleadingly)*

Niobe: Oh darling... how much did it cost?

Child 6: Hmmm. Too much... Could you give me a little advance on my pocket money? Oh please... And don't tell daddy... But I'm sure you're going to like it, wait till I try it on... (*all children go off*)

Niobe: Yes, that's my children...My treasures. (*goes out into garden or looks out of window, spots Mrs. Latona outside, we have to imagine that she is talking to her leaning out of the window.*)

Niobe: O hello Mrs. Latona. How are you?

Niobe: Oh, splendid, splendid, they are all fine, all seven of them. I'll never understand how you could stand to have only two. The more the merrier – is what I always say. *(laughs)* If only women took a bit more responsibility for future generations...

Niobe: Oh, I'm sorry, now don't look so insulted, I was just joking. Have a nice day! *(goes in, while Latona goes off)* The poor woman. Just two children, when others are blessed with so many more. I mean two are just hardly enough to replace her and her, well, yes, the father. To tell the truth *(goes into gossip modus)* there seems to be no husband, never was, maybe that is the reason. There are stories that she had something with a married man and his wife discovered it, so she ran away, pregnant with twins and now – a truncated family, woman without husband, children without father, sad story... Always makes me recall that I am really blessed. *(smelling flowers, going in)*

Ovid: But so much happiness did not fail to produce jealousy. Latona - who was not just some old woman with only two children but a woman who had been proud and honoured in her youth, being the lover of a powerful man – burned with rage. Burned with rage at the continued little subtle insults she was suffering from her neighbour. She told her grown-up children about this constant mortification. And her children swore that they would defend their mother's honour. That Niobe would suffer for her arrogance. And so, a plan grew. A deadly plan. *(Pause)* One morning Niobe said goodbye to her daughters who were going to attend a schools-sports-day. Everything seemed to be fine. Wonderful weather. Happy children. A happy mother.

*Niobe says goodbye to her daughters and sons and encourages them to do their best and bring home prizes, the daughters go off.*

Ovid: But not for long. In the afternoon, an unusual visitor disturbed the idyll. The police.

*(police(wo)man enters and talks to Niobe who looks disturbed, the au-pair is listening too)*

Ovid: The police officer told Niobe that (s)he was very sorry and that Niobe must be very strong now. Niobe is a bit irritated.

Niobe: Why? What happened?

O: And the police officer reported how a man with a gun had appeared at her children's school. How he had rounded up her children and killed them. One by one. A madman? No – her neighbor's son – incited by his mother to take brutal revenge for Niobe's pride. *(Pause)* How does Niobe take these news? She is shocked, clearly, but does not really grasp the scope of events, first asking:

Niobe: And have you arrested him? What about the mother?

O: Whereupon she is told that...

Policewoman: The murderer could flee and the mother seems to have disappeared, which hints at her possible involvement in the crime.

O.: Then slowly, realization dawns. Her children, her darlings, are dead. Gone. No more happy motherhood.

*(Niobe is under shock. Slowly shock turns into numb grief. The au-pair girl tries to comfort her in vain)*

Ovid: Slowly, her grief turns into numbness. News hardly seem to reach her any more. Not even that of another catastrophe.

Police officer *at the door, is let in by au-pair girl*. I seem to be a real messenger of doom for this house. I am very sorry but your husband has been found dead. It seems that he has committed suicide. There is a letter. Do you want to see it?

*Niobe has kept on staring into space during the whole account, probably silently crying, now, as the au-pair girl touches her carefully, she replies absentmindedly: What? (Policewoman goes off, shown out by Larissa)*

O: Nothing moves her anymore.

*Niobe sits there quite still, turning into stone.*

O: No grief, no blame, no questions, nothing human reaches her anymore.

*Larissa comes in again, notices that Niobe has become so still, touches her, realizes that she has turned to stone.*

O.: She has turned into a stone. *(au pair girl touches the stone again, shrinks back. Lights go black. Niobe and au-pair go off in the dark)*

Cupid: What a story...

Ovid: Well... pride comes before the fall.

Cupid: I never though you were a moralist.

Ovid: Well, I'm not. I'm just telling stories that have been around for a long time.

Cupid: Then I'd like you to tell another love-story. Please? I thought Echo might have some potential in that area. Although – now that she's had her quarrel with Juno, there might be a little problem. You know what Juno did to her?

### **Echo III:**

Ovid.: Oh yes.

