

MASTER OF THE FEARFUL DEPTHS

PATRICK H. ADKINS

ACE BOOKS, NEW YORK

This book is an Ace original edition, and has never been previously published.

MASTER OF THE FEARFUL DEPTHS

An Ace Book / published by arrangement with the author

PRINTING HISTORY

Ace edition / July 1989

All rights reserved. Copyright (c)1989 by Patrick H. Adkins.

Cover art by John Jude Palencar.

This book may not be reproduced in whole or in part, by mimeograph or any other means, without permission.

For information address: The Berkley Publishing Group, 200 Madison Avenue, New York, New York 10016.

ISBN: 0-441-52106-1

Ace Books are published by The Berkley Publishing Group, 200 Madison Avenue, New York, New York 10016.

The name "ACE" and the "A" logo are trademarks belonging to Charter Communications, Inc.

PRINTED IN THE UNITED STATES OF AMERICA

10 987654321

For Alisha, this second volume, too

One

As the powerful wings of the ocean god carried her down from Mount Olympos, Nalassa tried to drive from her mind all thought of the dangers they had so narrowly escaped. She had discovered the secret charnel room where the King of the Gods and Thanatos, his unclean servant, sought to probe the limits of mortality and immortality. Had Proteus not rescued her, she was certain she would be there now, among the decaying corpses and dismembered bodies.

Nestled in his strong arms, with her cheek pressed against his chest, the water nymph wanted to think only of the present and the god who held her. Instead she found herself glancing back again and again across Proteus's broad shoulder. Behind them, dimly visible in the crisp starlight, the great palace of the Lord of the Titans grew small in the distance. Two or three times she thought she detected movements that might be indicative of pursuit, but she could not be certain.

Proteus flew close to the mountainside, hugging the jutting cliffs or dipping into deep gorges for concealment. The terrain became increasingly rugged as they followed a sinuous route that led both downward and toward the eastern sea. They skimmed over a frozen wasteland of snow, ice, and rock. At each dizzying dip or turn the naiad

clutched Proteus still more tightly and tried to stifle the cries that leaped to her mouth. The icy wind buffeted her face and whipped her hair and clothing about her.

Soon ice and snow were replaced by dark forests that sprouted from the sheer slopes of the mountainside. The tossing treetops lapped beneath them like waves. They were flying almost horizontally, and now for the first time she saw the dark expanse of the sea. It lay directly ahead of them, reflecting pinpoints of starlight.

Proteus soared in toward the rocky shore, arching his wings at the last moment to slow their descent. He swung her down and she found herself running in the sand beside him before she fully realized they were no longer airborne. He folded his great wings and began to reabsorb them into his body as they ran out a short distance into the frothing waves. Hand-in-hand they dived headfirst into the dark waters.

Accustomed to the river ruled by her father and to its many shallow, racing tributaries, the sea seemed both familiar and strangely alien to the naiad. She filled her lungs with sea water and let him lead her downward through the almost total darkness.

Had he been alone, the son of Okeanos might have metamorphosed himself into a dolphin or assumed the tail and fins of a fish to facilitate his journey. Instead he swam leisurely, retaining his own form. Still Nalassa had difficulty keeping up with him. Countless ages had trained his muscles to traverse the silent depths with maximum speed and minimum effort.

Proteus paused regularly to allow the naiad to catch up, and he stopped occasionally so that she could rest. When they spoke, the watery element made their voices sound thick and oddly distant.

After they had been swimming for some minutes, Nalassa noticed ahead of them many dull points of light, like stars viewed through haze, that seemed gradually to be growing brighter. A few moments later thousands of tiny, silver-eyed fish cavorted about them, surrounding them in a cloud of luminescence. She realized that Proteus must have summoned these creatures up from far below to light their way. The luminous fish accompanied them as they swam, and on all sides, just beyond the faint blue of the water, the illumination ended in a wall of impenetrable blackness.

Now she followed a little behind him, watching the easy naturalness of his movements and admiring the perfect symmetry of his smooth, bronzed body. Tall, neither slender nor bulky, he glided effortlessly ahead of her just above the languidly waving growths of the sea-bottom plain, his sleek muscles rippling with each slightest movement. He belonged here, she realized, amid the magnificent solitude of these blue depths.

Coral-covered cairns of rock rose up around them like ghostly castles. An eel, startled at their approach, sought shelter within the crevices. A scarlet, spiked creature watched them from unblinking eyes as they swam past. A ray fish ventured into their path, then veered away with the sudden flapping of its winglike fins.

When sharks passed nearby within their circle of illumination, Proteus warned her to stay close to him. Usually these vicious predators extended to the gods the wide berth otherwise reserved only for the largest of whales, but their ravenous ferocity occasionally led them to attack even creatures of divine proportion. Despite their relatively small mortal size, they could inflict very painful injuries. They were

capable of snipping off divine ringers or toes, and even more serious wounds could result when they hunted in packs.

The palace of Nereus lay in the deepest part of the Aegean, near the very bottom of a great sunken rift. As they approached this enormous valley the sea bottom dropped away suddenly. Proteus led her outward into the open water, well clear of the steep wall. With a single thoughtless kick the naiad might easily precipitate an underwater landslide and trap both of them beneath an avalanche of soft mud.

Downward they swam, through the vast and empty darkness, until they reached the rippled, yellow surface of the valley floor—a silent landscape pockmarked by the burrows of deep-sea creatures and spotted with waving thickets of spiny, red and orange growths that resembled finely serrated plants.

Occasionally fan-shaped coral drifted past, reflecting red in the phosphorescent light. Three sharks came upon them suddenly—ugly white creatures with broad, flat heads and glistening, bulbous white eyes. Finding themselves caught in the periphery of illumination, they backed away in startled confusion, then sought escape in the surrounding blackness.

At last the palace of Nereus came into sight, glowing in the distance, wreathed in phosphorescence. It rose from the sea bottom like a scarlet mountain, its thick walls and high towers reaching high above the surrounding hills and bluffs.

As they drew near, piscine sentinels sensed their presence and swam to meet them; other fish carried word of their arrival to the palace. An honor guard of stately silver ray fish glided out to circle and escort them toward the main entrance, leaving them only as Proteus and Nalassa swam through an enormous portal and into a wide corridor.

The palace, which the sea god Nereus had commanded to grow upon this spot, was formed completely of coral. Ugly, coral-eating fish patrolled its corridors, grazing on walls, floor, and ceiling to keep them properly trimmed.

As they swam they were joined by an ever-increasing number of golden-haired nymphs, the daughters of King Nereus and Queen Doris. By the time they reached the great hall more than a dozen Nereids encircled them. The goddesses laughed and chatted excitedly, their long hair and beautiful gowns, woven of many-colored sea growths, fluttering around them in the water.

Now Nalassa found herself in an enormous, high-ceilinged chamber. Walls of blue coral surrounded them and small fish scuttled out of their way. Millions of phosphorescent creatures, microscopic in size, had imbedded themselves to the high walls and ceiling of the room; each produced only a dim illumination by itself, but collectively they flooded the chamber in a soft blue-white light. The walls of the great room were lined with benches and tables, and nearby rose a high platform surmounted by two polished thrones of gleaming black coral.

A dark-haired goddess was swimming toward them, smiling warmly as she drew near. Behind her at a short distance followed a golden-haired god. Proteus and Nalassa slowed to a stop, floating side by side and moving their arms and legs only as much as necessary to maintain their positions.

"Greetings, Queen Doris," Proteus said as the goddess slowed her rapid

progress with a few reverse strokes of her hands.

She laughed, threw her arms about his neck, and kissed him. "Proteus, will you never abandon your senseless formality when you speak to me? I'm still your sister, even if you seldom visit me."

"And the mother of the world's most beautiful goddesses," he said, nodding toward the watching Nereids who were gathering at a discrete distance.

Nereus, the golden-haired god, had now joined his wife. A little plump and below medium height, he carried himself with a regal bearing nonetheless. "I see your vision and judgment remain as sharp as ever," he said jovially. "Welcome, Proteus! I observe that the outside world does not lack beauty either. Who is your lovely companion?"

"This is Nalassa, the daughter of the river god Asopos."

Doris turned toward her daughters. "Go now, children, that we may talk. There'll be time later for each of you to greet our guests." Reluctantly the Nereids left the great hall, and Doris turned back to her brother. "It's been far too long since we've seen you. Why, most of my daughters didn't even recognize you. ..."

Nereus interrupted her. "No recriminations, Doris. He'll stay away even longer next time if you scold him. Now, Proteus, shall we talk first, or would you rather wait until you've rested? Are you hungry? Have you eaten?"

"A long conversation is in order," Proteus said.

Two others, a god and goddess, had entered the hall and seemed uncertain if they should approach more closely. Nereus glanced toward them, then gestured to them to come forward. "Here are my brother and sister, Lord Phorkys and his wife, Lady Keto," he told Nalassa. The two gods joined them. Both had the golden blond hair of Nereus and his daughters, and both displayed obvious curiosity about the two visitors.

After the cordialities had been satisfied, Nereus said, "Come, then, Proteus. You've traveled far and we have much to say to each other. I'm sure everyone will excuse us."

He clapped the ocean god on the shoulder and led him across the broad hall toward a number of coral benches, the surfaces of which were kept smooth by the coral-eating fish that seemed to be everywhere about the palace. Nudging one of these aside, Proteus and Nereus sat side by side.

"Would you care to see your apartment now?" Doris asked Nalassa.

Nalassa hesitated, glancing toward Proteus. "If you don't mind, I think I'd rather wait here for a while yet."

Doris nodded. "Certainly, though I must warn you that they may talk for quite some time. My husband does not despise conversation."

Nalassa smiled back at her hostess. The others had all moved away now, so that the nymph and the queen were alone on one side of the great hall. From across the chamber Nereus signaled to his wife to join him and Proteus. The two gods had risen from their bench and were swimming toward the portal of an adjoining room. Doris looked her embarrassment and began to glance about, intending to summon one of her daughters to keep the naiad company while she accompanied Nereus and Proteus.

Nalassa forestalled any such action. "Please go right on," she said softly. "I won't at all mind being left to myself-if you don't mind. Your palace is so lovely and different. You have the beauty of nature here, and I'll relish the opportunity to study it."

Doris started to object, but changed her mind when Nereus signaled to her again, this time from the entrance of the room to which he was leading Proteus. "If you need anything- anything at all, my dear-you need only call one of my daughters. ..." She squeezed Nalassa's hand, then swam quickly to join her husband and brother. The three disappeared into a doorway and a great double curtain of shells swung closed behind them.

Nalassa sighed. She was glad that she had come here with Proteus; the beauty of the undersea palace at least partially compensated for how terribly neglected she was feeling. For a number of minutes she floated in the gentle current that ran across the great hall, from one high-vaulted entrance to another; she let her thoughts float and sway, too.

"You must not want him very badly," a small voice said from behind her.

She turned to find a divine child, little older than a toddler, riding toward her atop a giant turtle. The turtle was moving slowly across the hall, skimming along just above the floor; the goddess on its back, though very young, was nearly as large as the thirty-foot-long reptile. She tapped lightly against the beast's shell and it slowed to a stop. Long strands of golden hair settled around her face. Coy eyes, hinting of laughter, gleamed up at Nalassa.

