

The Gorgon in the Cupboard

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HARRY could not get the goat to stay still. His model, who was an aspiring actress, offered numerous impractical suggestions as she crouched beside the animal. In fact, she rarely stopped talking. Harry didn't like the look in the goat's eye. It wasn't very big, but it seemed to him arrogant beyond its age, and contemplating mischief.

"Give it something to eat," Moira suggested. "Goats eat anything, don't they? That old leather sack, there."

"That's my lunch," Harry said patiently. "And the less we put into the goat, the less will come out of it. If you get my meaning."

She giggled. She was quite charming, with her triangular elfin face, her large green eyes with lashes so long they seemed to catch air like butterfly wings as they rose and fell. She dealt handily with the goat, who was eyeing Harry's lunch now. It strained against the rope around its neck, occasionally tightening it so that its yellow eyes verged on the protuberant. A bit like hers, Harry thought.

"Try to remain serious," he pleaded. "You're a scapegoat; you've been falsely accused and spurned by the world. Your only friend in the world is that goat."

"I thought you said you were just sketching the outlines today. Putting us in our places. So why do I have to be serious?" The goat, in whose rope her wrists were supposedly entangled, gave an obstinate tug; she loosed one hand and smacked it. "You should have gotten a female. They're sweet-natured. Not like this ruffian." She wrinkled her nose. "Stinks, too, he does. Like—"

"This one was all I could borrow. Please."

They were still for a miraculous moment, both gazing at him. He picked up charcoal, held his breath and drew a line of the goat's flank onto the canvas, then continued the line with her flank and bent knee. She swatted at a fly; the goat bucked; they both seemed to *baa* at once. Harry sighed, wiped sweat out of his eyes. They had been there half the morning, and little enough to show for it. The sun was high and dagger-bright; the tavern yard where he had set his poignant scene was full of sniggering critics. Idlers, he reminded himself, resuming doggedly when the pair settled again. They wouldn't know a brush from a broom straw. Still. He paused to study his efforts. He sighed again. There was something definitely wrong with her foot.

"It's hot," she said plaintively, shaking her heavy hair away from her neck, disturbing the perfect, nunlike veil across her face.

"Ah, don't—"

"And I'm starving. Why can't you paint like Alex McAlister? He lets me sit inside; he dresses me in silks; he lets me talk as much as I want unless he's doing my face. And I get hung every time, too, a good place on the wall where people can see me, not down in a corner where nobody looks."

The goat was hunkered on the ground now, trying to break its neck pulling at the rope peg. Harry glanced despairingly at the merciless source of light, looked again at his mutinous scapegoats, then flung his charcoal down.

"All right. All right."

"You owe me for Thursday, too."

"All right."

"When do you want me to come again?"

He closed his eyes briefly, then fished coins out of his pocket. "I'll send word."

One of the critics leaning against the wall called, "Best pay the goat, too; it might not come back otherwise."

"I might have work," Moira reminded him loftily. Mostly she worked early mornings selling bread in a bakery and took elocution lessons in afternoons when she wasn't prowling the theaters, or, Harry suspected, the streets for work.

"That goat won't get any younger neither," another idler commented. Harry gritted his teeth, then snapped his fingers for the boy pitching a knife in a corner of the yard. The boy loosened the goat from the peg, got a good grip on its neck-loop to return it to its owner. He held out his other hand for pay.

"Tomorrow then, sir?" he asked indifferently.

"I'll send word," Harry repeated.

"Don't forget your dinner there, sir."

"You have it. I'm not hungry."

He dropped the charcoal into his pocket, tucked the canvas under one arm and the folded easel under the other, and walked home dejectedly, scarcely seeing the city around him. He was a fair-haired, sweet-faced young man, nicely built despite his awkward ways, with a habitually patient expression and a heart full of ravaging longings and ambitions. He was not talented enough for them, this morning's work told him. He would never be good enough. The girl was right.

His paintings, if chosen at all to be hung for important exhibits, always ended up too high, or too close to the floor, or in obscure, badly lit corners. He thought of McAlister's magnificent *Diana*, with the dogs and the deer in it looking so well-behaved they might have been stuffed. And Haversham's *Watchful Shepherd*: the sheep as fat as dandelions and as docile as—as, well, sheep. Why not scapesheep? he wondered despondently, rather than scapegoats? No goat would stand still long enough for mankind to heap their crimes on its head.

Then he saw that which drove every other thought out of his head.

Her.

She was walking with her husband on the other side of the street. He was speaking fervidly, gesturing, as was his wont, probably about something that had seized his imagination. It might have been anything, Harry knew: a poem, the style of an arch, a pattern of embroidery on a woman's sleeve. She listened, her quiet face angled slightly toward him, her eyes downturned, intent, it seemed, on the man's brilliance. He swept fingers through his dark, shaggy hair, his thick mustaches dancing, spit flying now and then in his exuberance. Neither of them saw Harry. Who had stopped midstream in the busy street, willing her to look, terrified that she might raise her dark, brooding eyes and see what was in his face. She only raised her long white fingers, gently clasped her husband's flying arm and tucked it down between them.

Thus they passed, the great Alex McAlister and his wife Aurora, oblivious to the man turned to stone by the sight of her.

He moved at last, jostled by a pair of boys pursued through the crowd, and then by the irate man at their heels. Harry barely noticed them. Her face hung in his mind, gazing out of canvas at him: McAlister's *Diana*, McAlister's *Cleopatra*, McAlister's *Venus*. That hair, rippling like black fire from skin as white as alabaster, those deep, heavy-lidded eyes that seemed to perceive invisible worlds. That strong, slender column of neck. Those long fingers, impossibly mobile and expressive. That mouth like a bite of sweet fruit. Those full, sultry lips...

I would give my soul to paint you, he told her silently. But even if in some marvelous synchronicity of events that were possible, it would still be impossible. With her gazing at him, he could not have painted a stroke. Again and again, she turned him into stone.

Not Aurora, he thought with hopeless longing, but Medusa.

He had tried to speak to her any number of times when he had visited Alex's studio or their enchanting cottage in the country. All he managed, under that still, inhuman gaze, were insipid commonplaces. The weather. The wild-flowers blooming in the garden. The stunning success of McAlister's latest painting. He coughed on crumbs, spilled tea on his cuff. Her voice was very low; he bent to hear it and stepped on her hem with his muddy boot sole, so that whatever she had begun to say was overwhelmed by his apologies. Invariably, routed by his own gracelessness, he would turn abruptly away to study a vase that McAlister had glazed himself, or a frame he was making. McAlister never seemed to notice his hopeless passion, the longing of the most insignificant moth for fire. He would clap Harry's shoulder vigorously, spilling his tea again, and then fix him in an enthusiastic torrent of words, trying to elicit Harry's

opinion of some project or profundity, while the only thought in Harry's head was of the woman sitting so silently beyond them she might have been in another world entirely.

He walked down a quiet side street shaded by stately elms, opened the gate in front of the comfortable house he had inherited from his parents. Looking despondently upon his nicely blooming hollyhocks, he wondered what to do next.

If only I could create a masterwork, he thought. An idea no one has thought of yet, that would attract the attention of the city, bring me acclaim. Make me one of the circle of the great... Now I'm only a novice, a squire, something more than apprentice yet less than master. Harry Waterman, dabbler at the mystery of art. If only I could pass through the closed doors to the inner sanctum. Surely She would notice me then...

He went across the garden, up the steps to his door, and stopped again, hand on the latch, as he mused over an appropriate subject for a masterpiece. The goat, while original and artistically challenging, held no dignity; it would not rivet crowds with its power and mystery. At most, viewers might pity it and its ambiguous female counterpart, and then pass on. More likely they would pity the artist, who had stood in a sweltering tavern yard painting a goat.

Aurora's face passed again through his thoughts; his hand opened and closed convulsively on the door latch. Something worthy of those eyes he must paint. Something that would bring expression into them: wonder, admiration, curiosity...

What?

Whatever it was, he would dedicate his masterpiece to Her.

The door pulled abruptly out of his hold. Mrs. Grommet, his placid housekeeper, held a hand to her ample bosom as she stared at him. "Oh, it's you, Mr. Waterman. I couldn't imagine who was making that racket with the door latch." She shifted aside, opened the door wide for him to enter.

"Sorry, Mrs. Grommet," he murmured. "Throes of creation."

"Of course, Mr. Waterman. I didn't expect you back so soon. Have you had your lunch, sir?"

"No. Just bring me tea in my studio, please. I expect to be in the throes for the rest of the afternoon."

"Yes, sir."

In the highest floor of the house, he had knocked down walls, enlarged windows to give him space and light, views from a city park on one side, the broad, busy river on the other. Mrs. Grommet came panting up with a great silver tray. He slumped in an easy chair, sipped tea as he flipped through his sketchbooks for inspiration. Faces, dogs, flowers, birds, hills, rocks, pieces of armor, horses, folds of heavy tapestry, drifting silk, hands, feet, eyes... Nothing coherent, nothing whole, nothing containing the lightning bolt of inspiration he craved.

He read some poetry; words did not compel an image. He paced for a while, his mind a blank canvas. He beseeched his Muse. Anybody's Muse. Inspiration failed to turn her lovely face, her kindly attention, toward him. He wandered to his cupboards, pulled out old, unfinished canvases, studied the stilted figures, the fuzzy landscapes for something that he might redeem to greatness.

One caught at memory: a head without a mouth. He placed it on the easel, stood studying it. The head, when completed, would have belonged to Persephone at the moment she realized that, having eaten of the fruits of the Underworld, she was doomed to spend half her life in that gloomy place. The young model he had chosen for it had vanished before he could finish it. Harry gazed at her, struck by her beauty, which had inspired his normally clumsy brushwork. The almond-shaped eyes of such pale gray they seemed the color of sun-kissed *ice*, the white-gold hair, the apricot skin. A true mingling of spring and winter, his model, who had disappeared so completely she might have been carried away into the netherworld herself.

He tried to remember her name. May? Jenny? She had gotten herself into trouble, he suspected. Harry had noticed a certain heaviness in her walk, the frigidity of terror in her expression. Moved, he had offered, in his nebulous, hesitant way, to help. But she had fled. Or died, perhaps, he was forced to consider. In childbirth, or trying to get rid of the child, who could know? He had tried to find her so that he could finish the painting. But no one seemed to know anything at all about her.

He wondered if it might be worth finishing. Her eyes, gazing straight out at the viewer, compelled attention. Idly, he traced a mouth with his forefinger, rifling through all the likely mouths he might borrow to finish it. There was

Beresford's cousin Jane... But no, even at her young age, her lips were too thin to suggest the hunger that had caused Persephone to eat forbidden fruit... Or was that a different tale?

He recognized the invisible mouth his finger had outlined, and swallowed.

Some passing Muse, a mischievous sprite, tempted him to reach for crimson paint. The lips that haunted him burned like fire in memory... but darker than fire, darker than rose, darker than blood. He toyed guiltily with all those colors on his palette. Only paint, he told himself. Only memory. The color of wine, they were, deep, shadowy burgundy, with all the silken moistness of the rose petal.

Vaguely he heard Mrs. Grommet knock, inquire about his supper. Vaguely he made some noise. She went away. The room darkened; he lit lamps, candles. Mrs. Grommet did not return; the streets grew even quieter; the river faded into night.

He blinked, coming out of his obsessive trance. That full, provocative splendor of a mouth was startling beneath the gentle, frightened eyes of his Persephone. But the likeness transfixed him. Aurora's mouth it was; he had succeeded beyond all dreams in shifting it from memory into paint. He could not use it. Of course he could not. Everyone would recognize it, even on some other woman's face. Which he would need to go out and find, if he wanted to finish this Persephone. Maybe not his masterwork, but far easier to manage than the goat; she would do until inspiration struck.

He lingered, contemplating that silent, untouchable mouth. He could not bring himself to wipe it away yet. He would go down and eat his cold supper, deal more ruthlessly with the mouth after he had found a replacement for it. It did not, after all, belong to him; it belonged to the wife of his dear friend and mentor... He tore his eyes from it, lifted the canvas from the easel and positioned it carefully back in the cupboard, where it could dry and be forgotten at the same time.