O: Echo was punished. *(Echo enters, freeze)*

Cupid: Tell them how.

O: Talkative Echo lost the power of starting a sentence on her own and was reduced to merely repeating the last words of others.

C.: Which interfered a bit with her love for socializing...

O: Since people indeed tended to find conversations with her a bit...

Cupid: Monotonous?

O: So she withdrew more and more from society. (*Echo hides behind the screen*) But she was not the only one.

Narcissus *enters*

*Narcissus sits down by the water, lies back and looks at the sky:* Peace and quiet at last.

*Echo is apparently enthralled by him, but hides quickly.*

Echo: At last!

Cupid: At last a boy for whom Echo felt more than just passing interest. Love at first sight, obviously. Unfortunately, it was one-sided.

Narcissus: No more silly girls – and boys – who all claim that they're in love...

Echo: In love!

Narcissus: With me!

Echo: Me!

Narcissus (*sits up, looks around*): Strange spot of earth here. It seems as if the rocks are resounding with my words. But at least I'm alone now. A good lonely outdoor-trip to celebrate the values of self-reliance, to find myself. I never thought people could be so exhausting. I really don't understand why they all want to talk to me!

Echo: Talk to me!

Narcissus: This is uncanny. Is there someone?

Echo: Someone!

Narcissus: Come out, whoever you are. It's silly to hide.

Echo: Silly to hide! (*comes out*)

Narcissus: Oh dear.

Echo: Dear! (*tries to embrace him*)

Narcissus: Are you one of them? I mean one of those girls who all claim that they're in love with me? Are you one of those?

Echo: One of those?

Narcissus: Are you stupid or what?

Echo: What? (*advances towards him*)

Narcissus: No! I don't want you!

Echo: Want you!

*She tries to embrace him.*

Narcissus: Hands off! I'd rather die than you should have me!

Echo: Have me!

*They do a silent dance to "I want to be your mirror"*

*Suddenly Narcissus breaks out:* I don't want you to be my mirror. Go away. If I really needed a mirror, I think this pool would do quite nicely, thank you. (*looks briefly into the "pool", then away again, freeze*)

Cupid: Well, Narcissus, so cold-hearted? I think you're a bit spoiled... loved by everyone, so you could never learn what it means to feel longing... But what if you fell in love with someone who is out of your reach? Hmm... (*touches Narcissus with his arrow*)

Ovid: And so Narcissus fell in love with his own reflection. (*Narcissus is enthralled by himself, kneeling down to look closer at his reflection, Echo watches him*) Of course he soon realized that the person in the water was nobody else but he himself – but he couldn't help it. And so he stayed at the pool day in and day out, gazing at his own reflection.

Narcissus (*speaking to his reflection*): I thought myself safe from love. I thought it was enough to rely on myself. And now I'm yearning for him who is myself and is yet so unreachable for me. Oh why won't you let me touch you? (*tries to touch his reflection*)

Echo (*reaching out for him*): Let me touch you...

Ovid: She hadn't forgotten him. But he was oblivious to her.  
(*Echo hides*)

Narcissus: Why do you always shrink away from me?

Echo: From me!

Ovid: And so both were caught in their impossible loves. And both pined away, longing for what they could not have.

Cupid: Not even death could end Narcissus' infatuation with himself. Even now, they say, he is gazing at his own reflection in the river Styx.

Ovid: And Echo? She kept on answering Narcissus, and consumed herself in this task until only her voice was left, which to this day remains, answering to hapless wanderers, in hope that it might be Narcissus.

Cupid: It was a love that was built to last.

Ovid: Well, well, well... Making people want what they can't have, and letting others not want what they have-

Cupid: Well, this is how you poets like it. Unhappy love makes so much more interesting poems...

### **Alcyone**

Ovid: Good point. But... I could write about marital bliss, for a change. How about... Alcyone and Ceyx. A happily married couple. (*Alcyone and Ceyx enter, happily*)

Cupid: Well. And now what?

Ovid: They were happy.

Cupid: Yes?

Ovid: Okay, okay, I can see it doesn't work like that. Well. (*Ovid thinks*) They *seemed* happy. (*Ceyx turns away from Alcyone*) But all of a sudden Ceyx felt the urge to go away.

*Ceyx taking leave of Alcyone: Goodbye*

Alcyone: Don't leave me! (*Ceyx goes to other side of stage, at the other side of the "water"*)

Ovid: But he entered his ship that was going to take him on some mysterious mission across the sea.

