

Is a Box Ever Just a Box?

Apollonio di Giovanni di Toaso, Panel from a Marriage Chest with Story of Apollo and Daphne, ca. 1460

They are both so flat, running across my marriage chest. Apollo seems tentative. His proud mind has been hijacked but his legs suspect trickery. Daphne

holds up her dress as she scurries away to the river and the magic of her father. She will be turned into a laurel tree. The chase will end in rooted wood. Did

Daphne choke in the dirt, immobilized in lonely ground? Ten years ago, a wedding parade with bright banners set out with me and my new marriage chest

rattling over cobblestones. My father chose the story painted on the box. Could he have turned River God and protected me from this fate? Would I choose

to be a tree, bleeding clear sap as Apollo sliced away my branches to form his crown of victory? Did Apollo hesitate before the first cut? His trembling hand, sharp

blade. His love had to inflict pain in order to express itself. O, to spear Eros and roast his baby-fat in a fire pit. The day my father gave me this box, ornamented

with Daphne's flight, my mother placed her hand over her mouth and coughed a word. A muffled truth, sure, but I swear to heaven my mother's word was "coffin."

-- Sylvia Cavanaugh