"What did you say?" the naiad asked.

"I said that you must not want him very badly. If you really wanted him, you would work to win him."

The odd words, spoken by so young a goddess, both puzzled and flustered Nalassa. She wondered if her state of mind was so obvious that everyone could recognize it, even children.

"You're very silly," the child continued, her speech oddly languorous. "Of course you're in love with him. But you don't want to admit it, even to yourself. You must know your own mind."

The child glanced across the hall toward the room into which Proteus had disappeared. "He'll be difficult to win, but you can do it," she continued. "No, don't worry. If you really want him, I'll help you."

"What are you talking about?" Nalassa asked, pretending that the things the child said were meaningless to her.

"I'm talking about love, you foolish nymph. Your face betrays your heart. You're in love with him, but he doesn't love you-yet."

Nalassa glanced quickly around the huge chamber. No one was near them. The hall was empty except for Phorkys and Keto, who were talking quietly just inside the entrance to one of the many adjoining corridors.

Nalassa stared at the child. There was an aura of indolence about her, and of sensuality, particularly in her slow, languid gestures and pouting lips.

"Of course you're in love with him," the child continued, laughing. "You needn't pretend with me. You can hide it from yourself and from some of

the others, but not from me. I know about these things. I can make him love you if-

Now it was Nalassa who laughed, partly out of nervousness but also because she had become suddenly aware of the absurdity of her conversation with this goddess who was little more than an infant.

The child frowned. She was still astride her turtle. "You may doubt me," she said very seriously. "I will allow that. After all, you don't know me. But don't laugh at what I say. I, who cherish laughter and merriment, also love retribution. Yes, I can make him love you, if I so choose. I can fill him with love until he overflows, until-

"And how would you do this?"

The child looked again in the direction of the room in which Proteus was meeting with Nereus and Doris, then back at the nymph. She shook her head, making her long, golden hair wave in the water. "First you must decide. Then ..."

"Pardon," a voice interrupted. A dark-haired goddess swam up to them. "I am looking for Lord Proteus. Are you the nymph who arrived with him?"

Nalassa nodded.

"Where is he? I am Dione, his sister. I wish to greet him."

"He's over there, mother," the child said, pointing across the hall.

"Another of Proteus's sisters!" Nalassa exclaimed. "The children of Okeanos are indeed numerous and widespread. He's meeting with King Nereus and Queen Doris and probably won't be free for some time yet," she explained. "This is your daughter? I've been talking with her. She's ... a most interesting child. ..."

The goddess grinned. "Indeed she is! I'm not really her mother, however, though she insists on calling me that. I found her some years ago, floating in the sea in a pocket of foam. For that reason we call her Aphrodite." The word meant foam-born. "Nereus and Doris have grown quite fond of her, as have I. Do you know, she hasn't grown a bit since the day I found her. Pay no attention to what she says, though. She says the most astounding things."

The Okeanid Dione frowned, then continued, "I don't guess I'll wait. Please tell him that I'm looking for him, and not to dare leave without seeing me."

Nalassa agreed to deliver the message.

Dione excused herself. "What about you, Aphrodite? Are you coming back with me, or staying here?"

"I'll come, mother," the child answered. She tapped the turtle and it began to turn in a circle, moving in the direction from which they had originally come. "Remember what I said," the child told Nalassa. "All depends on you." She followed her foster mother away.

Perplexed, Nalassa swam the short distance to a bench and sat down to wait. She noticed that Phorkys and Keto were still near one of the entrances to the hall and that they were watching her. As she looked at them, the god and goddess retreated out of sight down the corridor.

Two

Behind the closed curtains of shells, Proteus and his sister sat side by side on a low bench. Nereus had drawn up a small stool and was sitting close in front of them.

"Oh, why can't he leave us in peace?" Doris demanded. "This is a tiny realm. There are other seas, even the great sea itself. Anyone who likes may fashion his own domain in one of them. ..."

"The real surprise," Nereus said, addressing his visitor, "is that Kronos has waited this long to act. His hatred isn't new. We've been aware of it for a very long time."

"But why does he hate us so?" Doris asked. "What have we done that he should be so intent upon our destruction?"

Nereus shook his head sadly. "Part of it, I suppose, is that he wants us to acknowledge him as our king and—"

"But we do!" Doris interrupted. "We always have!"

"Not as thoroughly as he wishes, my dear." Nereus leaned forward, took his wife's hand, and squeezed it gently. "We live far from Olympos. We don't bow to him daily. We aren't in his debt for every good thing that surrounds us. All that we have, we've earned for ourselves. We owe him nothing. That's what he resents. He finds that intolerable."

As he looked back and forth between his sister and her husband, an odd sensation crept over Proteus. He pressed his eyes shut and held them closed for a few moments. There was a terrible familiarity in Nereus's words, and for an instant Proteus was overwhelmed by the impression that he had seen and heard all this before—that he was only reenacting events that had already taken place long ago.

After a moment he looked up again, once more in control of himself.

"It's fitting, I suppose," Doris was saying. "To most of us the wedding of a brother or sister is a joyous occasion." She smiled bitterly. "But to the King of the Gods, it's merely an opportunity for treachery!"

"Poor Eurybie," Nereus said quietly. "It saddens me to think that our misfortune will taint her wedding day. She and Crios deserve better—much better!"

"I'm afraid you don't fully understand the situation yet," Proteus said. "Shed no tears for them. They both conspire against you with Kronos. Among other things, this marriage is a pretext for placing Crios on your throne. Once you've been deposed, your sister will reign as queen here, with Kronos's brother at her side."

Deep sadness touched Nereus's features. "Are you certain of this, Proteus? Eurybie plots against us, too?"

The son of Okeanos nodded. "She's as deeply involved as Kronos, and will profit handsomely, Kronos has planned carefully, and, I suspect, for a very long time. He'll claim that you conspire against him and that you seek to overthrow him as King of the Gods."

"But that's preposterous!" Doris exclaimed. "Who'll believe such nonsense? We, of all the gods, have no reason to plot against Kronos. Such a claim is beyond belief."

"That doesn't matter," Proteus continued. "The wedding of Crios and Eurybie offers entry to your palace for both Kronos and his followers."

When he accuses you, he'll have the support not only of the Titans he's already enlisted- Iapetos, Koios, and Crios-but of all the lesser gods as well. He's their king. They know him little but revere him much, and they'll believe whatever he tells them. They'll follow him without hesitation."

Proteus paused for a moment, then concluded, "And when he strikes against you, he'll strike also against my father."

"Of course," Nereus said sadly. "That only makes sense. He's long begrudged Okeanos his independence. He hopes to be rid of us both with a single stroke-while we're most unsuspecting. "

A small squid drifted between them, then flitted suddenly away. Doris let her gaze wander from Proteus to look around the simple, unadorned room in which they sat. The soft beauty of the coral chamber seemed to increase her sadness.

"What will become of us?" she asked her brother.

"Tartaros."

"They say the air is dank and loathsome there," she said thoughtfully, "that nothing can grow in its fetid atmosphere. They say it's better to die the death of a mortal animal than to live-a deathless god-entombed forever in darkness and decay." She looked up at Proteus. "Does Kronos think all this is still unknown to us? If he knew we were forewarned, might he not be deterred?"

Proteus shook his head. "While on Olympos, I had the opportunity to observe him in conference with his fellow conspirators. Don't deceive yourselves. I saw his face and heard his voice as he spoke to them. He's determined to rid himself of you, Nereus, and of my father. Nothing will dissuade him. He will destroy you both, or destroy himself in the attempt. As it is, we have the advantage of knowing when he plans to attack-and that may well be our only advantage. If he became aware of our knowledge, he might delay and shift his plan to some other day, and then the advantage would be his again."

For more than a full minute none of them spoke.

Finally Proteus continued, "There is something more I must tell you. I know, Nereus, that you never intentionally look into the future, that you prophesy only under duress...."

"We are so alike, Proteus, brother of my beloved wife," Nereus said. "Of all the gods, you, who share my 'gift,' know what a burden it is, and its limitations. Whatever chance now clouds your vision is a blessing. I wish I, too, could remember nothing of the things I foresee."

"My visions are hidden from me, it is true, but not from those around me," Proteus explained. "At such times I fall unconscious and am oblivious to the words that pour from my mouth. This happened last three days ago. Nalassa, the nymph who accompanied me here, was with me and later told me the things I said. I mention this only because I believe it must pertain to what we've been discussing."

Nereus started to object, but his wife interrupted him. "Let him speak. This is a time when it would be well to glimpse the future."

"These are the words I spoke while my body seethed in continual metamorphosis: 'Change follows change when god devours god. Titan against Titan, god against god... power unleashed, force undreamt...."



"Oh, brother," Doris cried softly, "it sounds as though our worst fears are destined to be realized!"

"There is more: 'The gull shall weep, the eagle cease to soar, when the white mare rears her hooves and the broken willow pierces their hearts.'

"The gull," Doris said, "why, that's a shape favored by your father. And the eagle certainly must be Kronos. Does this mean that both will fail?"

"Enough, Proteus," Nereus interrupted. "One might just as well judge a melon by a single thin slice as the future by such words. The slice could be the only bad part, or the only good. None can truly know what is to be. It's a vain, useless pursuit. ..."

Doris leaned toward her husband and laid a hand upon his arm, looking at him with affection and sympathy. "Such visions always trouble him. Proteus is right, though, my dear. This is something we must know. Let him go on...."

"No, Doris, let me speak," Nereus insisted. "Brother- for you are my brother, so close is my wife to me-the future is a shifting, shapeless thing, impossible to grasp and hold. It depends in part upon what we do today. Today we shape tomorrow. Each act of the present has its consequences. It's folly to heed such words as you have recited."

Proteus shrugged. "I've told you this because I thought it might hold some meaning for you."

Nereus settled back on his stool now that he had said all he cared to say. Doris turned back toward Proteus.

"Whatever those words may mean," she said, "tell me this, brother-what can we do?"

"There are really only two courses of action, and neither is acceptable. Nereus and my father could avoid Kronos simply by failing to be present at the wedding, but then the confrontation would only be postponed. Kronos would seek out a new opportunity. Or we could prepare to meet him when the time comes-perhaps even strike first against him."

Nereus shook his head vigorously. "I won't arm my daughters with tridents. If we resist Kronos, terrible violence will ensue. Neither of us need peer into the future to know that. I won't be responsible for that result."

"But what will you do, then?" Proteus demanded. "Certainly you won't surrender to him."

"If Kronos attempts to capture me, I'll try to elude him- but I shall not fight him and I shall not hide from him."

For what seemed like a long time they were silent. Finally Proteus said, "Nereus, I came here to warn you and to seek your help. It isn't only you and Doris who stand in the balance...."

"No," Nereus said insistently. "My decision is firm. Such violence can only beget an ever-widening circle of still more violence. I will not be a party to it. If such things must happen, they must happen without my assistance."

"Listen to me," the ocean god continued, leaning forward as he spoke.

"Your restraint will avert nothing. My father has already been warned. He knows what Kronos plans. If a single spear is lifted against him or against any member of my family, this palace of yours will tremble to its foundations. We can oppose Kronos-easily. If he chooses, my father can summon a thousand of his sons from the far corners of the earth."

"Would Okeanos do that?" Nereus asked.