He closed the door and the lips spoke.

"Harry!" Its voice was sweet and raucous and completely unfamiliar. "You're not going to leave me here in the dark, are you? After calling me all afternoon? Harry?"

He flung himself against the door, hearing his heart pound like something frantic trying to get out of him, or trying to get in. He tried to speak; his voice wouldn't come, only silent bleats of air, like an astonished sheep.

"Harry?"

"Who—" he finally managed to gasp. "Who—"

"Open the door."

"N." -

"You know I'm in here. You can't just keep me shut up in here."

"N."

"Oh Harry, don't be so unfriendly. I won't bite. And even if I did—" The voice trilled an uncouth snigger, "you'd like it, from this mouth."

Harry, galvanized with sudden fury, clutched at the cupboard latch, barely refraining from wrenching it open. "How dare you!" he demanded, feeling as though the contents of his inmost heart had been rifled by vulgar, soiled hands. "Who are you?"

"That's it," the voice cooed. "Now lift the latch, open the door. You can do it."

"If you force me to come in, I'll—I'll wipe away your mouth with turpentine."

"Tut, Harry. How crude. Just when I'm ready to give you what you want most."

"What I want—"

"Inspiration, Harry. You've been wishing for me ever since you gave up on the goat and gave me a chance to get a word in edgewise."

"You're a mouth—" He was breathing strangely again, taking in too much air. "How can you possibly know about the goat?"

"You called me."

"I did not."

"You invoked me," the voice insisted. "I am the voice of your despair. Your desire. Why do you think I'm coming out of these lips?"

Harry was silent, suddenly breathless. A flash went through him, not unlike the uncomfortable premonition of inspiration. He was going to open the door. Pushed against it with all his strength, his hands locked around the latch, he was going to open... "Who are you?" he pleaded hoarsely. "Are you some sort of insane Muse?"

"Guess again," the voice said coolly. "You looked upon your Beloved and thought of me. I want you to paint me. I am your masterwork."

"My masterwork."

"Paint me, Harry. And all you wish for will be yours."

"All I wish..."

"Open the door," the voice repeated patiently. "Don't be afraid. You have already seen my face."

His mouth opened; nothing came out. The vision stunned him, turned him into stone: the painting that would rivet the entire art world, reveal at last the depths and heights of his genius. The snake-haired daughter of the gods whose beauty threatened, commanded, whose eyes reflected inexpressible, inhuman visions.

He whispered, "Medusa."

"Me," she said. "Open the door."

He opened it.

DOWN by the river, Jo huddled with the rest of the refuse, all squeezed under a butcher's awning trying to get out of the sudden squall. In the country, where she had walked from, the roads turned liquid in the rain; carriages, wagons, horses, herds of sheep and cows churned them into thick, oozing welts and hillocks of mud deep enough to swallow your boots if you weren't careful. Here the cobbles, though hard enough, offered some protection. At least she was off her aching feet. At least until the butcher saw what took up space from customers looking in his windows and drove them off. Jo had been walking that day since dawn to finish her journey to the city. It was noon now, she guessed, though hard to tell. The gray sky hadn't changed its morose expression by so much as a shift of light since sunrise.

Someone new pushed into the little group cowering under the awning. Another drenched body, nearly faceless under the rags wrapped around its head, sat leaning against Jo's shoulder, worn shoes out in the rain. It wore skirts; other than that it seemed scarcely human, just one more sodden, miserable, breathing thing trying to find some protection from life.

They all sat silently for a bit, listening to the rain pounding on the awning, watching the little figures along the tide's edge, gray and shapeless as mud in their rags, darting like birds from one poor crumb of treasure the river left behind to the next. Bits of coal they stuffed into their rags to sell, splinters of wood, the odd nail or frayed piece of rope.

The bundle beside Jo murmured, "At least they're used to being wet, aren't they? River or rain, it's all one to them."

Her voice was unexpectedly young. Jo turned, maneuvering one shoulder out from beneath a sodden back. She saw a freckled girl's face between wet cloth wrapped down to her eyebrows' up to her lower lip. One eye, as blue as violets, looked resigned, calm. The other eye was swollen shut and ringed by all the colors of the rainbow.

Jo, her own face frozen for so long it hardly remembered how to move, felt something odd stirring in her. Vaguely she remembered it. Pity or some such, for all the good it did.

She said, "Whoever gave you that must love you something fierce."

"Oh, yes," the girl said. "He'll love me to death one of these days. If he finds me again."

There was a snort from the figure on the other side of Jo. This one sounded older, hoarse and wheezy with illness. Still she cackled, "I'd one like that. I used to collect my teeth in a bag after he knocked them out. I was so sorry to lose them, I couldn't bear to give them up. I was that young, then. Never smart enough to run away, even when I was young enough to think there might be a place to run to."

"There's not," Jo said shortly. "I ran back home to the country. And now I'm here again."

"What will you do?" the girl asked.

Jo shrugged. "Whatever I can."

"What have you done?"

"Mill work in the country. I had to stop doing that when my mother died and there was no one else to—to—"

"Care for the baby?" the old woman guessed shrewdly.

Jo felt her face grow cold again, less expression on it than on a brick. "Yes. Well, it's dead now, so it doesn't matter."

The girl sucked in her breath. "Cruel," she whispered.

"After that I got work at one of the big houses. Laundry and fires and such. But that didn't last."

"Did you get your references, though?"

"No. Turned out without."

"For what? Stealing?"

"No." Jo leaned her head back against the wall, watched rain running like a fountain over the edge of the swollen awning. "I wasn't that smart."

The old woman gave her crow-cackle again. "Out of the frying pan—"

Jo nodded. "Into the fire. It would have been, if I hadn't run away. If I'd stayed, I'd have had another mouth to feed when they turned me out. So I came back here."

Another voice came to life, a man's this time. "To what?" he asked heavily. "Nothing ever changes. City, country, it's all the same. You're in the mill or on the streets from dark to dark, just to get your pittance to survive one more day. And some days you can't even get that." He paused; Jo felt his racking cough shudder through them all, piled on top of one another as they were. The old woman patted his arm, whispered something. Then she turned to Jo, when he had quieted.

"He lost his wife, not long ago. Twenty-two years together and not a voice raised. Some have that."

"Twenty-two years," the man echoed. "She had her corner at the foot of the Barrow Bridge. She sang like she didn't know any better. She made you believe it, too—that you didn't know anything better than her singing, you'd never know anything better. She stopped boats with her voice; fish jumped out of the water to hear. But then she left me alone with my old fiddle and my old bones, both of us creaking and groaning without her." He patted the lump under his threadbare cloak as though it were a child. "Especially in this rain."

"Well, I know what I'm going to do when it quits," the girl said briskly. "I'm going to get myself arrested. He'll never *get* his hands on me in there. And it's dry and they feed you, at least for a few days before they let you out again."

"I got in for three months once," a young voice interposed from the far edge of the awning.

"Three months!" the girl exclaimed, her bruised eye trying to flutter open. "What do you have to do for that?"

"I couldn't get myself arrested for walking the streets, no matter how I tried, and I was losing my teeth and my looks to a great lout who drank all my money away by day and flung me around at night. I was so sick and tired of my life that one morning when I saw the Lord Mayor of the city in a parade of fine horses and soldiers and dressed-up lords and ladies, I took off my shoe and threw it at his head." The old woman crowed richly at the thought. "I let them catch me, and for three months I had a bed every night, clean clothes, and food every day. By the time I got out, my lout had moved on to some other girl and I was free."

"They don't make jails nowadays the way they used to," the fiddler said. "They never used to spoil you with food or a bed."

Jo felt the girl sigh noiselessly. "I'd do three months," she murmured, "if I knew where to find a Lord Mayor."

Jo's eyes slid to her vivid, wistful face. "What will you do," she asked slowly, "for your few days?"

"I've heard they take you off the streets if you break something. A window, or a street lamp. I thought I'd try that."

Jo was silent, pulling a tattered shawl around her. Jo had made it for her mother, years earlier, when her father had been alive to tend to his sheep and his cows, make cheese, shear wool for them to spin into thread. When she'd gone back, her mother had given the shawl to her to wrap the baby in. The sheep and cows were long gone to pay debts after her father died. Her mother's hands had grown huge and red from taking in laundry. Alf, they called the baby, after her

father. Alfred Fletcher Byrd. Poor poppet, she thought dispassionately. Not strong enough for any one of those names, let alone three.

The man who was its father showed his face in her thoughts. She shoved him out again, ruthlessly, barred that entry. She'd lost a good place in the city because of him, in a rich, quiet, well-run house. A guest, a friend of the family, who had a family of his own somewhere. He'd found her early one morning making up a fire in the empty library... The only time she'd ever seen him, and it was enough to change her life. So she'd run out of the city, all the way back home to her mother. And all she had left of any of that time was an old purple shawl.

That was then, she thought coldly. This is now.

Now, the rain was letting up a little. The young girl shifted, leaning out to test it with her hand. Jo moved, too, felt the coin or two she had left sliding around in her shoe. Enough for a loaf and a bed in some crowded, noisy, dangerous lodging house run by thieves. Might as well spend it there, before they found a way to steal it.

Or she could break a window, if she got desperate enough.

A door banged. There was the butcher, a great florid man with blood on his hands and a voice like a bulldog, growling at them to take their carcasses elsewhere or he'd grind them into sausages.

The girl wrapped her face close again, hiding her telltale eye. The fiddler coughed himself back into the rain, his instrument carefully cradled beneath his cloak. The old woman, wheezing dreadfully, pulled herself up with Jo's help. Jo picked up her covered basket for her. Flowers, she thought at first, then caught a pungent whiff of it. Whatever it was she sold, it wasn't violets. The woman winked at her and slid the basket over her arm. She trailed off after the rest of the bedraggled flock scattering into the rain.

Jo saw a lump of masonry, or maybe a broken cobblestone, half the size of her fist near the wall where the old woman had been sitting. She picked it up, slipped it into her pocket in case she needed it later.

You never knew.

HARRY stood in the enchanted garden of the McAlister's cottage in the country. Only a few miles from the city, it might have existed in a different time and world: the realm of poetry, where the fall of light and a rosebud heavy with rain from a passing storm symbolized something else entirely. The rain had stopped in the early afternoon. Bright sun had warmed the garden quickly, filled its humid, sparkling air with the smells of grass and wild thyme, the crushed-strawberry scent of the rambling roses climbing up either side of the cottage door. The cottage, an oddly shaped affair with no symmetry whatsoever, had all its scattered, mismatched windows open to the air. There was no garden fence, only a distant, rambling stone wall marking the property. The cottage stood on a grassy knoll; in nearby fields the long grass was lush with wildflowers. Farther away, brindled cows and fluffy clouds of sheep pastured within rambling field walls. Farther yet, in a fold of green, the ancient village, a bucolic garden of stone, grew along the river. On the next knoll over, John Grainger was battling the winds trying to paint the scene. Occasionally, as a puff of exuberant air tried to make off with Grainger's canvas, Harry could hear his energetic swearing.

Harry had come up for the day to look for a face for his Medusa among the McAlisters' visitors. Painters, their wives and families, models, friends who encouraged and bought, and brought friends who bought, wandered around the gardens, chatting, drinking wine and tea, sketching, painting, or watching McAlister paint.

McAlister was painting his wife. Or rather, he was painting her windblown sleeve. She stood patiently against the backdrop of climbing red roses, all of which, Harry noticed, were the exact shade of her mouth. He tried not to think of that. Thinking of her mouth made him think of the monstrous creation in his cupboard. In the sweet light of day, there in the country, he was willing to attribute his Gorgon to the morbid churning of his frustrated romantic urges. But she had inspired him, no doubt about that. Here he was in McAlister's garden, looking at every passing female, even the young girl from the kitchen who kept the teapot filled, for his Medusa.

McAlister was unusually reticent about his own subject matter. Whatever figure from myth or romance he was portraying, he needed her windblown. He had captured the graceful curves of his wife's wrist bone, her long, pliant fingers. The flow of her silky sleeve in the contrary wind proved challenging, but he persevered, carrying on three discussions at once with his onlookers as he painted. Aurora, her brooding eyes fixed on some distant horizon, scarcely seemed to breathe; she might have been a piece of garden statuary.