Alcyone.: But why?

Ceyx: Read my letter.

Ovid: He said.

*Alcyone takes up the letter that Ceyx has left. As she reads, Ceyx speaks the words of his letter.*

Ceyx: Of course I am happy with you. Do not worry about that, I really and truly love you.

Alcyone: But why must you go on this journey?

Ceyx: I'm discontented with my situation. Something is wrong.

Alcyone: Have I done something wrong?

Ceyx: It has nothing to do with you. Or maybe it has.

Alcyone: What? What?

Ceyx: Maybe our relationship is a little too perfect. We're so solid, the two of us. Sometimes I feel so weighted down by our perfect quiet little life.

Alcyone: How can that be?

Ceyx: You know, sometimes a man needs a challenge. Like a bird that has lived too long on the ground. At some time it'll want to fly again. I'm sure you'll understand that.

Alcyone: Is there another woman?

Ceyx: I assure you that there is no other woman involved. I just need some time to find out about myself, about us, about everything. I'll be back soon and I'm sure, we'll both be happier after that.

Alcyone: But why go by ship and put yourself at the mercy of the sea? Why go by this dangerous route? It's safer over land.

Ceyx: I feel it's the right thing to do. Don't worry. In two months at most I'll be back.

Alcyone: I have a bad feeling. What will I do if he doesn't come back to me? But I can't do anything now. He's gone. *(they go off)*

Ovid: And she waited. And the two months passed. And again and again she ran out to see if he had returned.

*Alcyone runs out and searches the beach.* Nothing. Not yesterday. Not today. And probably not tomorrow. *(goes "home")* Why? Why? Why? *(she sighs and lies down to sleep)*

*Ceyx' ghost appears on the water*

*Alcyone stirs in her sleep and whispers:* No, no, not that... *(she wakes up crying)* Ceyx! *(Ceyx off)* Where are you? Why aren't you here...

*Voice on the radio:* A terrible storm has wrecked more than one ship. The number of deaths has not been ascertained yet. Search parties are out. It has to be feared that more than 100 people have been killed.

*The ghost of Ceyx appears on the water:* I didn't want to listen to her. She was right. It was dangerous and unnecessary. But if one wish may be granted to me in death then let my body return to her, let me not be lost graveless on the sea. *(lies down near Alcyone's side of the coast)*

Cupid: And his wish was granted. His body washed ashore near the place where Alcyone used to wait for him. And so her wish was granted too. Ceyx had returned to her.

*Alcyone searching, with a flashlight. Spots the body, bends down, suspicion becomes terrible certainty. breaks down crying*

Ovid: But such honest grief did not go unnoticed. A god took pity on her and granted her and husband what he had so sorely missed in the last time of his life: The ability to fly.

*(they transform into birds)*

Cupid: Alcyone felt as if with each tear flowing from her eyes she was getting lighter and as she was bending over the body of Ceyx it seemed to her as if his salt-crusted wounds were closing, his whole body was shrinking and the decaying corpse became covered in feathers, ice-blue feathers and where a dead and maimed face had been, a beak sprouted and as she tried to touch him in wonder she realized that she too had turned into a feathery creature and where her arms had been holding Ceyx, she now embraced him with a pair of wings.

Ovid: And it is reported that the kingfisher is the only creature that is able to nest on the sea and hatch its young there. Because in retribution for what it did to Ceyx and Alcyone the sea now calms down for seven days each year: Poseidon holds his breath to watch the kingfishers in their mating dance.

### **Cupid and Psyche**

C: Well...

O.: Well?

C.: This is a good story. One where love wins in the end. Maybe you should stay on that track. I like it.

O.: Oh, you would.

C.: Actually, would you maybe be interested in telling my story in your book? It's a lovely story.

O: I bet it is. Okay. You tell me and then I'll decide.

C.: Right. Here goes. Once upon a time there was a girl. Her name was Psyche and she was incredibly beautiful. *(Psyche enters)* People revered her so much for her beauty that my mother's jealousy was awakened. And it is not a good thing when Venus is jealous. So she told me to punish poor Psyche for being so stunning.

O.: How? Did you have to make her ugly?

C.: No, that's not in my power. But I was to make her fall in love with the ugliest man on earth. And so I went to her with my bow at the ready.

*Psyche is sleeping. Just as Cupid is about to "shoot" her, she wakes up. He is so startled that he lets the arrow (his remote control) drop.*

C.: So the arrow pierced me instead of her.