Proteus shrugged almost imperceptibly. "I don't know. I do know he won't willingly surrender to Kronos. But I didn't come here, Nereus, to advise you to arm for battle. This problem is deeper and more terrible than that. I fear that no matter what course of action we choose, the result will be disastrous."

"It isn't only you and Doris, or Okeanos and Tethys, who are at stake," Proteus continued. "It's all of us. Once this battle has begun, it won't stop here in your throne room, whoever is victorious. Some of my brothers, hotheaded and anxious for sport, will seek out those who support Kronos and deal with them individually-or Kronos's supporters will do the same. From one end of the earth to the other, the gods will fight one another. And this pleasant way of life we've learned to enjoy will crumble about us."

He was staring into the other god's eyes. "Nereus, we're old enough to remember how things were before Kronos imposed his rule upon the world-the ignorance and savagery that held sway. Unless we can somehow persuade Kronos to abandon his plan, those days will surely return. All that's been built will be shattered, and only ruins will remain."

Nereus was nodding his head. "What you say is true. But what do you want from us? There's nothing Doris or I can do that will affect that outcome."

For a few moments Proteus sat with his eyes cast down. Finally he said, "I fear you may be right. I suppose I hoped you might offer some idea that had escaped me."

Doris took her brother's hand. "We'll try to help, brother, even if my husband thinks it impossible."

"This topic has saddened and tired me," Nereus said. "It is late. We can talk more tomorrow."

When they returned to the great hall Nalassa looked up from her reveries as they swam toward her.

"Come, both of you," Queen Doris said, her voice surprisingly pleasant after the distressing conversation in which she had been a participant. "I must find suitable quarters for our honored guests."

Nalassa and Proteus were led through a number of passageways until they reached the apartments Doris intended for them, which were located near each other on opposite sides of a corridor. When finally they were left alone Nalassa rejoined Proteus in his room.

She found him upon a coral bench, deep in thought.

"You look troubled," she said.

"I was thinking about Metis and Philyra. I should have insisted they come with us."

"They wanted to stay on Olympos," Nalassa said. "Besides, I think you

underestimate them."

"Perhaps. But they're in great danger." He sounded tired.

She settled near him on the floor, crossing her slender legs beneath her. "What will we do now?" she asked. "Will you remain here, or will you return to Olympos?"

"I'll stay a day or two more, I suppose. I want to talk more with Nereus and Doris. ..."

Nalassa remembered the message she was supposed to deliver. "Oh, my lord, I forgot until just now. Your sister Dione is here and is anxious to greet you."

"Dione," he mused, smiling slightly. "I'd better see her, or she'll be offended."

Proteus and Nalassa left the apartment together. He parted from her just outside the door to her room. Lost in her own thoughts, Nalassa lingered in the corridor for two or three minutes, floating and swaying in the almost imperceptible current. Eventually she became aware that she was not alone. Turning, she found herself looking into the face of the golden-haired child.

"You'll never win him the way you're going about it," Aphrodite said.

The child was still seated upon the back of her giant turtle. "Just what should I be doing?" Nalassa demanded, petulant.

"Let's go to your room. I'll tell you there. You've much to learn, but I'll teach you."

Three

Nalassa pushed open the door to her apartment and swam inside. The golden-haired child, abandoning her turtle, swam in after her. The naiad closed the door, then swirled around gracefully in the water so that she could face her companion.

The child settled atop a high divan of coral, which had been newly draped with a thick mattress of seaweed. Lying languidly upon it, she appraised Nalassa from head to toe.

"You aren't bad, actually," Aphrodite said thoughtfully as she continued to scrutinize her. "You have a great deal of natural beauty in your face, and even though your hair is rather plain in color, it's quite rich and full. You're too slender, of course-I've always thought a goddess looks best when she's full-figured-but no god would cast you aside for that. Take off your clothes."

Nalassa laughed. "I'll do no such thing," she exclaimed. "Why should I? Who are you? You talk so oddly-especially for someone so young."

"If you wish me to help you win the heart of Proteus, you must do as I command. I must know what you have to offer- what we have to work with-if I'm to judge the difficulty that lies before us. As to my age-I'm far older than I look, far older than you, if the truth be known. I know many things- and even I don't always know just how I come to know them."

Nalassa was floating upright just in front of the child, her feet barely touching the floor of the chamber. She laughed again, beginning to feel

very foolish and quite uneasy. Who was this precocious creature whose every glance and gesture were laden with coy flirtation, whose slightest movements bespoke profound sensuality?

"Well? Do you wish my help?" the child demanded in her melodic, bubbly voice.

Nalassa started to obey, then changed her mind. Her laughter had turned to a nervous tittering. She loosened the catch on her peplos, then refastened it.

The child seemed amused at the naiad's obvious embarrassment. Nevertheless, she continued to insist.

At last, despite her misgivings, Nalassa loosened the catch and unwound her peplos, letting the garment float slowly away and toward the green coral floor.

"It's as I feared," the child said slowly, signaling the nymph to turn around so that she could observe all of her. "Your breasts are too small-nicely shaped in their perky way, but still too small. On the other hand your waist is narrow and your hips flare charmingly. They aren't really very wide; your narrow waist only makes them seem that way. To some gods the hips are more significant than the breasts, anyway. Turn again, more slowly this time."

Feeling terribly awkward and self-conscious, Nalassa did as she was directed, her long brown hair swirling after her in the water.

"Yes, yes," the child continued. "Not nearly as bad as I feared. Even if you were ugly, I could still make him love you. Desire can blind the sharpest eye and cloud the clearest brain. If I wished, I could make him crave you with all the zeal of a starving hyena scrambling for food. Sometime, when I'm in the mood, I'll prove that."

She waved a hand toward the nymph. "But you-you should be able to win almost any god with your natural endowments. You shouldn't need my help at all, except that you've chosen for yourself a peculiar sort of god. I could tell that from the glimpse I had of him. His heart is shielded. But don't despair. If he carries such a shield, it must protect a vulnerable spot. Once we've nudged it aside, love's dagger may easily pierce his heart."

Aphrodite laughed gaily. "Has he seen all of you yet?" she asked unexpectedly. "Or have you kept him in suspense?"

Nalassa blushed but did not answer.

"Too bad. I suppose, then, that you've also ..."

Nalassa's wide eyes darted away from those of the child.

"Foolish creature! Don't you know that the male's greatest weakness is his imagination? He would have clothed you in a radiance you could never manage by yourself. You should have given him a glimpse of your shoulder, pretending that your peplos slipped down of its own accord; or rewarded him with a peek at your bare ankle or calf. You should have teased him mercilessly. You should have encouraged and discouraged him by turns, teasing and tantalizing, but always drawing back."

Nalassa was frowning. "Oh, I'm not like that. Besides, he isn't interested in me at all."

"I don't doubt it. You've made quite a mess of things so far. Your education seems to have been sorely neglected. Perhaps we should start with the basics, to be sure you know them. You can still succeed."

Nalassa was hugging her arms across her bare breasts. As the child continued talking, the nymph recovered her clothing and began to drape it around herself.

"At least you know how to care for your body and cultivate its natural beauty? How to arrange your clothing and hair to best display your charms. . . ? On land, I mean; it's difficult to tend to such things down here. A hint of chance adds immeasurably—a curl out of place, for instance. You must always adorn yourself lightly; too much jewelry or makeup wouldn't flatter you. Of course you must remember not to laugh too loudly. It's far more effective to giggle or titter. Never bray or guffaw, and when you smile—you should smile a thousand smiles for each time you laugh—show your teeth proudly, for you have admirable teeth. Be careful of your posture, and make a point of always moving as though you are being watched."

The child paused a moment, then said, "All of that you should have been taught by your mother. She should have taught you, too, the primary rule of love. Do you know it?"

Wide-eyed, Nalassa shook her head. "No. At least I don't think so."

"This is the primary rule of love—never believe what he tells you"

The naiad stared at her. "Why not?"

"Because he will always lie to you. Even when he means to tell the truth. Even when he thinks he is telling the truth. Male and female—they see truth differently. All their communications are lies of one sort or another. Protect yourself from them as best you can, for you will invariably be deceived, however vigilant. If you expect the truth from him, you will only be the more thoroughly deceived."

Nalassa had temporarily forgotten that a child was lecturing her. She wanted to laugh aloud at the preposterousness of the situation; instead she found herself absorbed in the unexpected things Aphrodite was saying. The child's face seemed to shine, and her childish voice seemed always on the verge of laughter.

"In this battle of male and female," she continued, "your most potent weapon is delay. He will seek to influence you by creating a yearning emptiness within you, by making your in-sides ache for him, so that your heart begins to flutter at the sound of his approaching steps or the first note of greeting that issues from his mouth. Delay, or you're lost! Nothing so inflames the male principle as unfulfilled desire. Tease with your eyes, glancing away shyly whenever he turns toward you—"

"I do that already, without even trying," Nalassa said.

"All things become habitual when practiced often enough. Drive him mad with glimpses and laughter and soft words. Never say yes. Never say no. Always say maybe. And whenever possible, say it without words."

The naiad had begun to fret. "I'm not like that," she protested. "I detest such trickery and guile."

Aphrodite drew back, her smile extinguished. For an instant her eyes gleamed with anger, but only for an instant. Almost immediately the goddess's normal manner returned. "What a child you are! You want love,

but don't want to work for it. How else do you expect to acquire the love you desire, other than by the things you call trickery and guile? Do you think any god would willingly bind himself to a goddess, however wonderful she might be, without first being driven completely and hopelessly mad?" Laughter like the tinkling of glass filled the room.

"Don't be so foolish," she continued. "You already do most of these things, even if you don't realize that you do. Think how much more successful you'd be if you really tried!"

Nalassa shook her head sadly. "I'm afraid it's useless. I could never manage all of that. And Proteus probably wouldn't even notice if I did."

The child lapsed into silence, pouting. "All right," she said at last. "You're a stubborn creature, though there is some truth to your argument, I must admit. Proteus is more immune to love than most. It would be very difficult for you to win him by yourself."

She paused again, scrutinizing the naiad. "I said I would help you, and I shall - even if you aren't willing to exert yourself. I shall make him fall in love with you. Come here."

Nalassa only stared at her.

"I'm determined. You shall have your god. Obey me, Nalassa. Come here."

Hesitantly Nalassa drew closer. When she stood directly in front of Aphrodite, the child reached up and drew her face downward. The child kissed the naiad directly upon the lips.

"Now go. Go to the one you love and give him the kiss I have just given you. Give it to him, then return here."

Nalassa backed awkwardly away.

"Remember, don't linger. Come immediately back here."

Against her better judgment Nalassa left the apartment, her arms and legs propelling her through the water at a steadily increasing rate as her curiosity and determination increased. She began to feel foolish as she reached Proteus's room. She entered anyway, realizing only then that Proteus would probably still be visiting his sister Dione.

He was not. He had returned and lay soundly asleep on a padded divan in one of the rear rooms of his apartment. She hovered silently above him, feeling very foolish as she looked down at his handsome face, very foolish and- very much in love.

She kissed him quickly; then, tearing her lips from his, she swam rapidly toward the door.

Proteus was already stirring. "Nalassa?" he called as he sat up. The fleeing figure paused for an instant near the doorway, turning to smile at him. Then she was gone.