Harry drifted, trying not to watch.

He sat down finally next to John Grainger's mistress, Nan Stewart. She had modeled many times for John's drawings and paintings, as well as for other artists who needed her frail, ethereal beauty for their visions. Grainger had discovered her sitting in the cheaper seats of a theater one evening. A well-brought-up young girl despite her class, she refused to speak to an artist. Undaunted, he found out who she was and implored her mother's permission to let her model for him. Her mother, a fussy lump of a bed mattress, as Grainger described her, accompanied Nan a few times, until she realized that the girl could make as much in an hour modeling for artists as she could sewing for a week in a dressmaker's shop. Eventually Nan came to live with the brilliant, volatile Grainger, which explained, Harry thought, her pallor and her melancholy eyes.

She had fine red-gold hair and arresting green eyes. With marriage in view at one point in their relationship, Grainger had hired someone to teach her to move and speak properly. She smiled at Harry dutifully as he filled the empty chair beside her.

"More tea?" he asked.

A vigorous, incoherent shouting from the knoll beyond made them both glance up. Grainger, hands on his easel, seemed to be wrestling with the wind.

Nan shook her head. She had a bound sketchbook on her lap, as well as a pencil or two. Grainger encouraged her to draw. She had talent, he declared to the world, and he was right, from what Harry had seen. But that day her sketchbook was shut.

"Not inspired?" he ventured.

"Not today." She turned her attention from the painter on the knoll finally. "How are you, Harry?"

"Flourishing."

"Are you painting?"

"I have a subject in mind. I'm prowling about for a face."

"What subject?"

"It's a secret," he said lightly. "I'm not sure I can pull it off. I don't want to embarrass myself among you artists."

Her smile touched her eyes finally. "You're a sweet man, Harry. I'm still such a novice myself."

"John praises your work to the skies. He thinks very highly—"

"I know." Her face was suddenly angled away. "I know. I only wish he still thought so highly of me."

"He does!" Harry said, shocked. "He's loved you for years. You live together, you work together, you are twin souls—"

"Yes." She looked at him again, her expression a polite mask. "Yes."

He was silent, wondering what was troubling her. His eyes strayed to the group beside the rose vines. Children ran out of the cottage door; he recognized Andrew Peel's gray-eyed little beauty, and her baby brother trundling unsteadily after. Nan sighed absently, her eyes on the children. Harry's own eyes strayed. Across the garden, the statue came to life; the dark, unfathomable eyes seemed to gaze straight at him.

He started, his cup clattering, feeling that regard like a bolt from the blue, striking silently, deeply. He became aware of Nan's eyes on him, too, in wide, unblinking scrutiny. Then she set her cup down on a table; it, too, rattled sharply in its saucer.

"She's pregnant, you know," Nan said. Harry felt as though he had missed a step, plunged into sudden space. He started again, this time not so noisily. Nan added, "So am I."

He stared at her. "That's wonderful," he exclaimed finally, leaning to put his cup on the grass. He caught her hands. That's all it was then: her inner turmoil, her natural uncertainties. "Wonderful," he repeated.

"Is it?"

"Of course! You'll marry now, won't you?"

She gave him an incredulous stare. Then she loosed her hands, answered tonelessly, "Yes, quite soon. Next week, perhaps, and then we'll go away for a bit to the southern coasts to paint."

"I couldn't be happier," Harry told her earnestly. "We've all been expecting this for—"

"For years," she finished. "Yes." She hesitated; he waited, puzzled without knowing why. Something about the event, he supposed, made women anxious, prone to fear disasters, or imagine things that were not true.

Grainger's voice, sonorous and vibrant, spilled over the group. He appeared tramping up the knoll, his hat gone, his canvas in one hand, easel in the other, paints in the pockets of his voluminous, stained jacket. He blew a kiss to Nan, leaving a daub of blue on his bushy, autumn-gold mustaches. Then he turned to see how McAlister's sleeve was coming. Above his broad back, Harry saw the statue's eyes come alive again; her cheeks had flushed, in the wayward wind, a delicate shade of rose. Ever the consummate professional, she did not move, while Grainger, lingering in the group, expounded with witty astonishment how like a wing that sleeve seemed, straining for its freedom on the wind.

Harry turned back to Nan, breath indrawn for some pleasantry.

Her chair was empty. He looked around bewilderedly. She had flown herself, it seemed, but why and on what wayward wind, he could not imagine.

JO walked the darkening streets, fingering the broken cobble in her pocket. The day had been dryer than the previous one; that was as much as she could say for it. Sun seemed to linger forever as she trudged through the noisy, stinking streets. She asked everyone for work, even the butcher who had driven her out from under his awning, a shapeless, faceless, unrecognizable bundle he didn't remember in the light. But he only laughed and offered the usual, smacking with the flat of his hand the quivering haunch of meat he was slicing into steaks.

"Come back when you get desperate," he called after her, to the amusement of his customers. "Show me how fine you can grind it."

She got much the same at inns and alehouses. When she stopped at crossings to rest her feet and beg for a coin or two, she got threats from sweepers' brooms, screeches from ancient heaps of rags whose territory she had invaded, shoves from lean, hollow-cheeked, cat-eyed girls with missing teeth who told her they'd cut off her hair with a rusty knife if they saw her twice on their street.

Toward late afternoon she was too exhausted to feel hungry. She had money for one more night's lodging, or money for food. Not both. After that—she didn't think about it. That would be tomorrow, this was not. Now she had her two coppers, her two choices. And she had the stone in her pocket. She drifted, waiting for night. ' When the street lamps were lit, she made up her mind. Just in that moment. She was sitting in the dark, finally safe because nobody could see her nursing her blistered, aching soles. Nobody threatened, yelled, or made lewd suggestions; for a few precious moments she might have been invisible.

And then the gas lamps went on, showing the world where she was again. Caught in the light, she didn't even think. She was on her feet in a breath, hand in her pocket; in the next she had hurled the broken stone furiously at the light. She was startled to hear the satisfying shatter of glass. Someone shouted; the flare, still burning, illumined a couple of uniformed figures to which, she decided with relief, she would yield herself for her transgression.

There was a sudden confusion around her: ragged people rushing into the light, all calling out as they surrounded the uniforms. Jo, pushing against them, couldn't get past to reveal herself to the law.

"I did it," a woman shrieked.

"No, it was me broke the lamp," somebody else shouted. The crowd lurched; voices rose higher. "Give over, you great cow—it was me!"

"I did it!" Jo shouted indignantly. "It wasn't them at all!"

The crowd heaved against her, picked her off her feet. Then it dropped her a moment later, as it broke apart. She lost her balance, sat on the curb staring as the uniforms escorted the wrong woman entirely out of the light. She went along eagerly enough, Jo noted sourly. She pulled herself up finally, still smarting over the injustice of it all.

Then she realized that her purple shawl was gone.

She felt her throat swell and burn, for the first time in forever. Even when her mother had died she hadn't cried. Not even when the baby had died. She had taken the shawl off her mother, and then off the baby. It was all she had left to remember them by. Now that was gone. And she was blinded, tears swelling behind her eyes, because the tattered shawl had borne the burden, within its braided threads, of her memories.

Now she was left holding them all herself.

She limped to find some private shred of shadow, refusing to let tears fall. All the shadows seemed occupied; snores and mutterings warned her before she could sit. She wandered on and on through the quieting streets, unable to stop the memories swirling in her head. Her innocent young self, cleaning the ashes out of the fireplace in the fine, peaceful library. The handsome stranger with the light, easy voice, asking her name. Asking about her. Listening to her, while he touched her cuff button with his finger. Shifted a loose strand of her hair off her face. Touched her as no one had, ever before. Then gone, nowhere, not to be seen, he might have been a dream. And she, beginning to wake at nights, feeling the panic gnawing at her until she could bear it no longer, and upped and ran.

But there was something else. A street name dredged it up as she walked. Or the night smell of a great tree in a line of them along the street. She had run from someone else. Oh, she remembered. Him. The young painter. He had a gentle voice, too, but he only touched her to turn her head, or put her loose hair where he wanted it. He paid well, too, for the random hour or two she could spare him. It was his money she saved to run with, when she knew she could no longer stay. When her skirts grew tight. When the other girls began to whisper, and the housekeeper's eyes drew up tight in her head like a snail's eyes at the sight of Jo.

What was his name?

She walked under the great, dark boughs that shielded her from the streetlights. She could sleep under them, she thought. Curl up in their roots like an animal; no one would see her until dawn. The street was very quiet; a sedate carriage or a cab went by now and then, but she heard no voices. He lived on a street like this; she remembered the trees. She'd walk there from the great house, his housekeeper would let her in, and she would climb the stairs to his—his what was it? His studio. He painted her with that strange fruit in her hand, with all the rows of little seeds in it like baby teeth.

He told her stories.

You are in the Underworld, he said. You have been stolen from your loving mother's house by the King of Hades. You must not eat or drink anything he offers you; if you refuse, he will have no power over you, and he must set you free. But you grow hungry, so hungry, as you wait...

"So hungry," she whispered.

You eat only a few tiny seeds from this fruit, thinking such small things would do no harm. But harm you have done for now he can claim you as his wife and keep you, during the darkest months of the year, in his desolate and lonely realm...

What was her name?

Her eyes were closing. Her bones ached; her feet seemed no longer recognizable. Not feet any longer, just pain. Pain she walked on, and dark her only friend... She didn't choose; she simply fell, driven to her knees in the damp ground beneath a tree. She crawled close to it, settled herself among its roots, her head reeling, it felt like, about to bounce off her shoulders and roll away without her.

What was its name?

She closed her eyes and saw it: that bright, glowing fruit, those sweet, innocent seeds...

Pomegranate.

Would he want to finish his painting? she wondered.

But there was someone guarding her passage out of the Underworld. Someone stood at the gates she must pass through, protecting the serene upper realms from the likes of her. Someone whose word was law on the border between two worlds...

What was her name?

Her eyes. Jo could not remember her eyes, only felt them watching as she fled into the ancient, timeless dark. Only her bun, the light, glossy brown of a well-baked dinner roll, and her chins and the watch pinned to her bosom, at one corner of her apron.

What would her eyes say when she saw Jo?

She remembered as she felt the strong arms seize her, pull her off the earth into the nether realms of sleep.

Mrs. Grommet.

HARRY, having returned from the country without his Medusa, avoided his studio. He did not want to open the cupboard door again. He couldn't decide which might be worse: his painting talking to him or his painting not talking to him. Was expecting a painting to speak to him worse than having it speak to him? Suppose he opened the cupboard door with expectations, and nothing happened? He would be forced to conclusions which, in the cheery light of day, he did not want to think about.

So he left the house at midmorning and dropped in at a gallery where a new painting by Thomas Buck was hung. The gallery, recently opened, had acquired pieces indiscriminately in its desire to become fashionable. It aimed, it declared affably, to encourage the novice as well as to celebrate the artist. Tommy Buck's work showed promise. It had been showing promise for years. Harry, studying the new painting called *Knight Errant*, was gratified to see that Buck still could not draw to save his life. The horse was absurdly proportioned; its wide, oblong back could have been set for a dinner party of six. And the knight's hands, conveniently hidden within bulky gauntlets, gripped the reins awkwardly, as though he were playing tug-of-war. The young woman tied to a tree, toward whom the knight rode, seemed to be chatting amiably with the dragon who menaced her.

I could do better than that, Harry thought.

He felt the urge, remembered the anomaly in the cupboard, and was relieved when some friends hailed him. They carried him away eventually to dine, and from there to another friend's studio where they drank wine and watched the painter struggle with his Venus, a comely enough young woman with something oddly bland about her beauty. She bantered well, though, and stayed to entertain them over a cold supper of beef and salad. Harry got home late, pleasantly tipsy, and, inspired, went immediately up to his studio to view his work within the context of his friends'.

The Gorgon spoke when he opened the cupboard, causing him to reel back with a startled cry: he had actually forgotten her.