O: And you fell in love with her and everybody lived happily ever after?

Cupid: Not so quickly. I hurried away. I was rather confused. *(Pause)* Psyche continued to be admired, but nobody wanted to marry her. Her parents started to worry and consulted an oracle. It told them that their daughter was not destined for a mortal husband but for a monster

wielding terrible weapons that had power even over the gods in heaven. They were to leave her alone on a mountain top for the monster to come and take her.

O to Cupid: The monster was you?

C.: Yes. But I was a bit ashamed – probably for the first time in my life – and moreover, I didn't want my mother to know – and so I sent somebody else to fetch Psyche and lead her to my place. (*Psyche is led to dark part of stage*) There, I waited for her in the dark and I forbid her to light the room – because I was so terrible to look at, I told her.

O: And what did you do with her?

C.: What do you think a love god does with a woman he happens to be in love with?

O: I see. And in the morning you went to your mother and she forgave you and everybody lived-

C.: No. It was a bit more complicated. I went to her every night and vanished in the morning before she could see me. But Psyche was a curious girl. She wanted to see the strange lover, who told her he looked so horrible, but who actually felt rather good in the dark. Moreover, her sister claimed that it was a shame to have a husband whom she couldn't present at dinner parties...

O: Uh oh...

C.: And so one night she waited until I was asleep beside her. (*lies next to Psyche*)

Psyche: And then I lit a candle. And now I saw what my husband was. Relief. Not a monster. But then a drop of wax fell from the candle – and Cupid was awake! (*Cupid and Psyche freeze*)

O to Psyche: And then you were punished for your disobedience?

Psyche: No. He was so confused that he just ran away. (*Cupid hastily leaves Psyche and joins Ovid again*)

C: A bit embarrassing, it's true. And then I was too busy healing my burnt skin – I do have rather sensitive skin – to care for anything else in the next few days.

O: So you just broke up like that?

C.: No, not really. She was a bit more spirited than me, I have to admit. And besides, it had been her mistake... So she searched for me. But, unfortunately, nobody knew where I was, save my mother. (*Psyche moves to a place at the side of the stage where she talks to some unseen goddess high above*)

O: Who told her to go to hell?

C.: Yes, how did you guess? But first she had to sort a huge basket of grains, to gather golden wool from a herd of...

Psyche (*shocked, echoing what Venus has told her*): ... vicious sheep?

Cupid: ...to fetch water from an impossibly steep cleft and finally to...

Psyche(*shocked, echoing what Venus has told her*): ... go to the underworld?

Cupid: ...and fetch a box filled with beauty. For my mother claimed that through all the stress caused by Psyche she had lost some of her own, and so-

O (*knowingly*): Oh yes, your mother can be a real bitch... (oder: A woman's revenge can be terrible.)

C.: Yes, but actually this is a kind of fairy tale. Psyche was so beautiful and helpless and charming that all kinds of people and animals helped her to do the tasks. Only after the last one, when she was carrying the box of beauty, (*Psyche enters with box*) her curiosity almost got the better of her once again.

O: She opened the box?

C.: And out of the box rose not beauty, but sleep. And so she fell asleep on the spot. The sleep was so heavy and deep that she lay there as if she was dead. Heaven knows what would have happened to her if I had not – finally – come back to my senses and searched for my poor lover. I found her, took the sleeping spell off her and advised her to deliver the box straight without any further delay.

Psyche: While I did that, he went to Jupiter.

O: And asked for a formal family reconciliation?

C.: Yes.

O: And since finally your mother could not resist Jupiter's pleading for your cause, you were re-united.

C.: And we lived happily ever after. Yes. (*Psyche and Cupid embrace.*)

O.: That's a bit too romantic for me.

C.: What?

O.: I had never thought Love's love life could be so boring.

C.: There is a difference between profession and private life. For me, at least. (*Psyche off*)  
However, what about you?

O.: Me?

C: Don't you have a story? Your life? Your loves?

O.: My life? No, I don't think so. Nothing interesting about that... No transformations...

C: Yes, but there is. The transformation from the much-loved society poet to Rome's saddest expatriate...

O.: But this is *my life*. This is serious. This is real.

C.: But it would make a good story.

*(Cupid shoves Ovid to the center of the stage)*

## **Ovid**

Cupid: Publius Ovidius Naso was born on 20 March in the 43 before Christ in Middle Italy as the second son to – what might nowadays be called – upper middle class parents.