For some minutes after Nalassa's unexpected visit, Proteus remained in a sitting position, vacantly looking in the direction in which she had departed.

Less than three days had elapsed since she had sprinted across his path in the moonlight. She had followed him Olympus and become enmeshed in great danger there, so that he had been forced to carry her away with him when he the palace of the King of the Gods. During all that time had

given her little thought. His mind had been occupied with the mission entrusted to him by his father and with all that he had discovered on Mount Olympos.

She was, after all, merely another nymph-more attractive than some, less than others. On a different occasion, under different circumstances, he would gladly have lingered with her among the hills and brooks of her native land. He had tried to treat her tenderly and kindly. For that reason alone he would have left her within a day or two, before she could become too attached to him. He had no desire to hurt her.

There was a pleasant freshness about her that he found appealing, but his feelings went no deeper than that. Had he not been so preoccupied, he would have made a point of giving her the little attentions that females found so important-not to endear himself to her, but to reassure her that he did, indeed, appreciate her charms. As it was, necessity had forced him to forgo such courtesies.

Reclining on the divan, he tried to sleep once more. Instead he kept thinking of the parting smile she had given him. Sleep refused to come, and he tried to concentrate on Kronos and the problem he needed to keep uppermost in his mind. Instead he found himself remembering the delicate, feminine gestures of the nymph, the way her clothing fluttered around her as she swam.

Finally he made up his mind to seek her out. He swam into the corridor and down to the entrance to her apartment. There he hesitated. By now she was probably asleep. He started to return to his own room, but changed his mind and instead tapped lightly at her door. When there was no response, he tapped again, then pushed gently against the barrier. It was bolted upon the inside. Turning, he swam back to his room.

The night passed very slowly for Proteus. In the morning a Nereid came to call him to breakfast. He went to Nalassa's chambers, intending to accompany her to the great hall where the meal was to be served. The naiad's apartment was empty. Oddly disappointed, he went on without her.

To his surprise he found her already seated at one of the long tables. A number of the daughters of Nereus surrounded her and they were all carrying on an animated discussion.

The Nereid who was serving as his guide led him to a table some distance from her. He ate slowly, barely tasting the lush tubers and odd growths cultivated by the children of Nereus and their piscine servants. Lovely, tittering goddesses sat all around him, addressing him almost continually with questions and quips. He barely heard them. His eyes, as if by a will of their own, kept seeking out Nalassa's slender form. Occasionally she glanced in his direction, but always for only the briefest moment. He kept trying to catch her gaze, and kept failing.

As though he were seeing her for the first time, he noticed the depth of her wide brown eyes. The lavish fullness of her hair-even here, below the sea, where it drifted carelessly about her, curling and lashing with each slightest movement of her head-triggered peculiar sensations within him. He became increasingly fascinated by the way her lively eyes darted about her little group, from speaker to speaker, sparkling with interest and amusement.

Her delicate, long-fingered hand carried food to her beautifully shaped mouth. Why didn't she look in his direction? He kept expecting her to notice him suddenly, to give him one of her flashing smiles.

When the meal was at last completed-it seemed interminable-he edged his way through the crowd of friendly, talkative Nereids toward Nalassa's table.

"Oh, there you are," she said as he reached her at last. "What a marvelous place you've brought me to! The food was very good, don't you think? Glauke has offered to lead me about the palace, and out to see the gardens that surround it."

The Nereid at her side inclined her head in a slight, respectful bow. "Does my lord wish to come too? There is much to see."

Proteus did his best to smile pleasantly as he agreed to accompany them. He had seen the palace and gardens more than once in the past and had no interest in seeing either again, however changed they might be; nevertheless he found himself swimming with them, finding pleasure in Nalassa's nearness-and annoyance in the presence of the beautiful Nereid. Occasionally Nalassa tossed him a morsel of gratuitous affection-a look, a gesture, a smile-and he snapped it up like a ravenous beast. When his body accidentally brushed against hers, electric sparks shot through him.

The coral palace had been erected upon a high hill that was honeycombed with caves and caverns, many of which still served as dwelling places for the numerous daughters of Nereus. Glauke insisted upon beginning her tour here and did not relent until she had taken her guests all the way to the topmost turret of the structure. At every turn eels or rays or coral-eating fish scuttled out of their path.

Glauke summoned phosphorescent fish to light their way, then led them out of the palace and down a long, sloping hill. Here lay the gardens cultivated by the Nereids. They swam amid rows of festooning vines and lush white melons. Ugly blind fish, both large and small, patrolled the area to protect the garden from all that would plunder it.

Eventually the tour was completed. They returned to the palace and Proteus invited Nalassa to join him in his chambers.

"Oh, I think not," she said as they reached the corridor that led to their apartments. She yawned beautifully, her slender hand not quite covering her lovely mouth. "It's been an exhausting morning. I think I'll take a nap, so that I can be fresh this afternoon."

A few moments later she was gone, and soon he found himself alone, moving restlessly about his room. He threw himself down on the divan, only to rise again and move aimlessly about the small chamber.

At last he swam out into the corridor and down to the entrance to her apartment. Her door was unlocked now, and he pushed it open and entered.

She was sitting upright in her bed, arms clutching rumpled clothing in front of an otherwise bare body. "Yes, my lord?" she asked, eyes very wide and alluring. "You wish to see me?"

He did not know what to say. For an instant he considered retreating to his own room.

"You wish to speak with me, my lord?"

He forced himself to edge closer, at last reaching her side. Somehow he found words and they sat together for a long time, talking quietly. Nalassa tried to remember the instructions the child goddess Aphrodite had given her, but his presence made it difficult. She tried her best to



toy with him, to raise and lower his hopes by turns, but she kept forgetting, kept wanting him to edge still closer.

Outside the apartment, at the far end of the corridor where Proteus had not been able to see him, Phorkys, the brother of Nereus, waited impatiently. Keto, his wife and sister, appeared behind him and he turned gruffly to greet her.

"Has he answered yet?" he demanded.

She nodded. "Yes. Where are they?"

"Together, in her room."

"Oh," the goddess said, eyebrows rising meaningfully.

"What did Lord Kronos say?"

"He must suspect that Proteus has a companion. He asked if anyone accompanied him here. He wanted to know the name of that person."

"Have you answered yet?" Phorkys asked. "I don't remember the nymph's name."

"She is Nalassa, the daughter of Asopos. I sent a message in reply to Lord Kronos before returning here, telling him her name." Keto glanced down the corridor toward the apartments of the visitors. "Do you plan to watch all day? What more do you expect to learn?"

"I suppose you're right," Phorkys said. Reluctantly he turned away and followed his wife back to their apartment.

Behind them, within the apartment of Nalassa, the daughter of the river god Asopos lay in the arms of the son of Okeanos. Olympos seemed very far away. Once or twice Proteus's thoughts returned to Kronos, but they could not remain with him long. Sweet love beckoned them back to the beautiful nymph beside him, pushing aside all other concerns, even duty.

Four

The titan Iapetos paused just within the entrance hall of his apartment. An odd quiet hung over not only this room, but the entire apartment. At this time-early afternoon-his energetic younger sons should have been hard at play here. He listened carefully before continuing through the atrium toward his own rooms.

While day had followed day in lazy progression for Proteus and Nalassa, time had raced on with alarming rapidity for Iapetos. The plot of Kronos played upon his mind almost incessantly.

By nature Iapetos found all injustice repugnant. Everything he saw and heard told him that his brother and king was preparing to perpetrate a terrible wrong upon Okeanos and Nereus. He sensed the injustice of it with every fiber of his being.

Yet what was he to do? However wrong he might be, Kronos represented the single most important principle of law and reason in all the world. Without him the world might very well slip back into the chaos and savagery from which he had extricated it. Would it not be a greater wrong to oppose him and risk such a calamity? Should he endanger all the gods merely to save two, however innocent they might be? To condone injustice as unthinkable. But to do otherwise, to endanger the entire framework of order and justice that Kronos had imposed...?

Such thoughts haunted the Titan as he made his way toward his bedroom. As he entered the chamber, a low sound drew his attention. He moved absently toward the doorway that led to his wife's room, intending to speak briefly with Klymene. For a number of days now--since she had chanced upon him and the Titaness Themis together in the orchards of Olympos--she seemed to be avoiding him. Even though he had a great deal on his mind, he wished to speak with her and assure himself that she was not angry with him.

He entered her bedroom from his own. Klymene was not there, nor was Menoitios, their infant son. A quick, furtive movement at the rear of the chamber attracted the Titan's attention. Puzzled, Iapetos crossed the room. Something small stirred from below a table and flitted toward the open window.

It was a messenger of the type favored by Okeanos and his children, and Iapetos lifted his right hand in greeting. "Wait!" he called. "I am Iapetos, the husband of Klymene, who is the daughter of Okeanos."

The creature--a fish with the wings of a hawk--flew in a tight circle just outside the window, on the gallery. It made low, rapid hooting sounds, then finally settled upon the railing to watch the Titan.

Iapetos approached it slowly this time. "Do you bring a message for my wife?" he asked.

The creature watched him through wide fish eyes. He took another step toward it, and the thing began to make low, uneasy noises. Its wings opened partway and twitched in nervous readiness.

"What's wrong, creature?" Iapetos demanded, annoyed by the manner of the messenger; in the past such creatures had always been obsequiously polite, as was fitting in their dealings with gods.

"You have a message for Lady Klymene?" he demanded. "Is that why you are here? I'll deliver the message to my wife. You may give it to me."

The Titan stepped closer. The creature rose suddenly into the air, cawing shrilly. Before he could follow it out onto the gallery, it had flown from sight.

Turning slowly, he walked back into his own room. What did it mean? Why would a messenger to his wife--probably from her father or mother--react in such a way, as though the message were secret, intended for her alone?

He began to walk back and forth across his room. Such a message could be an indication that Okeanos was aware of Kronos's plot. ... It could even mean that Okeanos--and possibly Klymene!--were aware of the role in that plot assigned to him. As he paced Iapetos became more and more uncomfortable.

He started to leave the apartment, but changed his mind and instead crept back toward Klymene's bedroom. He leaned through the open doorway to peer inside. The messenger had returned. It had settled upon a table near the gallery. Its chest heaved slowly as it breathed through its wide, circular mouth.

Frowning, Iapetos retraced his steps through his apartment to the outer corridor. At first he walked without destination, but when he found himself in the vicinity of the apartment of the goddess Themis, who had

once been his wife and was still his sister, he turned his path in that direction.

He tapped lightly at the outer door of her chambers. The door opened partway and the goddess peered out at him, her features plainly displaying her surprise at his unexpected visit.

"I thought we had agreed ..." she said.

He stared at her without making any attempt to answer. Somehow her beauty always astonished him; for some reason his memory could never completely encompass it. After a few moments he edged his way past her and into the apartment. He found a chair and quickly seated himself before she could object.

He watched her tall, stately body as she closed the door and followed him into the room. She picked up the silken material she had set aside to answer the door and resumed her own seat. "A new peplos," she explained as she brushed her long, tawny hair into place with her fingers. "For the wedding. I've quite a bit more work to do on it. You may talk if you like, but I must sew." Spreading the fabric across her lap, she continued stitching a border of silver thread.