"Hello, Harry."

"Hlmp," he choked.

"Have you found me yet?"

He tugged at his collar, tempted to slam the cupboard shut and go to bed. But he answered, venturing closer, "No. Not yet."

"Did you even look for me?"

"Of course I did! I looked for you in every female face I passed. I didn't see you anywhere." Except, he thought, in McAlister's garden, where Her eyes had immobilized him once again. "You aren't easy to find," he added, speaking now into the shadows. "You're a very complex matter."

"Yes, I am, aren't I?" she murmured complacently. "Harry, why don't you let me out?"

"I can't. What if someone sees?"

"Well, I don't intend to pass the time of day with Mrs. Grommet, if that's what worries you."

"No, but—"

"Hang a cloth over my face or something. Pretend I'm a parrot."

"I don't think so," he sighed, sitting down on the floor because he had been standing much of the day. A lamp on the wall above his head spilled some light into the open cupboard; he could see the edge of the canvas, but not the moving mouth. Less afraid now, lulled by wine and company, he asked her curiously, "Where do you think I should look for you?"

"Oh, anywhere. You'll know me when you see me."

"But to see you is to be—"

"Yes," she said, laughing a little. "You'll recognize your model when she turns you, for just a tiny human moment, into stone."

"Only One can do that," he said softly.

"Maybe. You just keep looking."

"But for what? Are you—were you, I mean, really that terrible? Or that beautiful? Which should I be searching for?"

"Oh, we were hideous," she answered cheerfully, "me and my two Gorgon sisters. Stheno and Euryale, they were called. Even in the Underworld, our looks could kill."

"Stheno?"

"Nobody remembers them, because nothing much ever happened to them. They didn't even die, being immortal. Do you think anyone would remember me if that obnoxious boy hadn't figured out a way to chop my head off without looking at me?"

Harry dredged a name out of the mists of youthful education. "Perseus, was it?"

"He had help, you know. He couldn't have been that clever without divine intervention. Long on brawn, short on brains, you know that type of hero."

"That's not what I was taught."

"He forced our guardian sisters, the gray-haired Graie, to help him, you must have heard. He stole their only eye and their tooth."

"They had one eye?" Harry said fuzzily.

"They passed it back and forth. And the tooth. Among the three of them." She gave an unlovely cackle. "What a sight that was, watching them eat. Or squabble over that eyeball. That's what they were doing when they didn't see that brat of a boy coming. He grabbed their goods and forced them to give him magic armor and a mirror to see me in, so he wouldn't have to meet my eyes. Then he lopped my head off and used me to to kill his enemies. Even dead, I had an effect on people."

"He doesn't sound so very stupid."

"He had help," she repeated with a touch of asperity. "Anyway, it was loathsome, gray-haired old biddies who armed him to fight me. Not lissome, rosy-fingered maidens. You remember that when you paint me."

"I will." He added, brooding over the matter, "If I can find you."

"Oh, you will," she said more cheerfully. "Never fret. I do wish you would take me out of here and let me watch, though."

"No."

"I could advise you."

"You'd scare my model."

"I wouldn't talk, I promise you! And if I forget, just cover me up. Please, Harry? After all, I have inspired you. You could do me a favor. It's awfully dark in here."

"Well."

"Please? Harry?"

"Well." He got to his feet again, dusted off his trousers, yawning now and forgetting why he had come up. "I'll think about it. Good night."

"Good night, Harry."

He closed the cupboard door and went to bed.

The next morning, his ambition inflamed by what the gallery seemed to think worth hanging, he ate his breakfast hastily and early. He would not come home without his Medusa, he was determined, even if he had to search the ravaged streets and slums for her. No, he told Mrs. Grommet, she should not expect him home before evening. If then. He would go as far as he must to find his inspiration, even as far, he admitted in his inmost heart, as the country, to see if he might find that unexpected face in Aurora's shadow.

He got as far as the street. He paused to latch the garden gate behind him and was turned to stone.

A woman appeared out of nowhere, it seemed. She murmured something to him; he hardly knew what. He looked at her and time stopped. The normal street noises of passing carriages, birds, doors opening, voices calling, simply vanished. He heard the faint hum of his own blood in his ears and recognized it as a constant, unchanging sound out of antiquity. The sound heard when all else is silent nothing moves.

Her face was all bone and shadow, full of stark paradoxes: young yet ancient with experience, beautiful yet terrifying with knowledge, living yet somehow alive no longer. Whatever those great, wide-set eyes had seen had left a

haunting starkness in them that riveted him where he stood. She spoke again. She might have been speaking Etruscan, for all the words made sense to Harry. Her mouth held the same contradictions: it was lovely, its grim line warned of horror, it hungered, it would never eat again.

Sound washed over him again: a delivery wagon, a yowling cat, a young housemaid chasing after it down the street. He heard his stammering voice. "Where—where did you come from?"

She gestured. Out of a tree, out of the sky, her hand said. She was very poorly dressed, he realized: her thin, tight jacket torn at both elbows, the hem of her skirt awash with dried mud, her shoes worn down and beginning to split. She spoke again, very slowly, as if to a young child, or a man whose wits had badly strayed.

"I wondered if you had some work for me, sir. If maybe you could use me for your paintings. Anything will do. Any amount of time—"

One of his hands closed convulsively above her elbow; his other hand pulled the gate open.

"Oh, yes," he said unsteadily. "Oh, yes. Miss. Whoever you—"

"Jo, sir."

"Jo. Come in." He swept her down the walk, threw the door wide, and shouted, "Mrs. Grommet! Mrs. Grommet! We need you!"

"YOU have lice," Mrs. Grommet said.

Jo, hearing her within a cascade of lukewarm water, thought her voice sounded simply matter-of-fact. The kitchen maid stopped pouring water, began to pass a hard, lumpy bar of soap over Jo's wet hair. It took time to work up a lather.

"I'm not surprised," Jo murmured. She knelt in her tattered chemise beside a huge tub, allowing Mrs. Grommet the sight of her cracked, filthy feet. She could only hope that whatever vision had possessed Mr. Waterman to let her in the house would not be washed down the drain. But, she told herself coldly, if that happens then I will be no worse than I was before, and at least I will be clean.

"Go on, girl," the housekeeper said. "Give it a good scrub. Pretend you're doing the front steps."

"There's such a lot of it," the maid ventured. Jo closed her eyes, felt the blunt, vigorous fingers work away at her until she imagined herself underwater, floating in some river god's grip, being flailed back and forth like water weed.

"Rinse now," Mrs. Grommet ordered, and the water flowed again, copious and mercilessly cold. "There," the housekeeper said at last with satisfaction. "That should do it."

Freed, Jo straightened. The maid tossed a towel over her head and began to pummel her again.

"Go and boil some water," Mrs. Grommet told her. She added to Jo when the girl had gone, "Sometimes they work and sometimes they don't, these new hot water pipes. He didn't recognize you, did he?"

Jo swallowed. Mrs. Grommet's eyes, green as unripe tomatoes, said very little beyond her words. She knows, Jo thought. She knows why I ran away. But what Mrs. Grommet felt about that, Jo could only guess. Anyone else in the housekeeper's position would have made her sentiments about this immoral, unwashed bit of dredge crossing her employer's threshold very plain, very soon.

"No," Jo said simply. "He doesn't. He saw my face and wants to paint it. That's all. I don't know if he'll feel the same when he sees it again. If not, I'll go."

Mrs. Grommet did not comment on that. "I'll see what I can find for you to wear while you wash."

"Mrs. Grommet—" Her voice faltered; the housekeeper, hand on the doorknob, waited expressionlessly. "I know my clothes are a disgrace, but they're all I've got, if I go. Please—"

"Don't worry, girl," Mrs. Grommet said briskly, "I won't turn you out naked into the street, whatever becomes of you."

An hour later, Jo sat at the kitchen fireplace, letting her hair dry while she ate some cold beef and bread. She was dressed in a dark, shapeless gown which had made its way, some time in the distant past, to Harry's costume closet. Made to fit tight at wrists and neck and beneath the bosom, it hung on Jo like a sack. The kitchen maid, chopping onions for a pie, could not stop staring at her. Jo, too weary to eat much, didn't wonder at her staring, until the cook, a

great mound of a woman with cheeks the color of raw beef, who was rolling out pastry, made as though to swat the maid with a floury hand.

"Leave her be, then," she grunted.

"I'm sorry, miss," the girl murmured to Jo. "I can't help it. It's your hair."

Jo glanced sideways at it, as it fell around her face. It did look unfamiliar clean, but other than that it was just her hair.

"What's the matter with it? Have I got the mange, too?"

"No," the maid whispered, flicking her eyes to it again. "It's so beautiful, all long and gold and curly."

Jo blinked, at a loss. Her eyes rose helplessly, sought Mrs. Grommet's.

The housekeeper, sipping tea at the table and still inscrutable, gave a brief nod. "Oh, yes. He'll like that."

Jo, suddenly terrified, stood abruptly, her meal scattering out of her fingers into the fire. "I have to go, then," she heard herself babble. "I have to go. Where are my shoes? I had a couple of coppers in my shoes—"

Mrs. Grommet gazed at her wordlessly. Her eyes came alive suddenly, as she pushed herself to her feet. "There now, Jo," she said faintly, rounding the table to Jo's side. "Mr. Waterman's not like that. You know that. There's no need to run away from him again." She put her hand on Jo's arm and pointed to a grubby little pile near the hearth. "There's your shoes and clothes. The coins are in there, just as I found them. If you need them, you'll have them."

"Why," Jo asked her wildly, "are you treating me this way?"

"What way?" Mrs. Grommet asked, astonished.

It took Jo a moment to remember the word. "Kind." Spoken, it seemed to surprise them both. "Why are you being kind to me? You know—you—"

Mrs. Grommet's eyes went distant again. But she kept her hand on Jo's arm, patted it a little. "Stay a bit," she said finally, eluding the question. "Mr. Waterman will think we drove you away if you leave now. He'll only go looking for you."

"But I don't understand—"

"Well, you might ask him what he has in mind. You might stay long enough to listen to him. Whatever it is, I'm sure it's nothing more than a painting."

Jo, still trembling, sat down at the hearth again. She heard whispering; after a moment, the little maid brought her a cup of tea. She sipped it wordlessly, the kitchen silent behind her but for the thump of the rolling pin. When she knew she could stand again, she knew it was time. She rose, set the cup on the table. Mrs. Grommet looked at her.

"I'll take you up," she said briefly. Jo nodded gratefully, too lightheaded to speak. __

She passed familiar hallways, paintings, patterns of wallpaper, carpets that seemed more real in memory. It was, she thought dazedly, like being in two places at once; she was uncertain, from one step to the next, if she were moving backward or forward in time. They went up the second flight of steeper stairs into the top of the house. There, as Mrs., Grommet opened the door, Jo saw another memory that was real: the long rows of windows overlooking the street, the park across from them, and on the other side of the house, the river. She could see the tree under which she had wakened in the other world at dawn. She smelled oils and pungent turpentine, saw the untidy shelves of books and sketches, the oddments everywhere—peacock feathers, beads, baskets, seashells, tapestries, rich shawls of taffeta, goblets, moth-eaten furs.

She saw Harry. He stood across the room, watching her silently as she entered. She had never seen anyone look at her like that before, as though she were something not quite human, a piece of dream, maybe, that he had to step into to see her properly.

He said absently, "Thank you, Mrs. Grommet."

"Yes, sir." She lingered. "Will you need—"

"Nothing. Thank you."

She closed the door behind her. Harry crossed the room, came close to Jo. Still in his dream, she saw, he reached out, touched her hair with one finger. She felt herself stiffen. He drew back hastily. She saw his eyes again, anxious now, tentative, fascinated. Like some mooncalf boy in love for the first time, she realized, and not even sure with what.

"Will you let me paint you?" he asked huskily.

"Of course," she answered, so amazed she forgot her terrors.

"I see you—I see you as a very ancient power, a goddess, almost, who is herself mortal, but who can kill with a look. To see her is to die. But not to see her is to live without living. I see you, in all her terrible, devastating beauty, as Medusa."