Ovid: My parents, wealthy, though not rich, intended me for a career as a barrister or a civil servant, therefore I was sent to Rome as a teenager to study rhetoric.

Cupid: However, his efforts were not overmuch crowned by success.

O: I can try as I want to declaim in prose – the poetry just keeps crawling in!

Cupid: And therefore he soon declared to his rather nonplussed father:

O: I don't want to be a barrister. I want to be a poet!

Father: Son, son, be reasonable! Poetry... As a pastime, well maybe, though even then it is a rather effeminate pursuit. As a profession, it's mere starvation!

Cupid: However, when Ovid was 19, his older brother died. An event, sad as it was, which changed his whole future. His parents' finances, not sufficient to pay for two sons was more than enough sustain him now. And so...

O: Father, please, I must go to Athens. Everyone who is someone in the arts and literature has been there.

Cupid: So to Athens he went. (*Ovid einmal um Teich laufen?*) He returned to Rome three years later and took some minor offices, did well in them and probably even pleased his father.

Father: Maybe he'll come to his senses yet.

Cupid: But then he rejected the office of quaestor, which would have meant the first step on the ladder of a political career.

Father: But why?

O: This is not what I want out of life. Politics is boring. I want to enjoy life – and I want to write. So... combining the two... I'll write about... love. I will become one of the greatest love poets of my age.

Father: Dear gods... You had better bring some order into your own married life than go talking about love. But I can see that my advice is wasted on you. (*goes off*)

Cupid: Ovid had been married for the first time when he was hardly more than a teenager, to a girl that had been chosen for him by his parents.

(*girl enters*)

Cupid: But they were soon divorced.

Ovid (*to girl*): Farewell. (*girl leaves*)

Cupid: Well, that's your problem if you listen to your parents and not to the god of love... The second marriage followed soon after (*another girl enters*) but lasted hardly longer than the first, even though Ovid claims

O: Your conduct to me is irreproachable. I have really nothing to complain of.

Cupid: But...

Ovid: I just don't love you. (*girl goes off*)

Cupid: I admit that this young man was a hard case for me... But I got him in the end!

O: I was about to sing, in heroic strain, of arms and fierce combats. But Cupid...

*C laughs and shakes his head*: Write about love – not about war!

O *protesting*: No boy have I, nor long-haired girl, to inspire me

C: That can be helped. Poet, here is matter for thy song. (*points out Corinna, who has just entered*) Corinna. The heroine of Ovid's love poems. Already married but quite adorable – and not averse to the occasional affair. Especially not if the lover was an aspiring young poet.

O: Ah, hapless me, Love's arrow did but all too surely find its mark. On fire am I, and Love, now rules my heart that ne'er was a slave till now.

Cupid: And on he burned, telling us about all the ups and down of his relationship with Corinna. Such as:

Corinna: What to do when Corinna and her husband are invited to a posh dinner and Ovid, too. (*Corinna and her husband enter, Ovid enters too, clandestine glances and touching between Ovid and Corinna, official behaviour towards husband*)

Cupid: About his rage, when Corinna seems to have been unfaithful (to him). (*Ovid and Corinna argue*)

Maid (*enters*)

Cupid: His surprise when she accuses him of having had something with her maid.

Corinna: His anger at the maid that Corinna has found out. (*Ovid talks agitatedly to the maid*)

Ovid: Preaching to my Corinna who is too conceited about her good looks.

Cupid: Complaining to Corinna that she prefers a wealthier man and, weary of her, telling her

Ovid: Goodbye!

Cupid: But that did not mean that I was suddenly out of work.

Corinna: Do you mean that his third wife was more fortunate than the ones before? (*third wife appears*)

Cupid: The marriage did indeed turn out to be a long-lasting union. But actually I meant, the *Ars Amatoria*, his famous guidebook for seduction.

O: Chiron was tutor to Achilles; I am tutor to Love; I will teach love to obey.

Cupid: And how do you propose to do this?

O: By advising others how to master the art of love. (*Ovid talks to a group of Romans, who do what he tells them to do*) I will tell them: You, who for the first time are soldiers of Venus, find out, in the first place, the woman you would like to love. Your next task will be to bend her to your will; your third to safeguard that your love shall endure. This is my plan, my syllabus.