He seemed not to hear. When he did not reply, she continued, "Why have you come here? I thought we said everything to each other when we last met. There's nothing more to say, brother."

"Have you spoken with Klymene?"

The goddess shook her head. "Not since that day in the orchard. You explained to her, didn't you?"

"I told her we'd met by accident. I don't know if she believed me."

Themis shook her head. "You might have thought of something better to say."

"I couldn't tell her the truth."

"No, I suppose not." A bittersweet smile touched her lips. "You couldn't tell her that you were bidding your lover a last good-bye. You'd have to admit that we have been lovers- again."

"Since that day," he continued, "I've barely seen her. She's always busy, always going somewhere. It's as though-

"As though she doesn't believe your explanation? As though she's angry with you and exacting her revenge by avoiding you? You might have told her something more convincing."

"I thought best not to persist in my explanation. That would only have strengthened her suspicions."

Themis nodded, a stiff smile firmly set upon her lips. "And so you come to me with your domestic problems! This really isn't fair, you know. But tell me, have you asked where she is on these occasions?"

"She says she's working with the Hesperides, helping with their gowns for Eurybie's wedding."

Themis shrugged, lifting her own sewing a little toward him. "That's certainly reasonable enough. All of us are hard at work just now, you know. The Hesperides undoubtedly need assistance, being little skilled

themselves in such things. Klymene's gracious enough to assist all who solicit her help. Why do you doubt her? It sounds reasonable to me."

"It's reasonable, I suppose--except that she and the Hesperides have never been particularly friendly before. And she's absent for such lengthy periods of time--far longer than it should take merely to help with sewing--"

Themis laughed. "How little you know of the work of goddesses! To properly sew such garments--garments suited to the occasion and the wearer--why, weeks could be required, even months! How lucky you are, brother," she said quite serious now. "Your wife discovered you in what many would consider a compromising situation--alone in a very isolated part of the orchard, where few ever go, with someone she knows you once loved. She neither chides nor questions you, yet you aren't content. You scrutinized her every word and gesture, seeking the slightest suggestion that she disbelieves your lame excuse. ..."

He did not answer.

Her fingers remained hard at work as she spoke. "My advice is to look within yourself. It's you who are suspicious--suspicious of yourself. You know the guilt that lies within you, and it makes you think she can see it as clearly as you. There's your problem, brother."

For almost a full minute she watched him, her clear gray eyes studying his face. Finally she said, "Something more is troubling you. I've sensed it the last few times we've met." She laid aside her sewing and started to reach a comforting hand toward him, but caught herself and drew back.

He nodded. "You see too deeply. But I can't tell you about that yet."

"Oh?" She shrugged. "Well, as to Klymene, if you think it might help, I'll talk with her. ..."

He shook his head as he rose to his feet. He had been upon the verge of telling Themis about the peculiar messenger he had discovered in Klymene's room, but changed his mind. He stepped toward her to kiss her good-bye, but she pushed him away.

"Please, no!" she exclaimed. "Why torment each other with what can never be again?"

"I can't help it," he said bitterly. "I still love you, and you still love me. You can't deny you do."

She rose and walked a few paces away, then stood with her back toward him. "And you love Klymene. Don't deny that, either. You won't be happy unless you have both of us, which can never be. How weak and how foolish I must be, to have betrayed myself after all these years. I should never have returned to Olympos. I should have remained far away, where distance dulls the pain...."

"Oh, Iapetos," she continued suddenly, "this was all settled long ago, when we learned that you were destined to father sons by another wife. You have that happiness. It's yours now. I still must wait for the happiness promised me."

"What do you mean, Themis? I don't recall ..."

She nodded, smiling despite herself as she turned back to face him. "Not long ago I went again to Delphoi. I didn't tell you because I didn't

want to hurt you. I shall have a great new love, Iapetos-a far greater love than I've ever known. I must wait-perhaps a very long while-but in time it shall be mine!" Her voice was almost exultant.

The Titan's eyes were downcast, and he was frowning.

"How selfish you are," she cried. "After all I've suffered, you begrudge me this distant happiness. You have Klymene and your children. I have no one!"

"But I still love you," he said softly, "and I don't care about anything else. All I know is that I still want and need you."

She had started to cry. "Please go," she managed to say. "Please, please go. You see what sadness you bring me."

Iapetos hesitated, then turned toward the door. "I'm sorry," he said, but she did not reply. He pulled the door closed behind him and walked slowly away, sunk in gloomy thoughts.

When he arrived back in his own apartment, he found it as deserted as when he left. No sound disturbed his meditation until he reached his own bedroom.

He came to an abrupt stop, staring in the direction of the doorway that led to his wife's chambers. The door was closed now, though he was reasonably certain he had left it ajar. He went toward it. Perhaps that was what he had heard, the sound of a door closing. His wife must have returned home just ahead of him; she must have pulled the door shut just as he was entering his room.

He let his pace slacken as he reached the door. Instead of barging in on her, he decided to be more circumspect. He pressed an ear against the barrier.

The sounds that penetrated the wood were too indistinct to interpret. After a moment's hesitation he put his hand on the small, golden handle and pulled. The door was not equipped with any kind of bolt or latch; it opened easily, and through a narrow crack he peered into his wife's bedroom.

Klymene stood near the gallery with her back toward him. In her hands she held the winged fish. As he watched she carried it to one side of the room and set it upon a low table.

"Speak," she commanded, leaning over the thing. "Speak quickly-and softly, lest we be overheard!"

Iapetos held his breath so that the sound of his own breathing would not interfere with his ability to hear the creature. The messenger's wide, oval mouth flapped two or three times, and then it began to speak. Its voice was low but shrill, and Iapetos heard without difficulty every word it uttered.

"To Klymene, daughter of Okeanos, from Okeanos, her father: Greetings! All proceeds apace. Olympos suspects, but cannot prevent. Already he treads the lip of the precipice and will soon tumble. Fear nothing, daughter, whatever you hear. You and Philyra are our eyes and ears. Watch-listen-wait- be brave! Expect a visitor soon."

Its message delivered, the creature lapsed into silence. Klymene leaned over it and whispered something Iapetos could not hear.

"No, mistress. That is all," it replied.

Klymene continued whispering to the creature as she carried it out to the gallery. Standing beside the railing, she held out her hands and stared down at the phantom, watching as it began to fade. When only a few wisps of mist remained, she tossed them outward, toward the clouds far below.

Iapetos let the door close. He staggered away from the doorway. For a few minutes he sat in a chair, trying to absorb what he had heard. Then he rose and made his way out of the apartment, toward the solitude of his workshop.

Five

The dark haired goddess remained immobile beside the railing of the balcony. The instant the door to the adjacent room closed, however, her entire manner underwent an abrupt alteration. She shot a quick glance over her shoulder, then spun around to observe the interior of the room.

Had Iapetos been looking now, the slightest glimpse would have revealed that this was not his wife; no one would ever have mistaken one for the other, except here, where preconceptions and an imperfect view had joined to make the Titan believe he was watching Klymene in Klymene's bedchamber. In actuality this goddess was only an approximation of his wife—roughly of the same height and figure, with similar long, flowing dark hair. Her facial features failed utterly to simulate those of the gentle, good-natured Okeanid; instead her face displayed an unbecoming furtiveness as she glanced about.

Having assured herself that no one was in the room, she looked quickly to left and right along the gallery, then caused wings to grow from her shoulder blades. A few strokes of her wings took her to the gallery directly above and a few quick steps brought her to a window that led inward toward a corridor. Stepping through the opening, she made certain that no one was nearby to observe her, then let her body slip back to its natural form. Her hair lightened to golden blond and her luxurious figure became a bit taller. Pulling the cloak around her, the sea goddess Eurybie made her way quickly toward her own apartment, which lay only a short distance away. None of the gods and goddesses moving about the corridor on their own business seemed to pay her the slightest attention.

She closed behind her the main door of the apartment, then let herself lean against it for a long moment as she breathed out a sigh of relief. She looked up suddenly to see a figure rise from a chair across the room from her.

The sudden motion startled her, but she relaxed again almost immediately.

"Oh, it's only you!"

He looked even taller and more massive than usual as he came silently toward her, wrapped in the dark mantle that served as his only clothing.

"Whom did you expect?" the King of the Gods asked softly. "Who else might meet you here? You're trembling, and you've been gone a long time. Did something go amiss?"

She shook her head, wiping her face with the back of her long, delicate hand. "This isn't my sort of task, my lord. It makes me jittery. Iapetos could have recognized me—I mean, he could have realized I wasn't

Klymene. If he had come any nearer to me-

"But he didn't approach that closely," Kronos said, taking from her the cloak she was wearing and tossing it across a low table. He led her to a chair and sat down near her. "He did just as I said he would. He watched and listened, nothing more-am I not correct?"

"But you couldn't be sure he would act that way," she protested. "He might have taken it into his mind to confront me, and then-

"Then you would have fled to the gallery and escaped him-just as I instructed you."

She moistened her dry lips. "It was too risky," she insisted. "I've fulfilled your mission, my lord, but please don't ask me to help in this way again."

For a few moments he was silent. Then he said, "But everything went as planned?"

She nodded. "Exactly as planned. He found the messenger when he came home, because of the sounds, and when he returned the second time, he saw me and the messenger-

"You're certain he was watching? How can you be sure, since you couldn't look directly at him?"

She opened her clenched palm, revealing a small, highly polished silver disk. "I glimpsed him in this."

"And he heard all that was said?"

"That I can only surmise. I had to keep my voice low, so it wouldn't betray me, but I'm confident he heard more than enough. Reassure yourself, my lord. WeVe every reason to believe things went just as you planned."

The King of the Gods smiled. "Good. Very good, Eurybie. I must compliment you."

"It isn't compliments I want," she said. "I'd rather have a nice gift-something lavish, preferably."

He laughed. "And you shall have it, when we've finished."

"When we're finished? What do you mean?" She made a noise indicative of annoyance and formed her lips into an expression of distaste. "Have I no longer a voice in the things I do and the things I don't do?"

"I still need your help, Eurybie. Will you deny it to me?"

"Of course not, my lord. You know I'll assist you in any way I can-but I do like to be consulted. You haven't even told me what you expect to accomplish with this elaborate ruse."

"I'm surprised you can't guess."

Looking up at him, she said, "I suppose it has something to do with keeping Iapetos faithful to you." A slight smile touched her lips.

"Whatever you did to my betrothed-when you made him and Koios hunt with you-certainly succeeded, though I'm not convinced it was worth the trouble. You merely turned a timid rabbit into a groveling worm, a questionable accomplishment."

"Perhaps, but now I'm certain Crios will obey no matter what I demand. He won't dare disobey."

"Oh, I suppose so, though I still don't think it was necessary. But is that what you are doing to Iapetos?"

Kronos's great head nodded slowly. "That's part of it. I intend to bind him to me just as I have bound Crios and Koios. What you witnessed a little while ago was only the second of three steps in that process. The first--"

"Of course it would be a three-step plan! I would expect nothing less from the King of the Gods."

"I was about to say," Kronos continued, "that the first occurred some days ago. The final installment, in which you will be a principal element, will take place tonight."