"Yes, Mr. Waterman," she said, completely mystified, and thought with wonder: he doesn't recognize me at all.

MUCH later that day, almost into the next, Harry sat on the floor beside the open cupboard door, babbling to the Gorgon.

"The lines of her face are stunning. They transfixed me the moment I saw them. They seem shaped—sculpted—by primal forces, like stone, yet very much alive. They are beauty, they are death, they are youth, they are ancient beyond belief. And her eyes. Medusa's eyes. They gaze at you from another world, the Underworld perhaps; they are portals to that grim world. Of the palest gray, nearly colorless, like the mist between life and death—" He heard a vague noise from within the cupboard, almost as if the Gorgon had sneezed. "I beg your pardon. Did you speak?"

"No," she said faintly.

"And her hair. I've never seen anything like it. White gold, rippling down from her face to her knees. Again that suggestion of youth and antiquity, knowledge gained too early from unearthly places—"

"Harry."

"Her mouth—there again—"

"Harry."

"Yes, what is it?"

"I think you should let me see her."

"Her mouth is like—"

"I promise, by Perseus's shield that bore my reflection and killed me, that I won't speak a word in her presence."

"Again, it contradicts itself—it should be mobile, plump, alluring, the delicate pink of freshwater pearls—"

"You can put me in a dark corner where she won't notice me." _

"But it has long forgotten how to smile; its line is inflexible and determined—"

"Harry. It's me you're painting. I haven't seen myself in thousands of years. Have a heart. Let me see what humans think of me these days. I'm not used to being associated with beauty."

Harry was silent. He thought he perceived the faintest undertone in the Gorgon's plea, as though she were laughing at him. But her words argued otherwise. And it did seem an appropriate request. She had, after all, inspired him; how could he deny her his vision of herself?

"You'll forget," he said guardedly, "and say something impulsive and frighten her away."

"I won't. I have sworn."

"I'll think about—"

"Harry. Stop thinking about it. Just do it. Or I'll yell my head off here in the cupboard like one of Bluebeard's wives."

Harry blinked. "You could have done that—"

"Today, while she was here. Yes. But I didn't, did I? I am capable of controlling myself. I won't say a word in her presence, no matter how—"

"How?"

"No matter what."

"Do I amuse you?" Harry demanded indignantly.

"No, no," the Gorgon said soothingly. "No. I'm just incredibly old, Harry, and my sense of humor is warped. I'm very ignorant of the modern world, and it would do me good to see even a tiny corner of it."

Harry sighed, mollified. "All right. Tomorrow morning, before she comes."

"Thank you, Harry."

He got up early to hang the Gorgon above some high bookshelves, among other old sketches and watercolors scattered along the wall. The contradictions in the face startled him anew: the frightened eyes, the pale, anxious brows, the lush, voluptuous, wine-red mouth. His eyes lingered on that mouth as he descended the ladder. He would make a trip to the country soon, he decided. She was down there with Alex nearly every weekend. The mouth seemed to crook in a faint smile; his foot froze on the bottom rung.

"No," he said sharply. "You must be absolutely still."

The mouth composed itself. The eyes gazed unseeingly across the room. He had placed the painting where most often his model would have her back to it. She would only glimpse it as she faced the door to leave. And few people looked that high without reason, Harry had learned to his chagrin when his work had been hung near the ceiling in exhibits. She would never notice the peculiar face with its mismatched features unless she looked for it.

He spent a few days sketching Jo, learning every nuance of her face, experimenting with various positions, draperies. He decided, in the end, simply to paint her face at the instant she saw herself reflected in the young hero's shield. The Medusa turning her baleful gaze upon herself and realizing in that instant that she had slain herself. The shield would frame her within the canvas. The pale, rippling beauty of the model's hair would transform itself easily into gorgeous, dangerous snakes. Jo's stark-white skin, drained of life force it seemed, hollowed and shadowed with weariness and strain, hinted of the Medusa's otherworldly origins. He positioned black silk in graceful folds about her neck to emphasize the shadows. That would be her only costume. That and the snakes in her hair, which might suggest, in their golden brilliance, the final light of the sun upon her dying and deadly face.

So lost he was in the excitement of inspiration that he scarcely remembered to speak to his model. She came in the mornings, murmured, "Good morning, Mr. Waterman," and sat in her chair beside his easel. He arranged the silk about her throat, giving her a greeting or a pleasantry. Then she became so still she hardly seemed to breathe. He worked, utterly absorbed, until the light began to fade. Then, her pallor deep by then, her humanity began to intrude upon him. She is tired, he would realize. She must be hungry. I am.

He would put his palette down and open the door. "Mrs. Grommet," he would call down the stairs. Then he would study the day's work until the housekeeper hove into view, bearing a tea tray and Jo's wages for the day. Jo would follow her down. Mrs. Grommet would feed her in the kitchen, for Harry was reluctant to glimpse, at this sensitive stage, his Medusa with her cheeks full of mutton.

The Gorgon above their heads watched all this silently, refraining from comment.

She hardly saw Jo, Harry knew, except when she rose to leave. Then the wan, beautiful face would be visible to the painting above her head. Jo never looked that high; she seemed oddly incurious about the studio. Other models had prowled around peering at his canvases, opening books, trying on bits of finery, fingering this and that. But Jo just came and left, as though, Harry thought, she truly vanished into another world and was not much interested in his.

The Gorgon finally asked one evening, after Jo had followed Mrs. Grommet downstairs, "Where does she go?"

"What?" Harry asked through a bite of sandwich.

"Your model. Where does she sleep at night?"

"How should I know?" He was sitting in a soft stuffed chair, weary from standing all day, and devouring sandwiches and cakes, he suspected, like a well-brought-up vulture. He could see the Gorgon's face from that position if he wanted. Her voice startled him; she hadn't said much for days.

"Aren't you pleased with me, Harry?"

"For being so quiet? Oh, yes, I'm very grateful." He swallowed another mouthful of hot, sweet tea, and looked up at her. "What do you think of her?"

"Oh, a great deal," the painting answered vaguely, and gave a sudden, crude snort of a laugh. "She's far too beautiful for the likes of me, of course. But I see your point in her."

"Do you?"

"Beauty that can kill. But Harry, she's bone-thin and she's not much use to you dead. She might sleep in an alley for all you know. Anything could happen to her, and you'd never know what."

Harry was silent, blinking. He took another scalding sip. "I hadn't thought of that."

"Well, think of it. What would you do if tomorrow she didn't appear?"

The thought brought him out of his chair to pace a little, suddenly edgy. "Surely I pay her enough for decent lodgings. Don't I?"

"How much is enough?"

"I don't—"

"And suppose she has others dependent on her? Who need every coin she brings to them?"

"Well, maybe—" He paused, still tramping across the room; then he dropped into his chair again. "I'll ask Mrs. Grommet."

"You could ask your model."

Harry rolled his head to gaze up at the painting. "How?" he pleaded. "She is my Medusa. She exists only in this little world, only to be painted. I dare not make her real. She might lose all her power, become just another woman in my eyes."

The Medusa snorted again, this time without amusement. "She'd still be there for you to paint her. Your brush knows how to lie. If she vanishes into the streets out there, where will you go to look for her? You might at least ask her that."

Harry tried, at least three times, the next morning, before he got a question out. His model, whose name he kept forgetting, sat silently gazing as he had requested, at the back of his easel. What she saw, he could not begin to guess. Her wide, eerily pale eyes seemed to glimpse enormities in his peaceful studio. Until now, he had absently confused her expression with the Gorgon seeing herself for the first time and the last. Now he wondered, despite his better judgment, what those eyes had truly seen to make them so stricken.

He cleared his throat yet again. Her eyelids trembled, startled, at the sound of his voice. "Tell me, er—Jo?"

"Yes, sir?"

"Do you have a decent place to stay at night? I mean, I do pay you enough for that, don't I?"

She kept her face very still, answered simply, "Yes, Mr. Waterman. I go to a lodging house on Carvery Street."

"Alone?"

Her eyes flicked up, widening; he caught the full force of the Gorgon's stare. "Sir?"

"I mean—I only meant—Do you have other people to care for? Others dependent on you?"

"Oh." The fierce gaze lowered once again to the middle distance. "No, sir. They're dead."

"Oh," he said inanely. He painted in silence a while, aware, though he told himself he imagined it, of eyes boring into his head from above the bookshelves. He glanced up finally, was appalled to see the full red lips moving wildly in a grotesque parody of speech.

He cleared his throat again hastily. "Do you get enough to eat? I mean, you're very thin."

"I'm eating better now," she answered.

The question sent a faint, unwelcome patina of color into her white face that at first alarmed him. Then he thought, Why not? Medusa, seeing her own beauty for the first time, may well flush with pleasure and astonishment before she turns herself into stone.

"Do you know," he asked aimlessly, trying to make conversation, "the story of Medusa?"

"Something of it," she said hesitantly. "Some sort of monster who turned people into stone?"

"Yes."

"Ugly, wasn't she?"

"Hideous," he answered, "by all accounts."

He heard her take a breath or two then, as if to speak.

Then she grew still again, so still that he wondered if he had somehow turned her into stone.

HE let his model rest a day or two later and spent a tranquil afternoon in the country, watching others work. Arthur Millidge was there, putting a honeysuckle background to what would be his *Nymph Dying for Love of a Shepherd*. He kept knocking his easel over swatting at bees. John Grainger was there as well, to Harry's surprise, back on his windy knoll painting the distant village. McAlister had finished his wife's windblown sleeve; now he was engrossed in her bare feet and ankles, around which green silk swirled and eddied. Harry, after his first glimpse of those long marble toes and exquisite anklebones, took the first chair he found and tried not to think about them.

Arthur Millidge's wife Holly handed him a cup of tea and sat down beside him. She was a pretty, good-natured, giddy-headed thing, who could pull out an arrow and hit an astute social bull's-eye just when she seemed at her most frivolous. She was watching her suffering husband with a great deal of amusement.

"Oh, poor Arthur," she cried, when he batted at a wasp with his brush and actually hit it; it stuck, struggling, to the yellow-daubed bristles. "At least it's the right color."

Her husband smiled at her wanly.

"I thought," Harry said blankly, "that Grainger and Nan would still be at the south coast."

"Oh, no," Holly answered briskly. "They only spent a few days there."

"But they are—they did get married?"

"So it seems. She's wearing a ring."

"Is she here?"

"No, poor thing, the traveling exhausted her in her condition, so she let John come alone."

Harry's eyes crept back to Aurora. Her condition, as well, he remembered; he could not, for a prolonged moment, stop studying her. The flowing, voluminous silk hid everything. Her face seemed a trifle plumper, but then he had been gazing at his emaciated model for days, he reminded himself. Aurora's face seemed exquisitely serene, he realized, ivory, full and tranquil, like a midsummer moon.

"The condition suits Aurora," Holly said, reading Harry's thoughts in her uncanny way. "I think poor Nan will have a great deal of difficulty with it. She's frail anyway and suffers from imagination."

Harry pulled his eyes away from McAlister's wife, dipped his hand into a bowl full of cherries. "Which of us doesn't?" he asked lightly.

"I'm sure I don't." Holly laughed and helped herself to a cherry or two from Harry's hand. "I heard you're painting something mysterious, Harry. Tommy Buck said that he and some friends came to visit you, and you refused to let them into your studio."

"They frightened my model," Harry said, remembering the shouts, Mrs. Grommet's flurried protest, the stampede up the stairs. "I thought she might faint, she was trembling so badly."

Holly maneuvered a cherry pit daintily from lips to palm and tipped it into the grass. "But who is she? Someone we know?"

"No. I found her in the street."

"How exciting! And what are you making of her?"

"Oh, I'm experimenting with this and that," he answered airily. "Nothing much, yet."

"She must be very pretty."

"In a wild kind of way. She's very shy. Not used to company."

"Everyone," Holly sighed, "is full of secrets. Alex won't tell what he's working on, either. You should bring her here, Harry."

"I should?"

"It might calm her, knowing others like her who model. Besides, if you decide you can't make anything of her, someone else might, and then she wouldn't have to go back into the streets."

