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

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