Eurybie frowned and sighed. She leaned back in her chair. "As you wish, my lord. Would you be so kind as to lay out before me the various elements and sections and subdivisions of this plan of yours. I know simplicity bores you, but I find it refreshing occasionally - and ever so much easier to comprehend. Your purpose, you say, is to bind Lord Iapetos to you. That, I should think, will be both easy and difficult: easy because everyone obeys your orders and difficult because Iapetos stubbornly insists upon thinking for himself. You don't want only his obedience. You want him to approve of your commands, to execute them gladly, and that I think will be a good bit more difficult to manage."

Kronos was listening with bemused interest. "Keep an attentive eye on the proceedings, then. You may be surprised. Crios and Koios are mine now, in thought and action. I must have the same degree of devotion from Iapetos. Unlike the other two, he can't be intimidated. The threat of force would only drive him from me." He paused for a moment, thinking, then continued, "Do you remember telling me, Eurybie, that everyone has a weak point?"

She nodded.

"The concept was not new to me, of course, though I'd never phrased it so concisely. I'd always thought of it in terms of what one wants or fears. They're really the same thing, but viewed from opposite directions. My brother Okeanos wants dignity and fears humiliation. To use your terms, his weak point is his pride.

"Now, apply this to my other brother, Lord Iapetos. What is it that he wants or fears? Like each of us, many things. But most important to him are his wife and children, and the goddess he still loves. You know that he was once married to Themis, before he married Klymene?"

"Yes," she said, leaning forward now with unconcealed interest.

"When he first married Klymene, he didn't love her at all, though he's since grown very fond of her. Still, it is Themis who stirs his passions."

"Why then did he marry the Okeanid?"

"He became convinced that he must marry her, that such a marriage was destined."

Eurybie scrutinized the features of her king. "Convinced? I sense



something more lurking beyond your bare words."

"It was an oracle of Gaia. Only thus could his children be born. Themis, herself, told him he must bow to its fulfillment. Another characteristic of my brother, you may have noticed, is righteousness. Neither his own happiness nor that of Themis could dissuade him once he was convinced, and so he put aside the wife he loved and took instead an Okeanid about whom he cared nothing."

Eurybie, who was always fascinated by tidbits of gossip, shook her head slowly. "He forsook his love for his duty- or what he considered his duty. I almost find myself admiring such strength of character. Still-" She hesitated, smiling. "Few would dare risk an oracle in so delicate a matter as love-since it would almost always be unfavorable-so he must have gone to ask how he might gain offspring. ..."

She laughed self-consciously. "How preposterous. I must be careful, Lord Kronos. I'm becoming terribly suspicious. I was just thinking that of all the Titans, only Iapetos-and Crios, once he and I are married-failed to marry a Titaness. Crios is marrying me, of course, because you wish him to, so that you may have a claim, however tenuous, to the throne of my brother. ..." She laughed again. "No, even you couldn't be so calculating as that, to plant the seeds of your triumph decades before their fruition-to plant them at the expense of your brother's happiness all these years. ..."

"I suppose this is one of the vexations I must endure," Kronos said slowly. "When there's an evil in question, I'm attributed powers beyond those of any god; when there's a good . . . Seriously, Eurybie, do you think I can control the oracle of Gaia, shaping it to my own ends? If you know how it can be done, please tell me. That would be a useful talent."

"Of course, my lord," she said, smiling broadly and nodding her head in assent. "It is as you say ... as always. Still ..." Her voice trailed off.

"We were speaking of Iapetos's weaknesses," Kronos continued, "not of the powers attributed to me. His family is one, and it's there that he's most vulnerable, if only for the reason that we've just been discussing. It's there that I have determined to attack him."

"And I'm to be your weapon?"

He ignored her question. "Iapetos has been seeing Themis without Klymene's knowledge. He saw her three days ago, down one of the orchard paths after supper. I saw them go down the path separately and guessed what was in progress. When Klymene happened to come nearby looking for her husband, I directed her to their trysting place. And so step one fell into place without any effort on my part."

"But what have you accomplished, except to make Klymene unhappy and angry with her husband?"

"Oh, far more than that. I've tilted my brother off balance, so that when other things begin to happen he'll be less able to deal with them. Step two, he becomes aware that his beautiful, faithful wife, is, in reality, a spy for her father-that Okeanos is indeed plotting against Kronos, just as Kronos has been telling him, and that fair, innocent Klymene is a party to that plot."

Eurybie listened in silence, fascinated and appalled by the always

surprising intricacies of her lord's mind.

"You see, don't you?" he continued. "Klymene found him with Themis. Inevitably there will be greater distance between wife and husband. She'll be suspicious of him even if he convinced her she had no cause for jealousy. After all, she knows full well of his earlier passion for Themis. Iapetos, of course, will be unusually sensitive to his wife's manner and see distrust even where there is none.

"It was for this reason that I had you arrange for the Hes-perides to keep Klymene busy. Even though she has, indeed, been thoroughly occupied helping them prepare their wedding costumes, to his guilty mind her prolonged absences from home will be but another proof that she has neither forgiven nor forgotten."

"I still fail to understand what all this will accomplish."

"Tonight, when you execute the final part of my plan, I shall gain Iapetos!"

He rose and stretched his massive body, towering over her.

"But enough of this for now. I need something more pleasant to think about. Tell me-is the apartment ready? Philyra will be expecting me shortly." He glanced out the window to verify the time by the position of the sun.

"I put the final touches on it last night. Would you like to see it?"

He nodded, rising.

"That reminds me, my lord. Why did you implicate Philyra? Now Iapetos thinks she, too, is plotting against you."

The Lord of the Titans shrugged. "If he is no longer overly concerned about the welfare of his niece, is that a bad thing?"

Together they left Eurybie's apartment.

Six

Philyra, the Okenaid, rose at last from her dressing table. For some minutes her preparations had been completed. Her hair was carefully arranged, her clothing exactly adjusted, and nothing remained for her to do now but await the arrival of the Lord of the Titans. The loneliness and isolation of her room began to depress her, and she rose to seek out her sisters and some measure of companionship and commiseration.

First she went to look for Klymene, but found no sign of her. The personal quarters of the wife of Iapetos were completely deserted. Indeed, all of the apartment seemed oddly empty and still as she traversed its many rooms. Finally she retraced her path past her own room to that of her young sister Metis.

She found Metis kneeling on the floor surrounded by plants of every description. The girl glanced up for a moment as she entered.

"Wait a moment, Philyra," she said. "I can't stop yet. I think I've almost found what I'm looking for."

Philyra settled quietly on Metis's bed and watched as the divine child turned her attention back to the plant she held in her hand. She stared

down at it, evidently with deep concentration. As Philyra looked on the plant began to grow, its tendrils snaking like the limbs of some monstrous sea creature. Finally, with a sigh, Metis set the plant aside and looked up.

The drawn, nervous appearance of Philyra's usually bright and lovely face immediately drew the child's sympathy. "Oh, sister," she said, rising and coming toward her, "why do you put yourself through this? You can't go on this way. I think you should leave Olympos now. It isn't too late."

Philyra shook her head, her mouth drawn into a firm, straight line. "I won't do that, Metis, not as long as there's a chance we can help Father and Proteus by staying."

"But you promised Proteus you'd flee if the danger became too great," Metis protested.

"And I shall-but only then. I won't let myself be cowardly at a time such as this."

"But how long can you endure it all? He's wearing you down day by day. If this continues, you'll be useless to Father and yourself. Look how your hands are trembling."

Philyra clasped her hands together in front of her. "Please, Metis, don't go on. I am doing some good, you know. At the very least I'm occupying some of Kronos's time. That must leave him less time to plot against our father. I only wish there were more I could do-some bolder stroke!"

Metis grinned at her. "He certainly hasn't broken your spirit."

"It's amazing," Philyra continued. "Never once have I encouraged him in any way."

"Except by failing to discourage him!"

"Oh, that isn't fair, Metis. In our position here, I can't offend him."

"What new stratagem is he unveiling today?"

Philyra shook her head. "I don't know. That's one of the reasons I'm so jittery."

Metis's voice became serious. "Have you decided what to do if he becomes unmanageable?'"

Philyra shook her head.

"You have a dagger?" the girl asked. "You could easily hide one among the folds of your clothing."

"No! I'd use it on him if I had one. Then we would have to flee Olympos. Why, he could twist it around and claim I attacked him as part of our father's conspiracy. He could use it as proof of our father's treachery.'"

Metis frowned. "I hadn't thought of that. But what will you do when he finally grows tired of being put off? I suppose as a last resort you could always faint."

They had lapsed into silence for a few moments when a sound interrupted their thoughts. Philyra had left open the door to Metis's room so that

they would hear Kronos if he sought admission. Trembling, she threw herself into Metis's arms, then rose to her full stature and began to quickly straighten her clothing as she made her way to the atrium, the main room and entrance hall of the apartment. There she hesitated, fighting to overcome the skittishness which, even now, threatened to send her racing from Olympos.

As she opened the door the Lord of the Titans filled the doorway. Smiling, he bowed his broad head.

"Greetings, Philyra," he said, stepping toward her only enough to carry him across the threshold. His quick eyes examined every corner of the large room. "Are Lord Iapetos and Lady Klymene here? I haven't seen them today."

"No, my lord."

"Oh, well, I'll see them some other time. You're ready? Good, let's go."

Before she could agree or object, he took her by the arm and led her out into the corridor.

"But where are we going?" she asked, trying to sound cheerful even though she was almost breathless from the manner in which he had whisked her through the door and closed it behind them.

He shook his head. "I won't explain anything. There's nothing so sorry as a spoiled surprise. Be patient, child. You'll soon know."

He led her up the circular staircase to the floor directly above, then down a number of twisting corridors.

As they walked, Philyra found herself becoming more and more uneasy. Brave but high-strung, she had greeted each new manifestation of Kronos's unwavering purpose with suppressed panic. She had returned each gift with a polite message, declined each romantic advance. Yet invariably such actions had no effect on her unwelcome suitor. Finding one path blocked, he sought another-with an indefatigable energy and singleness of mind that came to terrify her.

When for one reason or another she was unable to attend breakfast or supper with him, she found herself cultivated by the beautiful sea goddess Eurybie. While previously they had done little more than exchange polite greetings, now Kronos's protege appeared out of nowhere with unnerving regularity; and whenever Eurybie was about, the sea goddess inevitably led the conversation to the King of the Gods, to the wealth at his disposal, the power at his command. Each new proof of the determination of the Lord of the Titans left Philyra still more nervous-and less certain that she could continue to evade him.

As they walked she darted quick glances in his direction. He was talking calmly and easily; she had no idea what he was talking about. His manner was friendly, relaxed, without hint of subterfuge-but still he frightened her. She had a premonition that matters between herself and Kronos were quickly approaching a culmination and it took every effort of her will not to bolt from him and try to lose herself among the corridors.

"Oh, yes," Kronos continued after a lull in his monologue, "a message arrived earlier today from your father. Perhaps you will tell your sister and Lord Iapetos for me, in case I don't have the opportunity. Lord Okeanos has informed Crios and Eurybie that he and your mother will

attend their wedding."

"Oh, good," Philyra said, attempting to make her response seem genuine. She forced a smile to her lips. "I'll be happy to tell them." She looked away again as soon as she could do so without appearing rude.