"True," he said absently, flinging a cherry pit at a bee buzzing in the honeysuckle. "Oh, sorry, Arthur. I was aiming for the bee."

"Don't try to be helpful, Waterman."

"I won't, then."

"Will you bring her, Harry?"

"I might," he answered vaguely and changed the subject. "What do you think McAlister is making out of his wife?"

"Oh, who knows?" Holly said, waving midges away from her face. "Blind Justice? Aphrodite? Maybe even he doesn't know. The point is to keep her here, don't you think?"

"Here?" Harry repeated, mystified. Holly turned her head, regarded him blithely a moment, chin on her fist. Abruptly she laughed and got to her feet.

"Oh, Harry. You are so unbearably sweet. Arthur, come into the shade with us and have something to drink before you melt in all that light. I'm trying to worm secrets out of Harry."

"Harry has secrets?" John Grainger's deep, vigorous voice intoned incredulously behind them. "*Mirabile dictu!*" He dropped into a chair, dipped into the cherries with cerulean blue fingertips and demanded of the hapless Harry, "Tell all."

JO sat in Harry's kitchen, eating her supper after he had returned from the country and began to paint her again. At his request, she had given Mrs. Grommet explicit instructions about where to find her if Harry needed her. Mrs. Grommet dutifully wrote the address down. Then, to Jo's surprise, she poured herself a cup of tea and pulled out a chair at the end of the table near Jo, where she sat close to the fire.

Mrs. Grommet said, "I know Mrs. Atkins, the woman who owns the lodging house on Carvery Street. She's a good, honest woman. Or at least she was when we worked together, in a great house over on Bellingham Road."

Jo's eyes slid uncertainly to her face. She managed an answer, after a moment. "She seems kind."

"She married unexpectedly. Lucky for her, her husband had saved a little money. And had a very loving heart. Married they were for thirty years before he died, and never a word passed his lips that their child wasn't his."

Jo coughed on a bit of pickled beet. The kitchen maid was on the far side of the kitchen, banging pots noisily in weltering dishwater. The cook was in the pantry counting spoons, which was her way of saying resting her feet and having a nip. Mrs. Grommet's green eyes opened meaningfully upon Jo, then lowered again. She sipped tea, half-turned at a splash from the sink.

"Go easy, girl! You're washing pots, not the flagstones."

Jo put two and two together, cleared her throat. Still, words came out with difficulty. "That's why—" She drew a breath, met the housekeeper's eyes. "That's why you're kind to me."

"Things happen," Mrs. Grommet said, the corners of her mouth puckering a moment. "They're not always our fault."

"No." She lifted her cup. It trembled badly; she put it down again quickly before she spilled. She folded her hands tightly, said to them, "It takes a special heart to see it that way, though."

Mrs. Grommet patted her hands. "I saw how you were with Mr. Waterman the first time you came here. So quiet and nicely behaved. Some of his models—well, the less said. Not that he was that way, at least not under his own roof. But I hear the young men talking about the girls they paint, about which would only pose and go, and which might stay around after for their bit of fun." She became aware of the maid handling the pots as gently as possible, and raised her voice again. "Finish up there, Lizzie, then go and see if Cook needs help in the pantry."

"Yes, Mrs. Grommet."

Jo said very softly, "You were friends, then, you and Mrs. Atkins, when you worked on Bellingham Road."

"Mary. Mary Plum she was, then. We started there very young, you see, and during the same summer. We were there together for five years. What happened to her seemed so unfair to me. It was one of the young friends of the family—"

"Yes," Jo whispered.

"Nothing to him, of course. He told her he loved her and would care for her. He couldn't even remember her name or her face, next time he came. He looked straight at her, she said, when she was serving dinner, and didn't even see her. She was at the point then when she had to leave. She had no choice. But then Martin—Mr. Atkins—found her weeping under the privet hedge when he went to trim it. He was a gardener there, then, and very well thought of. He'd

saved all his money for years for an investment, he said. He asked Mary to be his investment." She paused, watching Jo's struggling face. "I've never seen you smile before."

"I've nearly forgotten how. Did he really put it like that?"

"She was a pretty thing," Mrs. Grommet said reminiscently. "He said he'd had his eye on her, but never thought he'd have a chance. Well, chance came, wearing an unexpected face, and he was brave enough to take it. She had a daughter who looked just like her. After some years, he'd worked so hard that—" She stopped abruptly. "Oh, dear."

The tears came out of nowhere Jo could name, hot, fierce and seemingly unstoppable. She put her hands over her mouth, turned her back quickly to face the fire again. She heard Mrs. Grommet say something sharply to Lizzie; all sounds faded in the kitchen. Jo felt a tea towel pushed into her hand.

She buried her face in it, seeing, feeling, smelling all at once, as though memory, locked so carefully away, had crashed and blundered out of its door. His warm, slight weight in her arms, the smell of milk in his hair, his wide, round eyes catching at hers.

"Poor Alf," she whispered into the towel. "Oh, poor Alf. Poor little poppit. Oh, Mrs. Grommet, I did love him despite everything—"

"Now, then."

"He was just too frail to go on."

"There now." Mrs. Grommet patted her shoulder.

"I'm sorry."

"It's all right; Lizzie's gone. You have a good cry."

"I haven't—I forgot to cry, when—when—" Her voice wailed away from her, incoherent. She shook hair over her face and eyes like a shroud, trying to hide in it while tears came noisily, messily, barely restrained under the wad of tea towel. "Poor mite, he was all my heart. I think we must have gotten buried together, and I have been just a ghost ever since. No wonder Mr. Waterman sees me as that stone-eyed monster—"

"What?"

She drew a raw, ragged breath that was half sob. "Some—Medusa—who turns people into stone with her eyes. That's what he sees when he looks at me." Then she felt an odd bubble in her chest; loosed, it sounded strangely like a laugh. "I'd terrify anyone with these eyes now—"

"Let me see," Mrs. Grommet said faintly. Jo lifted her face from the towel, pulled wet strands of hair from her cheeks.

Her throat ached again at the housekeeper's expression. But it was not grief so much as relief that she could still cry, she could still laugh. Which she found herself doing again amid her tears, in a damp, inelegant snort. "Look what I've done to you. You're stunned..."

"You do look a bit fiery around the eyes," Mrs. Grommet admitted. "But no wonder Mr. Waterman doesn't remember you, with all that happened to you since."

"I was a maid when he began his first painting. Now, I'm Medusa." She sat again, drew a shuddering breath as she mopped her eyes.

"Maybe. But you look all the younger now for those tears." She refilled their cups. "Not that you're much more than a girl. But you just seemed... like you'd seen a Medusa, yourself. And lived to tell about it."

Jo wrapped her fingers around the cup, managed to raise it without spilling. "Mrs. Grommet, you've been so good to me," she said huskily. "I don't know how to thank you."

"Well. You reminded me so of Mary, when you disappeared like that. I couldn't see that you could have found any way to help yourself, except maybe into the river. Mr. Waterman looked for you when you left. He fretted about you. And not only for his painting. He wanted to help."

"I know." She got a sip past the sudden burn in her throat. "I was too frightened to think then. And now, I don't care if he never recognizes that terrified waif. I don't want him feeling sorry for me. I'm glad he doesn't know me."

"I did," Mrs. Grommet said, "the moment I saw you. I don't see how he can't. Being a painter as he is. Faces are his business."

"He doesn't see me. He sees the woman he wants to see. And I hope—" She touched her swollen eyes lightly. "I hope she's still there, in spite of my tears."

"Now he's got you thinking that way," Mrs. Grommet said roundly. "As if you're not yourself."

"But I never am, when he paints me. I am always the woman he has in mind. I think that's why he doesn't like to talk to me. He only wants to know the woman in his head. The dream he has of me. If I told him too much about"—she swallowed, continued steadily—"about Alf, about the streets, the mill, about my mother's hands all cracked from taking in laundry, about the purple shawl, the dream would be gone. All he'd have left is me."

HARRY was gazing at his Medusa, a ham sandwich forgotten in one hand. With the other hand he was pointing out to the Medusa overhead various examples of his brilliance or his clumsiness, which seemed, judging by the Gorgon's expression, to be running about neck and neck that day.

"Look there. Putting that fleck of pure white just so, I've captured perfectly the suggestion of ice in her gray eyes. Do you see it? Of course the delicate line of the inner eye is a bit blurry, there; I'll have to rework it." Raptly, he took a bite of sandwich. "And there..." he said with his mouth full, overcome. "You see what I did?"

"Harry. You still don't know anything about this woman."

"I told her to give Mrs. Grommet her address. You made a good point about that. Now, her hair. I shall have to go to the zoological gardens, observe some snakes." He paused, chewing, added regretfully, "I should have brought a few back with me from the country. I didn't think of it. Perhaps because I don't see the point of them. They just begin and go on and keep going on the same way they began, and then they end without any reason whatsoever." He paused again.

"Don't say it," the Gorgon pleaded.

Harry glanced at her, took another bite. "All right, I won't. But it is a bit like life, isn't it?"

"Harry!"

He smiled. "I'd give a lot to see your snakes, though. What color were they?"

"Ugly."

"No color is ugly."

"Maybe," the Medusa sighed, "but you must remember that I was hideous. I never looked at myself, of course, and my snakes were usually twined around my head. But now and then a loop or a head would lose its direction and slide near my eyes. They were fairly drab: brown, black, gray, without any interesting patterns. Big, they were, though. Thick as your wrists."

"Really? What did they eat?"

"Air, I suppose. Thoughts. They were my hair, Harry; they weren't meant to exist like ordinary creatures. Your hair feeds on you."

"I'll make hers like treasure," Harry said, studying the magnificent, haunting eyes again, the dangerous, irresistible mouth. "Gold, white gold, silver, buttercup, lemon. A shining, glittering swarm of colors. Tomorrow morning, I'll go —"

"She's coming tomorrow."

"I'll paint her in the morning then and visit the snakes in the afternoon."

"You could," the Gorgon suggested, "take her with you. You might get a better perspective on the snakes as hair if you see them both together."

Harry grunted, struck. "Possible..." Then he blinked. "No. What am I saying? I can't possibly watch this devastatingly powerful creature wandering around looking at snakes in the zoological garden. Something would happen."

"Like what?"

"She'd step in a puddle, get a paper stuck to her shoe, some such. She'd mispronounce the names of things, she'd want tea and a bun, or peanuts for the bears—"

"I can't see that frozen-eyed woman tossing peanuts to the bears. But what you're saying, Harry, is that she would be in danger of turning human."

"Exactly," Harry said adamantly. "I don't want her human, I want her Gorgon—"

"I bet she'd be a charming human."

Harry opened his mouth. As though one of the Medusa's snakes had streaked down quick as thought and bit him, he glimpsed the potential charms in those eyes, warming in a smile, that hair, piled carelessly on her head, tendrils about her face playing in a breeze. He clenched his fists, pushed them in front of his eyes. "No," he said fiercely. "No, no, and no. This is my masterwork, and nothing—" He lowered his hands as suddenly. "What on earth is that hubbub downstairs?"

There seemed to be a good deal of shouting and thumping coming up the stairwell. Mrs. Grommet's voice joined it and it resolved itself easily then, into any number of friends in every stage of revelry pushing their way upstairs to join Harry.

He threw open the door, heard their chanting as they ascended. "Where is she, Harry? We must see her. We want to see your painting, foul as it may be. We have come to kneel at the feet of your Muse, Harry!"

Harry had just enough time to remove the painting from the easel and slide it carefully into the cupboard. Where, he hoped fervently, it would not also acquire a voice. He opened his study door, stepped into the landing. Half a dozen friends, a couple of them painters, one planning a gallery, others budding poets or philosophers, or whatever was fashionable this week, reeled into one another at the sight of him. Then, they rushed the second flight of stairs.

Harry glimpsed Mrs. Grommet below, flinging her hands in the air, turning hastily back to the kitchen.

"Don't you dare lock your door this time," the honey-haired, sloe-eyed Tommy Buck called. "We'll sit on your stairs and hold them hostage until you reveal her. We'll—"

"She's not here," Harry said, with great relief. "She left an hour ago."

