

SONGS FROM THE LAUREL TREE [2017]

a song cycle by Thomas Juneau

I. Daphne with Her Thighs in Bark by Eavan Boland

I have written this
So that,
In the next myth,
My sister will be wiser.
Let her learn from me:
The opposite of passion is not virtue
But routine.
Look at me.
I can be cooking,
Making coffee,
Scrubbing wood, perhaps,
And back it comes:
The crystalline, the elsewhere,
The wood where I was
When he began the chase.
And how I ran from him!
Pan-thighed, Satyr-faced he was.
The trees reached out to me. I silvered and
I quivered. I shook out
My foil of quick leaves.
He snouted past. What a fool I was!
I shall be here forever,
Setting out the tea,
Among the coppers and the branching alloys and
The tin shine of this kitchen;
Laying saucers on this pine table.
Save face, sister.
Fall. Stumble.
Rut with him.
His rough heat will keep you warm and
You will be better off than me,
With your memories
Down the garden,
At the start of March,
Unable to keep your eyes
Off the chestnut tree-
Just the way it thrusts and hardens.

II. Where I live in This Honorable House of the Laurel Tree by Anne Sexton

I live in my wooden legs and O
my green green hands.
Too late
to wish I had not run from you, Apollo,
blood moves still in my bark bound veins.
I, who ran nymph foot to foot in flight,
have only this late desire to arm the trees
I lie within. The measure that I have lost
silks my pulse. Each century the trickeries

of need pain me everywhere.
Frost taps my skin and I stay glossed
in honor for you are gone in time. The air
rings for you, for that astonishing rite
of my breathing tent undone within your light.
I only know how untimely lust has tossed
flesh at the wind forever and moved my fears
toward the intimate Rome of myth we crossed.
I am a fist of my unease
as I spill toward the stars in the empty years.
I build the air with the crown of honor; it keys
my out of time and luckless appetite.
You gave me honor too soon, Apollo.
There is no one left who understands
how I wait
here in my wooden legs and O
my green green hands

III. Daphne by Edna St. Vincent Millay

Why do you follow me?- Any moment I can be Nothing but a laurel-tree.
Any moment of the chase
I can leave you in my place
A pink bough for your embrace.
Yet if over hill and hollow Still it is your will to follow, I am off; -to heel, Apollo!

IV. Daphne After by Colin Way Reid

In the absence of a heart grown stemwise, silent, slow Daphne drinks unremembering the unknown,
in the manner of a laurel thinks in branches, sometimes blossoms.
Real forgetting is her secret, long detachment, no split sense to heal.
Only sentiment and song remembering how she suffered, ran in terror, turning tree, and past to
present.
Where the myth began, the laurel is the light's at last.

V. Waking by Margaret Kaufman

Morning light over the sill.
She extends one wooden arm, pushes her hair back,
bends her neck- from her breasts the scent of bay leaves.
Finally it is happening-
she lifts the hem of her gown, steps out of their bed,
over the carpet
down the stairs,
and lifts the latch.
Outside, in stronger light,
she examines her hands,
regards her bare feet: green everywhere.
Your imagination, he'd say.
No! in every step,
she breaks into a run holding her hands before her, flexing the fingers, opening, closing, opening.