Callisto in confusion

Tricked by
an imposter, who
posed as a role-model
to circumvent defences that
may have been stout, I lost all
self-confidence, felt
unworthy. What was there
to do except just
pretend that every
thing was normal? Instinctively backing
down but drawn to old friends' carefree
laughter, through my anxiety
I was unwittingly courting
disaster. Exposure beckoned, shame and
exclusion. Punishment followed swift,
for when is the victim not
blamed? Examined under
duress, my flesh crawled
like an attack of eczema
while thick dark patches
of coarse fur began to
disfigure my arms and
legs. Unbearable pain
accompanied a twisting
and straining of sinews
as, bowled over, I clawed
at anything that would
save me. If I had lived
in the 21st century, I
could have used #MeToo
to share my sordid story,
unravelling after I had
been blasted into oblivion.

Narcissus

No
body but
by the pool
a yellow flower
opening tremulously
to the sky in bright
sunshine. So there was no funeral
pyre for the boy on the grass where he died,
gazing intently into the water, so self-absorbed that
he was unaware of his surroundings: the leafy foliage
offering shade, a babbling stream, the contours of
the pool and shifting shadows on the water. “Will
his life be long?”, the boy’s mother had asked
the blind seer, Tiresias, apprehensive that
her baby’s beauty might provoke neighbours’
jealousy. “Providing he never knows himself”, had
been Tiresias’s enigmatic reply. What to make of this
pronouncement? Surely, one acquires self-knowledge from
seeing reflections of oneself through others’ eyes?
Should one shun others? The boy, who liked hunting
and fishing, had lived an uncomplicated life,
friendly but aloof and not deliberately
turning heads and leaving them all
swooning. Yet, inspiring love was
a dangerous game. A spurned
lover wasting away
cursed him
to suffer
the most
lonely
death

Bacchanalian revels at sea

It
had
been a
great night out
but I was hungover
still and really only
half-awake down by the beach
when I was offered a berth
to Naxos. Drowsing after boarding,
on the wine-dark sea I fell asleep and
dreamed of pirates seizing me. In my mind's
eye, the ship's forward movement ceased, with
ivy tangling up the oars and enveloping the sails
in luxuriant growth. I awarded myself a garland
of grapelets and a wand wrapped in vine-leaves.
I conjured up phantom lynxes, leopards, tigers
and panthers and fed grapes to these companions
bodyguarding me. Then it was time to have a little
fun. When the first sailor's back arched like
that of a dolphin, before he somersaulted into
the sea, the others' eyes widened. Open mouths
stretched, before nostrils flattened into gills.
Those holding oars or ropes lost their grip as
arms shrunk into fins. Soon there were dolphins
dancing in the waters all around the ship. A
deep sense of peace descended. When
I awoke the ship's crew had
gone. The only one left was
the friendly sailor who
had welcomed me onboard
in the first place. He
took the tiller and
guided me safely
to Naxos.

The daughters of Minyas

All we did
was stay inside
as the ticker-tape
parade trumpeted past.
Outside, it was bedlam.
Royal watchers drummed,
waved, sang, danced. So it
was a blessing to close the
door. Whispering softly to keep
eavesdroppers at bay, feeling scared
and yet defiantly brave, we started
surreptitiously restorying old tales
of Love Island gods being exposed in
shockingly flashlit scenes by chortling
paparazzi: Venus and Mars ensnared in fine
bronze chains by a jealous husband while
embracing! Our disdainful laughter must
have caught the attention of the secret
police lurking outside the door, ready
to punish those not celebrating tipsily
in the street, wildly made-up and garbed
in fawnskin, hair garlanded. In corners,
I hid squeaking, waiting for night
to fall fast, now a bat
cursed for a dark
life

Delos

According
to the myth, I was
an aimless beach bum of an
island drifting untethered around
the Aegean Sea until I found
my life's mission. Listening
to the desperate pleas of
a refugee being chased
from pillar to post helped
not only her, in the last
throes of birthing, but
also indirectly me. In giving
her sanctuary, I was assuming
responsibility and just beginning
to put down roots, anchoring myself
to the seabed. As the tale spread,
temples mushroomed along the shore.
"All life is precious", I murmur,
watching fragile flotillas brave
choppy waters, small boats from
North Africa carrying the
huddled together poor,
thirsty, desperate for a
second chance. "There
is enormous potential
in everyone", I reflect,
recalling the refugee's struggles
and her bright-eyed babies. She
named them Apollo and Diana.
A few years later, there
was a woman (Niobe)
in Ovid who claimed
that her own proud,
vain, indolent
children were
of a different class,
but it didn't do
her much
good