"Then let's see your painting."

"No. It's too dreadful." He turned adroitly as they reached the landing, and locked the door behind him. "You'll laugh, and I'll be forced to become a bricklayer."

"She's in there." Tommy Buck paused to hiccup loudly, then banged upon the door. "You've hidden her."

"I have not. She's a shy, sensitive woman and you lot would cause her to turn into a deer and flee."

"Prove it."

"Prove what?"

"Prove she's not there."

"All right, I will. But I don't want you all rummaging about my studio and tossing my bad paintings out the window. You can look in and see, Tommy. The rest of you go downstairs and wait."

"No," said one of the poets, a burly young man who looked like he might have flung bricks around in an earlier life. "Open up, Harry boy. Show us all."

"No. I shall defend all with my life."

"What's that in your hand?" Tommy asked, swaying as he squinted at it.

Harry looked. "My ham sandwich."

"Ham. He has ham in there," someone said wistfully. "I'm hungry."

"Here," Harry said, tossing him the remains.

"I saw it first," Tommy said indignantly. "I'm hungrier." He paused, still swaying lithely, like a reed in a breeze. "I've got an idea."

"He has an idea."

"I'd rather have a sandwich."

"Silence! I will speak! My idea is this. We all leave—" He waved his arms, fending off protests. "Listen. If we all go out to dinner, and Harry goes out to dinner with us, and then goes wherever we happen to go after that, it will prove that he hasn't got a model locked up in his studio. Won't it?"

"He could get the Grommet to unlock her," someone muttered.

"I won't speak to her," Harry promised. "And—" he dangled it. "I have the only key."

Tommy made a snatch at it. Harry tucked it out of reach. "She really has gone home," he told them. "And I think Tommy has an excellent idea. Maybe, if we hurry out, we'll catch a glimpse of her on the street."

They were quiet, staring at him, faces motionless in the stair lights.

Then, as one, they turned, clattered furiously back down the stairs. Harry followed more slowly, brushing crumbs off his shirt and rolling down his sleeves. He heard the street door fly open, voices flow down the hall and out. Someone called his name, then the sounds faded. He didn't hear the door close. He wondered if Mrs. Grommet had taken refuge in a closet until the barbarian horde had gone.

He reached the hall and nearly bumped into his Medusa, coming quickly out of the kitchen with Mrs. Grommet at her heels.

"Jo—" he exclaimed, startled.

She pulled up sharply, staring at him, just as surprised.

"Mr. Waterman," she breathed. "I thought you had left with them."

He was silent, studying her. Something was awry with her face. It seemed streaked, flushed in odd places; her cold, magnificent eyes looked puffy and reddened, oddly vulnerable. He caught his breath, appalled.

"What have you done?"

"Sorry, Mr. Waterman," she said tremulously, brushing at her eyes. "It'll be gone by morning."

"But—" Something else was happening to her face as he stared. Lines shifted. Memory imposed itself, rearranging a curve here, a hollow there. He swallowed, feeling as though the world he knew had vanished for an eye blink, and then returned, subtly, irrevocably altered.

"Jo," he said, feeling his heart beat. "Jo Byrd."

She said simply, "Yes."

SHE returned the next morning as she promised, though not without misgivings. She looked for the same apprehension in the artist's eyes, searching for his Medusa in her face while he arranged the black silk around her neck, to draw out her pallor as he said. She wasn't certain about the pallor. The face in the tiny mirror above her washstand had been more colorful than usual. Nor was she at all certain what Mr. Waterman was thinking. He was very quiet, murmuring instructions now and then. She would have described his expression as peculiar, if he had asked. He looked like someone who had swallowed a butterfly, she thought: a mixed blessing, no matter how you turned it.

She said finally, hesitantly, "Mr. Waterman. If you can't see your Medusa now for seeing me, I'll understand."

He gave his head a quick little shake, met her eyes. "As the Gor—as someone pointed out, I tell lies with my brush. Let's see how well I can do it."

"But—"

"We'll give it a try," he insisted calmly. "Shall we?"

"If you say so, sir." She subsided, prepared herself to sit as silently as usual.

But, strangely, now he seemed in a mood to talk. "I am," he said, touching white into the black around the Medusa's throat, "incredibly embarrassed that I didn't recognize you."

"I've gotten older."

"By how much? A year? I'm a painter! I've been staring at you daily. Not to mention—" His lips tightened; whatever it was, he didn't mention it.

"Yes, sir."

He looked at her again, instead of the silk. "I can't imagine what you've gone through. Or, rather, I can only try to imagine it. The child... it must have died?"

Her voice caught, but she had no tears left for that, it seemed. "Yes. He was never strong."

"Where did you go, when you vanished in the middle of my painting?"

"I went home to my mother's, in the country."

"I looked for you."

"I know. Mrs. Grommet told me."

His mouth crooked ruefully. "So she recognized you."

"The way I see it," Jo explained, "Mrs. Grommet was protecting your household. She has to know what she opens your door to. You remember what I looked like, then."

"Yes."

"She had to make decisions in her own mind about me. You were only seeing your painting. She was seeing a hungry, filthy wreck of a girl and trying to judge all in a moment whether I would steal the silver, eat with a fork or my fingers, go mad and break all the crockery. She was looking for reasons not to be afraid to let me through the door. You just saw your dream and let me walk right in."

He ran his hand through his hair, nearly tangling the brush in it. "Makes me sound like a fool."

She thought about that, shrugged. "I don't know. How do you like your painting?"

He looked at it, his eyes going depthless, still, like water reflecting an empty sky. They were, she realized suddenly, the exact blue of the dragonflies in the stream behind her parents' cottage. She'd lie and watch them dart and light, little dancing arrows as blue as larkspur.

Mr. Waterman blinked; so did she. They both drew back a little from what they'd been examining. She recognized that expression on his face; it was how he had been looking at her until now.

"I think—" he said, still gazing at his painting, and stammering a little, "I think—I wasn't a fool, after all. I think it's at least better than anything I've done so far. Jo..." He turned to her abruptly. "I have such amazing visions of your hair. Are you afraid of snakes?"

"No more or less than anything else that might bite me. But, sir," she amended warily, "surely you're not going to put them in my hair? I don't think I want to wear them."

"No, no." His thoughts veered abruptly. "I have to fix that eye before I go on. Look at me. Don't blink." He added, after a moment or two, "You can talk."

"About what?"

"Anything that won't make you cry." She felt her eyes flush at the thought; he looked stricken. "I'm sorry, Jo."

"It's just—somehow I never got around to crying before."

"Tell me something, anything you remember, that once made you happy. If there was anything," he added carefully.

"Well." The tide retreated; she gazed, dry-eyed, at her past. "When my father was alive, he kept a small flock of sheep for wool. I liked to look at them, all plump and white in their green field, watch the lambs leap for no reason except that they were alive. He'd shear them and we'd spin the wool into yarn to sell. Sometimes we'd look for madder root to dye it purple."

"We?" he asked, busy at the corner of her eye, from what she could see. "Sister?"

"My mother. I didn't have sisters. I had a little brother for a couple of years once, but he died."

"Oh. But you chose not to stay with your mother? To come back here instead?"

"She died, too."

"Oh. I'm sorry."

"Yes," she said softly, but without tears. "So was I. So I came back here. And you rescued me."

He looked at her, oddly surprised. "I did?"

"You did," she said huskily. "I couldn't find work, I was exhausted, I had two coppers to my name. I found my way to your street just muddling around in the dark, and then I remembered you. I slept under a tree, that night before I came to your door. I didn't have any hope, but I didn't have anything left to do. I even—I even tried to get myself arrested for breaking a street lamp, to have a place to sleep."

He was watching her, brush suspended. "When you do that—"

"What, sir?"

"Even when you only think about smiling, you change the shape of your eye. Medusa does not smile." He stopped abruptly, cast an odd glance above her head, and amended, "At least we have no recorded evidence that she smiled."

"You asked me to think about something happy."

"You didn't smile, then. It was irony, not happiness, that made you smile."

She mulled that over. "You mean trying to get into jail for a bed?"

"Yes. What happened? Did you miss the street lamp?"

"No. I hit it dead-on. But a dozen others stepped up on the spot and swore it was them that threw the stone. Someone else got my bed. So I wandered on—"

"And," he said softly, his brush moving again, "you found me."

"You found me," she whispered.

"No tears. Medusa does not cry."

She composed her face again, summoned the icy, gorgeous monster to look out of her eyes. "She does not cry."

"But," he said after a while, "she might perhaps like to come with me this afternoon to look at snakes. No blinking."

"No blinking."

"But snakes?"

"Looking at snakes," she said, suddenly aware of his own fair, tidy hair, on a nicely rounded head, his young face with its sweet, determined expression, "would make Medusa happy."

HARRY stood on the ladder in his studio, detaching the Gorgon from her nail. He had gotten in late. After spending a few hours among the reptiles and other assorted creatures, he had walked Jo to her lodging house on Carvery Street. Then he had wandered aimlessly, oddly light-headed, dropping in at studios here and there to let his friends tease him about his imaginary model, his hopeless daub of a painting so dreadful he was forced to keep it hidden behind locked doors. He laughed with them; his thoughts kept straying back to his studio, sometimes to the reptiles, none of which had done justice to his Medusa's hair.

But my brush can lie, he told himself. He had insisted on buying Jo peanuts in the zoological garden. But instead of throwing them to the animals, she had simply given them to a wiry, dirty-faced boy who had somehow wriggled his way in and was begging near the lions' den.

His elbow hit a book on top of the shelves as he maneuvered the painting down and under his arm. The book dropped with a thud that probably woke the house. He breathed a curse, trying to be as quiet as possible. The ladder rungs creaked ominously.

The Gorgon, who had been blessedly silent until then, said sharply, her mouth somewhere under his armpit, "Harry, you're not putting me back into the cupboard."

"Sh—"

"Don't shush me. Just because you don't need me anymore."

"What do you mean I don't need you?"

"I saw the way you looked at her."

"I was not aware that I looked at her in any particular way."

"Ha!"

"Shhh," Harry pleaded. "Mrs. Grommet will think I'm up here entertaining lewd company."

"Thank you," the Gorgon said frostily. But once started, she could never be silent for long, Harry knew. He felt the floor beneath his foot at last, and her curiosity got the better. "Then what are you going to do with me?"

"I just want to look at you."

He positioned a wooden chair beside the easel, propped the painting on it. Then he drew the black silk off the new Medusa. Side by side, Jo past and Jo present, he studied them: the young, terrified girl; the haunted, desperate woman. A year in the life... "What a life," he breathed, moved at the thought of it.

The Gorgon spoke, startling him again. "What are you looking for?"

"I wanted to see why it was I didn't recognize her. I understand a little better now. That hair—I should have known it anywhere. But the expressions are completely different. And the skin tone... She was at least being fed when she came to me the first time." His voice trailed away as he studied them: Persephone who had innocently eaten a few seeds and transformed herself into the doomed Medusa. He asked, suddenly curious himself, "Where do you live? I mean, where were you before you took up residence in my painting?"

"Oh, here and there," she answered vaguely.

"No, really."

"Why? Are you thinking of ways to get rid of your noisy, uncouth Gorgon?"

He thought about that, touched the Medusa on the easel. "Who inspired this out of me? No. Stay as long as you like. Stay forever. I'll introduce you to my friends. None of them have paintings that speak. They'll all be jealous of me."

"You invited me," she reminded him.

"I did."

"I go where I'm invited. Where I am invoked. When I hear my name in someone's heart, or in a painting or a poem, I exist there. The young thug Perseus cut my head off. But he didn't rid the world of me. I've stayed alive these thousands of years because I haven't been forgotten. Every time my name is invoked and my power is remembered anew, then I live again, I am empowered."

"Yes," Harry said softly, watching those full, alluring lips move, take their varying shapes on canvas in ways that he could never seem to move them in life. "I understand."

"You understand what, Harry?" the Gorgon asked so gently that he knew, beneath her raucous ways, she understood a great deal more than he had realized.

"I understand that I must go to the country again soon."

"Good idea. Take Jo with you."

