

THE GRAPES

For Sandra Gilbert

(i)

When Iphigenia sits down at the table in the courtyard, there are no birds in the trees and for this reason she feels sad. She is alone, her parents grieving in separate halls, her friends holding their own shivering hands in the shadow of the east wall.

The cheese and bread she swallows are as dry as the huge sun. This is the sun she had come to love when her mother, Clytemnestra, would join her at midday in the cool springs at home. Her mother told her stories, always about women, about the female oracle who would speak like poetry to each in her sleep. Often, when the oracle had sung in a deep dream, a woman would wake with the taste of fruit on her tongue, the thin moon hanging blue above the dawn.

Once, Clytemnestra pulled her daughter's hand softly beneath the water. Quietly, she drew it to herself, letting it rest on the flesh of her own stomach. The night sang sweetly about you, she said . . . let your hand hear.

(ii)

Iphigenia remembers the submerged touch of her mother's stomach. She knows that soon she will cry and she takes a handful of grapes to her mouth. She had felt something stir in her own body that day, a longing, and at the moment the grapes burst their cool jelly on her tongue, she remembers, yes!, the pheasant rising from the opposite bank, its white tail broadening in the sweet wind.

KEVIN CLARK