Cupid: And he told the men how to find women – in the theatres, in the temples, even on the Forum. The whole of Rome was – according to him – only too full of women ready for seduction and on the lookout for a little affair. *Ars Amatoria*, book 1 and 2. (*the Romans go off happily*)

Daphne *enters*: A great success. Rome was apparently full of men ready to become seducers.

O: But I thought of the women, too. It was not right to expose you, dear women, all defenceless as you were, to the attacks of a well-armed foe.

Cupid: He felt that women are more often betrayed by men than the other way round-

Corinna: I wonder where that insight came from?

Cupid: And therefore attempted to teach the women how to make a relationship last. *Ars Amatoria*, Book 3.

O.: Also quite popular.

Corinna: The ladies loved him.

Echo *enters*: But some time after that he discovered yet another target group for his kind of “self-help books in verse”.

O: Remedia Amoris. A remedy against love. This will be a book for those unhappily in love. Those who, if they cannot cease to love, will die the miserable victim of an unhappy passion. (*Cupid protests silently*) Let them, therefore, with my assistance, cease to love, and you will not have his death upon your conscience. You are a child and should know nothing but merry sport. Your torch was never made to light a funeral pyre.

C: That's not true! I mean, look at all the old stories. Love has been cause for death more than once – look at Dido and Aeneas or Echo and Narcissus...

O: Oh... They'd still be alive and human if they had read that book, which I am about to write!

C: Incurably in love with himself and his art... (*Pause*) Well poet, pursue thy self-allotted task.

Corinna: And on he wrote, enjoying fame and popularity and the glamour of Roman society.

O. (*to Cupid*): But what you said about Echo and Narcissus... Stories of people transformed by the effects of love... Hm... Or, even better, a book about transformations in general... There's lots of old stories around. Maybe there's another book in that...

Cupid: ... his biggest work so far, starting with the creation of the world out of chaos and ending with praise to the emperor Augustus.

O.: And now the work is done, that Jupiter's anger, fire or sword cannot erase, nor the gnawing tooth of time. (*presents book to Augustus who has entered in the meantime*)

Arachne enters: Ovid had worked on the *Metamorphoses* for 10 years, publishing little during that time. But this wasn't necessary, since his other works were bestsellers. The Roman world was still abuzz with excitement over his *Ars Amatoria*.

C.: So, unfortunately, was the court of Augustus. And the emperor was not amused. Not amused at all.

Niobe enters: Therefore, in the year 8, the year in which the *metamorphoses* were finished, the poet received extremely unpleasant news. *Augustus hands Ovid a letter and goes off.*

O. *shocked, reads*: Relegatio.

Cupid: This meant banishment.

O.: To the coast of the Black Sea.

Cupid.: To be more exact to Tomis, a small town in what is now Romania.

O.: But this is the end of the world...

Corinna: At least to a sophisticated city-person like Ovid, who needed Rome like a fish needed water.

O.: My banishment is neither sanctioned by the senate nor by a trial. This can't be. What have I done?

Cupid.: How about the *Ars Amatoria*?

O.: But this was published years ago!

Cupid.: Nevertheless, it runs in the face of emperor's campaigns to re-instate good old family values, marital faithfulness, female chastity and so on ... I should know about that, trust me. If that's not enough – consider what you know about Julia, the emperor's granddaughter...

O.: Her affair with Silanus. But I wasn't involved in that – I just happen to know about it. I have eyes in my head, what can I do about that?

Cupid: Your emperor is like a god – and gods don't need excuses for what they do. You of all people should know that.

Alcyone *enters*: So it was “*Carmen et error*”...

O.: A poem and a mistake...

*The lights starts to go down slowly. The six women have grouped themselves on one side of the stage.*

Alcyone: ...Which sent Ovid to the farthest end of the Roman empire.

Cupid: But he didn't go quietly.

Corinna: In an act of defiance, he burnt his manuscript of the *Metamorphoses*. (*Ovid lights candle, tears a page out of the book he had presented to the emperor and burns it*) But that didn't move the emperor. Ovid remained at Tomis until his death.

Cupid: Maybe it was mere vanity. Maybe it was foresight. But in the long run, the very end of the *Metamorphoses* proved prophetic.

O.: Let that day, that only has power over my body, end, when it will, my uncertain span of years. Yet the best part of me will be borne, immortal, beyond the distant stars. Wherever Rome's influence extends, over the lands it has civilised, I will be spoken, on people's lips: and, famous through all the ages, if there is truth in poet's prophecies - I shall live. (*goes off silently. Only the candle remains*)

BLACKOUT.