"Should I? Really? She might be uncomfortable. And Grainger will try to seduce her away from me. He tries to steal everyone's models."

"That will happen sooner or later in any case, unless you are planning to cast her back into the streets once you've finished with her."

"No. I don't want to do that. I hadn't really thought ahead. About sharing her. Or painting her as someone else. Until now she was just my inspiration." He paced a step or two, stopped again in front of the paintings. Jo then. Jo now. "She's changed again," he realized. "There's yet another face. I wonder if that one will inspire another painting."

"Something," the Medusa murmured.

"Something," Harry agreed absently. "But you're right. I certainly can't put her back on the streets just so that she stays my secret. If she can get other work, she should. If I decide I don't—"

"Harry," the Gorgon interrupted. "One thing at a time. Why don't you just ask her if she'd like to come to the country with you and be introduced to other painters? She'll either say yes or she'll say no. In either case, you can take it from there."

Harry smiled. "That seems too simple."

"And find her something nice to wear. She looks like a bedpost in that old dress. Went out of style forty years ago, at least. I may not have a clue about what to do with my hair, but I always did have an eye for fashion. Though of

course, things were incredibly boring in my day, comparatively speaking. Especially the shoes! You wouldn't believe —"

"Good night," Harry said, yawning, and draped the black silk over her. "See you in the morning."

JO sat in the McAlisters' garden, sipping tea. She felt very strange, as though she had wandered into a painting of a bright, sunny world strewn with windblown petals, where everyone laughed easily, plump children ran in and out of the ancient cottage, and a woman, still as a statue at the other side of the garden, was being painted into yet another painting. Some guests had gathered, Harry among them, to watch Alex McAlister work. Jo heard the harsh, eager voice of the painter, talking about mosaics in some foreign country, while he spun a dark, rippling thundercloud of his wife's hair with his brush. Aurora McAlister, a windblown Venus, it looked like, her head bowed slightly under long, heavy hair, seemed to be absorbed in her own thoughts; her husband and guests might have been speaking the language of another world.

Someone rustled into the wicker chair next to Jo. She looked up. People had wandered up to her and spoken and wandered off again all afternoon; she was struggling hopelessly with all the names.

"Holly," this one said helpfully, "Holly Millidge." She was a pretty, frothy young woman with very shrewd eyes. She waved a plate of little sandwiches under Jos nose; Jo took one hesitantly. "They're all right. Just cucumber, nothing nasty." She set the plate back on the table. "So you're Harry's secret model. We've all been wondering."

"I didn't know I was a secret," Jo said, surprised.

"I can see why."

"Why what?"

"Why he tried to keep you secret. Tommy Buck said he'd been twice to Harry's studio trying to see you, and Harry locked the door on him."

Jo remembered the clamoring voices, the thunder up the stairs. "Why," she asked warily, "did he want to see me that badly?"

"To see if he should paint you, of course." Holly was silent a little, still smiling, studying Jo. "They're noisy, that lot. But they're good-hearted. You don't have to be afraid of them."

"I'm used to being afraid," Jo said helplessly. "I'm not used to this."

"It's not entirely what you think," Holly said obscurely, and laughed at herself. "What am I trying to say? You're not seeing what you think you see."

"Painters don't, do they?"

"Not always, no." She bit into a strawberry, watching the scene on the other side of the garden. "They'd see how pretty you are and how wonderful and mysterious the expression is in your eyes. But they wouldn't have any idea how that expression got there. Or the expression, for instance, in Aurora's eyes."

Jo looked at the still, dreaming face. "She's very beautiful."

"She is." Holly bit into another strawberry. "Her father worked in the stables at an inn on Crowdy Street. Aurora was cleaning rooms for the establishment when Alex met her. Barefoot, with her hair full of lice—"

A sudden bubble of laughter escaped Jo; she put her hands over her mouth. "Her, too?"

"And whatever her name was then, it was most certainly not Aurora. Most of us have a skewed past. As well as a skewed present." She gave a sigh, leaned back in her chair. "Except for me; I have no secrets. No interesting ones, at any rate. When they put me in their paintings, I'm the one carrying the heartless bride's train, or one of the shocked guests who finds the thwarted lover's body in the fish pond."

Jo, feeling less estranged from her surroundings, took another glance around the garden. Seen that way, if the goddess had been a chambermaid, then everyone might be anyone, and no telling what anybody knew or didn't know about life. Except for Harry, she thought. And then she glimpsed the expression on his face and had to amend even that notion.

Nothing, apparently, was plain as day, not even Harry. While the other guests were laughing and chatting, Alex's voice running cheerfully over them all, Harry was standing very quietly among them, his eyes on the tall, dark goddess. Jo drew a breath, feeling an odd little hollow where her certainty had been.

"Harry," she said, hardly realizing she'd spoken aloud.

Holly nodded. "Oh, yes, Harry. And John Grainger, and half the painters in the McAlister constellation, including one or two of the women. Dreamers, all of them, in love with what they think they see instead of what they see."

"John Grainger. The one with the wild hair and rumbly voice and the black, black eyes?"

"Yes, that's him."

"He talked to me earlier."

"Everyone talked to you earlier," Holly said lightly. "I was watching. They're making their plans for you, don't you fret."

"I didn't like him," Jo said. "He has a way of putting his hand on you as though it's supposed to mean something to you. It made me uncomfortable."

Holly laughed. "Then he'll have to watch his manners with you. He's a fine painter, though, and very generous; if you let him paint you, you'll be noticed. Others will find you, if you want." She lifted her bright face to greet a lovely, red-haired woman with somber green eyes. "Nan! Have you met Harry's painting yet? Jo Byrd. Nan Grainger."

"Jo Byrd. Why do I know that name?" Nan eased herself into a chair, gazing at Jo. "Harry must have talked about you. But that was some time ago. Oh." She gave a little start, her pale skin flushing slightly. "I remember now."

"I ran away."

"Yes. In the middle of his Persephone. He was bereft."

"Yes, well," Jo said, her mouth quirked, for everyone seemed to know everything anyway. "So was I."

Nan was silent, gazing at her without smiling. What have I said? Jo wondered, and then saw what lay beneath Nan's hands clasped gently over her belly.

Holly interrupted Nan's silence adroitly, with some droll story about her husband. Jo sighed noiselessly, her eyes going back to the group around the goddess. John Grainger stood closest to Aurora, she saw. They did not look at one another. But now and then the trailing green silk around her bare feet, raised by a teasing wind, flowed toward him to touch his shoe. He would glance down at that flickering green touching him, and his laugh would ring across the garden.

Secrets, she thought. If you look at this one way, there's a group of cheerful people standing together on a sunny afternoon in a garden. That's one painting. If you look at them with a different eye, there's the story within the painting... She looked at Harry again, wanting the uncomplicated friend she thought she knew, who got excited over the golden snakes in the reptile house, and who made her go shopping with Mrs. Grommet for a dress, he said, that didn't look as if his grandmother had slept in it.

Unexpectedly, as though he'd felt her thoughts flow in his direction, against the wind, he was looking back at her.

"What beautiful hair you have," Nan said, watching the white-gold ripple over Jo's shoulders. "I'd love to paint it." Her green eyes were gathering warmth, despite the silk fluttering over her husband's shoe, despite her fears and private sorrows; for a moment she was just a woman smiling in the light. "Jo, have you ever tried to draw? You might try it sometime. I forget myself when I do; it makes me very tranquil."

I might try it, Jo thought, after I lose this feeling that I've just fallen off the moon.

But she didn't say that, she said something else, and then there was another cup of tea in her hand, and a willowy young man with wayward locks the color of honeycomb kneeling in the grass at her feet, who introduced himself as Tommy Buck...

HARRY watched Tommy kneel beside Jo's chair. Their two faces seemed to reflect one another's wild beauty, and he thought dispassionately: I would like to paint them both together. Then, he felt a sharp flash of annoyance at Tommy, who could barely paint his feet, dreaming of capturing that barely human face of Jo's with his brush.

His attention drifted. He watched the green silk touch Grainger's shoe, withdraw, flutter toward him again. Seemingly oblivious, Aurora watched the distant horizon; seemingly oblivious, her husband orated in his hoarse, exuberant crow's voice about the architectural history of the arch. Harry thought about Aurora's long, graceful hands, about her mouth. So silent, it looked now; he had gotten used to it speaking. He wondered if he could ever make this mouth speak.

And then she moved. The little group was breaking up around McAlister. "Too sober," he proclaimed them all. "Much too sober." Lightly he touched his wife, to draw her with him toward the cottage. As lightly, she slipped from his fingers, stayed behind to find her shoes under the rose vines. Grainger glanced at his wife across the garden, then at Aurora, then at his wife again. In that moment of his indecision, Aurora put her hand out to steady herself on Harry's arm as she put on her shoes.

"She's lovely, Harry," he heard her say through the blood drumming in his ears. "I like her. Where did you find her?"

"In the street," he stammered. "Both times. She—she has been through hard times."

"I know." She straightened, shod, but didn't drop her hand. Behind her, Grainger drifted away. Her voice, deep and slow and sweet, riveted Harry. "I know those times. I hear them in her speech, I see them in her eyes. I know those streets."

"Surely not—"

She smiled very faintly. "Harry, I grew up helping my father shovel out the stables until I was old enough to clean up after humans. Didn't you know that? I thought everybody did."

"But the way you speak," Harry said bewilderedly. "Your poise and manners—"

"A retired governess. Alex hired her to teach me. Beyond that I have my own good sense and some skills that Alex finds interesting. He likes my company."

"He adores you."

"He thinks he does. He adores the woman he paints. Not the Liwie that I am."

"Liwie?"

Her mouth crooked wryly; he saw her rare, brief smile. "Olive. That's my real name. Liwie, they called me until I was seventeen and Alex looked at me and saw painting after painting... He said I was the dawn of his inspiration. So Olive became Aurora."

"Why," he asked her, his voice finally steady, "are you telling me this?"

"Because I've often thought I'd like to talk to you. That I might like having you as a friend, to tell things to. But for the longest time you could only see me the way Alex sees me. But then I saw how you looked at Jo today, knowing all you know about her. So I thought maybe, if I explained a thing or two to you, you might look at me as a friend."

She waited, the dark-eyed goddess who had pitched horse shit out of stables and whose name was Liwie. Mute with wonder, he could only stare at her. Then his face spoke, breaking into a rueful smile.

"I hope you can forgive my foolishness," he said softly. "It can't have been very helpful."

"I do *get* lonely," she confessed, "on my pedestal. Come, let's have some tea with Jo, and rescue her from Tommy Buck. He's not good enough for her."

"Will you come some day and see if I'm good enough to paint her? I would value your opinion very much."

"Yes, I will," she promised and tucked her long sylph's hand into the crook of his arm, making him reel dizzily for a step. He found his balance somewhere in Jo's eyes as she watched them come to her.

MUCH later, he reeled back into his studio, stupefied with impressions. Jo had promised, sometime before he left her at her door, to sit for the unfinished Persephone as well. So he would see her daily until—until he dreamed up something else. Or maybe, he thought, he would do what Odysseus's Penelope had done to get what she wanted: weave by day, unweave by night. He pulled the black silk off Persephone's head, saw the lovely, wine-red mouth and smiled, remembering the real one speaking, smiling its faint sphinx's smile, saying things he never dreamed would come out of it. But he no longer needed to dream, and he did not want Jo to see that mouth on her own face and wonder.

He was wiping it away carefully with cloth and turpentine when he remembered the Gorgon.

Horrified, he dropped the cloth. He had erased her entirely, without even thinking. What she must be trying to say, he could not imagine. And then he realized that the voluble Gorgon, who had talked her way out of his cupboard and into his life, had said not a word, nothing at all, to rescue herself.

Perhaps, he thought, she had nothing left to say. Perhaps she had already gone...

He picked up the cloth, gazing at the clean, empty bit of canvas where Persephone's mouth would finally appear. He heard the Gorgon's voice in his head, having the last word as usual.

If you need me, Harry, you know how to find me.

He left them side by side, his unfinished faces, and went to bed, where he would have finished them, except that he could not keep Persephone from smiling in his dreams.