As they walked Kronos seldom took his eyes from her. Her smooth, firm skin fascinated him, and he found himself studying an exposed patch along the side of her neck. She brushed back a dark curl from her cheek, in the process turning in such a way that the tendons of her neck stood out strong and taut in sharp contrast to the delicate femininity of the rest of her. The movement was enticing-and maddening.

Somehow she managed to imbue every demure movement, every shy word, with coy promise. Experience told him that she could not possibly be the chaste young thing she pretended; he knew that her shy glances and quick smiles were mere artifice-or were they? Even the slight chance that she might really be the modest creature she pretended added immeasurably to her charm, making him all the more determined to penetrate her maidenly reserve.

Now he drew her to a halt before huge double doors.

"Here is where I've been leading you," he said. The doors swung slowly inward to his touch, revealing a panorama of lush opulence. Floors of lapis lazuli gleamed in the full golden light of the sun, which flooded into a broad atrium through large open windows. Upon the walls vistas of sky and mountain, valley and plain, had been created by infinitely skilled hands from pigments of gold and silver and pulverized gems of every type. The rarest of woods and fabrics had been employed to furnish the room.

Kronos led her within, pushing the doors closed behind them. He let his extended hand move from left to right. "Have you ever seen such a place?" he asked. "Not another suite on Olympos has such rich furnishings."

"No, my lord," she answered. "I must admit it. I've never seen such a room before." Her mind was racing, trying to find a way to extricate

herself from this lush trap. He was still holding her lightly by the arm. Now he guided her to one side of the atrium and down a short hallway. As they walked he opened door after door to reveal each room they passed. The same lavish luxury greeted them at each threshold.

"My lord," she said, "indeed this is all wonderfully beautiful, but tell me-why have you brought me here? Whose rooms are these? I'd think they were yours, except that I know your chambers are high above us."

"Patience, Philyra," he said softly. "Come this way."

Another door opened. A cedar-framed bed dominated the room, its purple mattress embroidered with floral designs executed in threads of gold and silver. Against one wall stood the full-length mirror that Kronos had given Philyra and which she had returned to him. Near it was a small dressing table. Scattered across the top of the table lay a large assortment of jewelry, glittering with every kind of precious gem. Among these things the Okeanid recognized the necklace and other gifts Kronos had given her and which she had declined.

She drew away from him, struggling to control her emotions. She could guess quite easily what all this was about. Nevertheless, she said, "These are the things I sent back to you. What does this mean, my lord?"

The Lord of the Titans nodded. He scooped up a handful of the baubles and let them slip through his fingers back into a heap upon the tabletop. "I am your king," he said simply. "If I wish to give a present, I will give it."

Philyra had drawn a few steps away and was clutching her hands together above her waist. "But I've told you before, I can't accept them."

He stepped toward her, talking soothingly. "Come now, lovely child. You have much to learn of both Olympus and the world. And your first lesson is that you must obey your king, especially when he so obviously has your interests at heart."

His smile, so natural and guileless, made her quake.

"But, Lord Kronos, what does all this mean? Why have you brought me here?"

His arm slipped around her trembling shoulders. "To show you your new chambers, Philyra. You've been the guest of your sister and Lord Iapetos for too long. Now you shall be my guest here on Mount Olympus. This apartment is yours. Beauty like yours needs a proper setting, just as the beauty of a jewel must be displayed properly if it's to be fully appreciated."

"Please, my lord. Can it be that you still don't understand, that I haven't made myself clear?"

He tried to soothe her as she continued to retreat a step or two at a time. Each time his arm started to settle upon her body she backed away again. "Don't be foolish, child," he told her. "There isn't a goddess on Olympus who wouldn't leap at the opportunity to have such an apartment as this. Why, I've had it all expressly furnished for you."

"No, my lord, I cannot. It would-it would compromise me-"

"Compromise!" he repeated, beginning to chuckle. "Philyra, can't you put aside such silly notions for a while? If you fear gossip, that needn't worry you. I know very well how to silence thoughtless tongues. Why should you not have such comfort as this? Would you deny me the opportunity to show my appreciation of you? I do appreciate you, you know. ..."

Again he stepped toward her, his arm slipping around her waist and attempting to draw her toward him. Her entire body trembled in extreme nervous agitation.

"None of those other things need concern you," he continued. His hand moved to her neck and shoulder in such a way that it brushed aside the fabric of her peplos and stroked her delicate skin.

"Oh, please, my lord!" She tried to turn away, but his other arm restrained her. "This cannot be! The other gods and goddesses-were they to learn that I was living here, installed in such luxury, they would certainly think you my lover."

At last she succeeded in twisting free. She continued to object as he pursued her across the wide room, advancing as she retreated. "They would whisper about me, my lord. They would scandalize us. Think of my reputation if not your own. Would you subject me to such embarrassment? Evil tongues will not be stilled, however much you may threaten, and their vile gossip must inevitably reach my parents and-and your wife!

Oh, Lord Kronos, I could never again face my father and mother. It may not-must not be. Even though I know you have only the purest and most honorable of intentions-

"Come, come, Philyra," he said, now stepping in front of her so that she could retreat no farther, "forget these foolish objections. I know the true situation, and that's all that matters. What these others think is of no consequence, and your parents must know you well enough to discount any gossip that may reach them."

He took her by the hand and began leading her toward another of the many rooms. "You shall enjoy this splendor and luxury, even if I must force it upon you. I'll not be dissuaded, child."

Philyra fought to keep back tears of frustration and anger.

Seven

Metis, the youthful Okeanid, looked up from her work when Prometheus and Epimetheus called to her from the entrance to Ophion's tunnel, the nearly forgotten passageway that had been bored through the walls of the palace by the ancient snake god long before the Titans came to Mount Olympos. The goddess was still sitting on the floor near the gallery, amid her numerous plants. Perhaps twenty minutes had elapsed since the departure of her sister Philyra, and during that time Metis had once again completely lost herself in her work.

Before regaining their normal size, the divine boys hopped down the short distance to the floor and walked out around the large wooden chest that partially concealed the entrance to the tunnel. They were just returning from the apartment of Momos, where the strange new creatures the Muses had dubbed man were hidden.

"Have you ever thought that maybe Ophion is still in there," Prometheus asked as he and his brother recovered their short white chitons from the places where they had hidden them, "and that someday we may run into him?"

"Too often," Metis answered. "There are times when I'm sure he'll slither at me from just around the next turn."

The brothers finished deftly adjusting their clothing. "Two more of the mortals can speak," Epimetheus announced.

"That makes eight so far-no, nine counting Alalkome-neus," Prometheus said. He squatted on the floor beside Metis while his brother continued to stand.

"They're fun to watch," Epimetheus said. "It's curious, though, the way they dislike each other. They'd probably fight all the time if we didn't stop them."

"That's not true," Prometheus said. "Usually they're just playing."

"The apartment is still safe?" Metis asked, dividing her attention between the plant in her hands and the two brothers, who were the sons of the Titan Iapetos and Metis's sister Klymene. "No sign of Momos or any other god?"

They shook their heads.

"Everything's fine there," Prometheus assured her, "but we'll have to bring more food soon. They're nearly out."

"The head of Oizys is always hungry," Epimetheus said. "I've never seen anything like the way he eats. Just one of us could carry enough food to feed the mortals for a year, if it weren't for him. He takes one big bite, chews it up, then waits a number of minutes before taking another bite. But he's always eating!"

"You'd probably seem pretty strange too," his brother said, "if you were just a big head with a tiny little body dangling from it. One mouthful is probably all that'll fit in his stomach at one time."

"I don't like him," Epimetheus continued. "He always seems to be watching us."

"He might not be so scary," Metis said, "if he were able to talk. That hissing sound he makes way in the back of his throat, when he's trying to attract attention, always makes me want to get far away from him."

"And he always wants the same thing," Epimetheus said. "Food."

Metis broke off small pieces from one of the shoots of the plant she was holding and handed them to the boys. "Taste these and tell me what you think."

Epimetheus demured. "Taste that? I don't want to."

Metis slipped a piece into her own mouth and chewed slowly. Prometheus hesitated, then followed her example.

"It isn't bad, is it?" she asked after a moment. "But it's not right. . . not quite right. . . It needs a lot more work."

Epimetheus snorted in contempt. "You'll never get anyone to eat stuff like that!"

Prometheus leaped to her defense. "You haven't even tasted it. You don't know what you're talking about."

"I don't expect anyone to eat it the way it is," she interrupted, trying to avert an argument. "But by the time I've finished, nobody'll want to eat anything else."

"I still don't understand what these plants have to do with the dead nymph in Thanatos's room, or with red ichor," Epimetheus said.

"Pink ichor," Prometheus corrected. "Not red like the blood of mortal creatures, or clear like the ichor that runs in the veins of the gods, but somewhere in between."

"Red, pink, I still don't see the connection."

"What Metis said makes a lot of sense. How can we expect our bodies to remain immortal when we consume perishable food? Over a long period of time all the poisons in that food must accumulate inside us."

"But no god has died, only a nymph. How does that prove anything? Why should the food all of us eat kill her and not anyone else?"

"Nymphs-I mean the river nymphs and nymphs of the woods and fields-aren't as powerful as other goddesses," Prometheus said. "Maybe they're more susceptible to these poisons than the rest of us."

Epimetheus was shaking his head as Metis interrupted. "Maybe I'm completely wrong," she said, "but I want to see if I can come up with a



really good food-something as delicious and as imperishable as nectar. It may have nothing to do with the nymph's death, or with the color of her ichor. Nevertheless, it only makes sense that if we are indeed immortal, we should not feed our bodies with food that rots. Each time we eat something that's died, we consume a portion of mortality.' ' "But you're saying," Epimetheus continued, "that the nymph wouldn't have died if she'd eaten this new stuff of yours all her life, instead of all the plants and animals she did eat? Or is that what you're saying?"

Metis shook her head. "I'm not saying anything yet. I've told you the thoughts that led to a feeling I have about this. Maybe the nymph would have died in any event. I suspect that's probably the case. The important point, though, is that her death suggested this idea to me. It's only an idea. It can't hurt to see what kind of food I can develop."

Metis grimaced inwardly. Her brother Proteus had made her promise not to tell anyone about his recent visit to Olym-pos, and so Prometheus and Epimetheus were aware of only a small part of her endeavors. They thought they were helping her protect the mortals and punish Thanatos, who would harm the little creatures. She could not tell them about the suggestive pink tint she had seen in Nalassa's ichor when the naiad had accidentally pricked her finger.

The conversation dwindled to silence, and a short time later the brothers left to go to their own room. Metis returned to her work, but as soon as the door closed she heard a soft, high-pitched shout from the direction of Ophion's tunnel.

As she looked in that direction the mortal Alalkomeneus stepped into view from behind the wooden chest. "Hail, Lady Metis," he cried as he advanced across the floor. A miniature cloak flared around him. "I've followed your instructions carefully, O Lady of Swift Wisdom. I've been waiting inside the tunnel for a long time, until my lords Prometheus and Epimetheus departed-even though I bear important news."

At the man's sudden appearance Metis set aside her work. She swooped him up, brought him to her cheek, and kissed him. "There you are, my little Alalkomeneus. I'm so glad to see you. I was starting to worry. You're late getting here. But tell me quickly, what's your news?"

"I've much to report, my lady, but nothing as important as what I learned in the chambers of Thanatos. After completing my other duties, I followed the leg of Ophion's tunnel that leads to that god's hidden room. Always when I go there, a terrible fear grips me, and the noisome smell of the place-

Metis laughed, holding him close to her face and kissing him again. "Oh, Handsome Man of the Facile Tongue, you love your words too well. If my brother Proteus were here, he might revoke his gift of speech, for you indulge it to the point of abuse. If this news is really important, then tell me quickly and in few words."

"Pardon, my lady. I'll try." The man looked chastened.

"I located the man assigned to watch Thanatos today. Unlike the one who was there yesterday, he seemed very observant and not overly fearful. He told me that Lord Thanatos awakened briefly a short time before I arrived."

"Awakened!"

"Yes, my lady. The god awakened and sat up. He looked about the room, then crossed the room to pour himself a cup of nectar.'"

"Did he speak with anyone? Did anyone see him-any god?"

"No, my lady. He drank, then stumbled back to bed. Almost immediately he fell back to sleep. When I was told these things he had been sleeping for a long time without so much as moving an arm or leg."

Metis set the man aside and rose quickly to her feet. Alal-komeneus watched as she opened one of the oak chests that lined the walls of her room and withdrew from it a leather bag.

"This is indeed important, little Alalkomeneus. Thanatos must be kept sick and unconscious. We can't let him talk to any of the gods." Of all Kronos's confederates, Thanatos alone had reason to suspect that Proteus had been here on Olympos. Metis had promised her brother that she would keep him safely indisposed and incapable of revealing to Kronos all that he had seen.

Working quickly, she transferred a small amount of powdered herb from the bag into a tiny swatch of linen, then fastened the linen closed with thread. She passed the now manageable bundle to Alalkomeneus.

Loosening her clothing and letting it fall to the floor around her feet, she began to shrink in size until she was only a little larger than the man.

"Will you remain here, or come with me?" she asked as she strode to his side and took the parcel from him; it was now larger than her own head.

"O Bright-eyed Goddess of Inexhaustible Sagacity, I will be flattered to be allowed to accompany you on this mission. My eyes will drink in every divine act of your glorious being. I will-"

"You will be quiet, my friend."

He followed her into the tunnel. A torch burned in its holder, and from it the goddess lit a second, which she had selected from a large stock that lay just within the entrance. She handed one to the man and kept the other for herself.

During the days that had elapsed since the discovery of Ophion's tunnel, Metis had made a point of exploring as much of the intricate system of passages as she could. Her explorations had progressed to the extent that she could find her way to many areas of the palace with little difficulty. Now she traveled to the chambers of Thanatos in a fraction of the time required on her first trip.

"Tell me, Alalkomeneus," she said as they walked, "what of your other project? By die way, it is that-and all things having to do with Kronos and Lord Proteus-that we may not share with Prometheus and Epimetheus. You could have told me about Thanatos in front of them."

"Forgive me, my lady. I was not certain."

"You're forgiven, my friend. Now, what else happened today?"

"When I left you this morning, I followed your instructions implicitly. I went directly to the place in the tunnel from which it is possible to overhear what is said in certain rooms of the personal chambers of Lord Kronos. I relieved the man who had occupied that post since last night. I remained there, listening but hearing nothing, until I was myself

relieved. That was only a little while ago."

"You heard no voices? You heard nothing at all-not even sounds?"

"Not even sounds, my lady."

"Then he must not have been at home."

"My lady," Alalkomeneus assured her, "had the King of the Gods been within those rooms, then surely I would have heard him. Even had he been soundly asleep, I would have detected the groaning of the stays of his bed-so carefully did I fulfill the mission with which you entrusted me."

Metis frowned. "It's too bad these tunnels don't run near every room in his apartment, so that we could monitor his activities more thoroughly. Still, it's likely you would have heard something had he been in the apartment." She shrugged. "You did well, and I thank you. Perhaps tomorrow we'll overhear the single phrase or sentence that will make all this effort worthwhile. We must be alert for anything that may help my father and Proteus."

"I have other things to report, my lady. You have not asked about the progress of my fellow mortals, or--"

"You'll have to tell me later, Alalkomeneus. We're almost there."

They were now approaching the entrance to Thanatos's hidden chamber. The tunnel entered the room at a point high up on one wall, near the ceiling. Metis had become proficient in making herself mortal-size, but still avoided the more daring feats of metamorphosis that her brother Proteus performed so effortlessly. Where he would have transformed himself into a bird and flown to the floor below, she was content to climb down the treacherous rope ladder that now hung from the lip of the tunnel, concealed only by the darkness of that part of the room. Once she reached the floor, she resumed her normal size and lifted down Alalkomeneus. The door from the laboratory to Thanatos's bedchamber had been left ajar so that mortal sentries could come and go. She peeked through the opening. The emaciated god lay stretched upon the matted rags that served as sheets and blankets on his bed. When he did not stir after two or three minutes, she pushed the door more fully open and entered the room. She carried Alalkomeneus in her hand.

A mortal came toward them from his hiding place behind a jumble of clothing heaped in a corner of the room. As he drew near he threw

himself down on the floor. Metis halted, staring at him. "What is he doing?" she asked Alalkomeneus. "Why is he lying down like that?"

Alalkomeneus displayed an air of superiority to the creature prostrated upon the floor. "He's frightened of you, my lady, but wishes to please you. He is bowing-all the way."

"I don't like it. Tell him to stop. It's undignified and distasteful. I won't have my mortals doing that. Do you hear me, man?" she asked, now addressing the mortal. "Get up and don't ever do that again. Have you no self-respect?"

The man rose quickly to his feet. His head hung down and his eyes avoided those of the goddess.

"Has Thanatos moved since he rose and drank nectar? Tell me quickly, man, for it's important."

"No, my lady," the man answered without looking up. "He's slept the whole time, barely moving."

"Good. Very good." She set Alalkomeneus down beside the other mortal and went to a small table against one of the walls. On it were three vessels—a jug of imperishable nectar, an ewer of water, and a mixing bowl. Near these was a small silver cup, a few drops of red nectar still glistening within it.

Glancing over her shoulder every few seconds, she opened the tiny cloth bundle she had brought from her room and sprinkled most of the contents into the jug of nectar. She swirled the liquid around several times, then crossed the room and let a few particles of the herb fall between the parted lips of the god.

She watched the god for nearly a minute, then went back to Alalkomeneus. "Wait here," she told him. "Talk with your friend. I have other work to do."

She opened wide the door to the laboratory so that light from the bedroom would enter it, then took a deep breath and went in. The smell was still very strong. During the time Thanatos had been unconscious, she or Prometheus had come each day to feed the creatures kept in this hidden room where Thanatos had sought to find the secrets of death. The task had not been performed today, and the animals cackled and grunted, lowed and bleated as she moved about the room tossing grain into their cages. She stopped occasionally to bestow a caress on a lamb or goat.

When she had finished she spent a few minutes walking slowly among the long tables that filled the room, many of them still bearing the desiccated remains of dissected mortal animals. The room held a morbid fascination that she could not fully deny.

Her path led past the headless body of Oizys, which lay motionless but still living upon one of the tables, a gruesome testimonial to Thanatos's relentless curiosity. Proteus had carried away from this room the still conscious head and entrusted it to Metis's care. It was now hidden away with the mortals in the apartment of Momos.

She forced herself to lean closer and examine the severed neck, which was now completely healed over and showed no indication that it would ever grow back a head. The head of Oizys had already regenerated a body. Though not much larger than the hand of a god, it was perfectly formed and probably would grow to full size eventually. Metis shuddered and walked on.

Finally she paused beside the corpse of the nameless nymph. Its skin had a distinctly gray cast now, and it was obvious that decomposition had set in, though much more slowly than would have been the case with a mortal animal. Metis studied the wound upon the nymph's arm, but the ichor she had seen there before was now indistinguishable from the decaying flesh.

She thought of Nalassa again. She should have told Proteus. The naiad was mortal; she was almost certain of that. She should have warned him so that he could shield Nalassa more carefully from the dangers that threatened all of them.

Eight

After Kronos finally left her philyra stood for a long time in the doorway of her new apartment, trying to decide what she should do. He

had left no doubt that he expected her to take up residence here; it was an order from the King of the Gods, however softly phrased.

In her mind she cursed him. She was doubly offended. Not only did he refuse to let her gracefully decline his unwanted attention, but he seemed to think he need only dangle the right trinket before her and she would leap willingly into his arms. A flush mounted her cheeks and made her face burn with humiliation and anger. She would not stay here! He might be the King of the Gods and she only a guest in his palace, but she would not submit to this. Even if she must flee Olympos--something she certainly did not want to do because of the obligation she felt to assist Metis and Proteus--she would not allow him to force her into such a compromising situation. He had promised to return tonight to visit her. Well, he would not find her here!

She took a last look about the opulent atrium. Under other circumstances an apartment such as this would have brought exclamations of delight to her lips. Today it seemed instead a vile and taudry place--an emblem of shame. She fled into the corridor, back toward her old room in the chambers of Iapetos.

Why could he not see that she had no interest in romance-- none at all, not with him or with anyone? She was still too young for that, at least in her own mind. Other gods had tried to court her since she had arrived on Olympos, but she had gently and firmly discouraged all overtures. Someday--perhaps soon, perhaps years from now--she would find love; she was certain of that, too, in her own mind. But not just yet, and certainly not with Kronos. She seldom even thought of love, so many other matters clamored for her attention.

She would simply ignore the Lord of the Titans, she decided suddenly. She would not move her belongings. She would return to her old room and continue to live with her sisters. If he objected--well, she would deal with that when it happened.

Despite this resolution she found herself wanting the advice and consolation of someone she could trust and speak with openly. When she reached the apartment of Iapetos she hurried to find her sister Klymene. She had spoken to Kly-mene about Kronos before, but had never revealed the full depth of the situation. She was determined now to tell her sister everything that did not touch upon Kronos's plot against their family.

To her dismay she found that Klymene had not yet returned home, and so Philyra went instead to find Metis.

"Where have you been?" the child demanded, shoving the door closed behind them. "What did you do? Did you insult Kronos?"

As quickly as possible Philyra told her all that had happened since they had last seen each other.

"Then no one knows you're here?" Metis asked. "She didn't see you come in?"

"She? Who?" Philyra sank into a chair. Her hands trembled uncontrollably.

"Eurybie. She arrived a few minutes ago. I, myself, have only just returned. She said Kronos sent her, and is in your room now with two other goddesses." Metis sighed. "At least things aren't as bad as I feared. I thought you might have done something rash."

Philyra looked both frightened and puzzled. "Why is Eurybie in my room?"

A slight tapping sounded at the door. Almost immediately the door opened to reveal the smiling face of the golden-haired sea goddess.

"Ah, it's you," Eurybie said guilelessly as she entered. "I thought I heard you." Her quick glance took in both Philyra and Metis. "I really must have your help," she told Philyra. "Come now, won't you? We're already late, and have much to accomplish."

Even as the Okeanid attempted to question and protest, Eurybie took her by the elbow and guided her across the narrow hall. Metis followed along, carefully closing the door behind them.

Eurybie led them directly to Philyra's room. As they entered they found much of the room's furnishings pushed aside or stacked together in one area.

"What's going on?" Philyra asked almost hopelessly. "My things...?"

"Lord Kronos asked me to help you move. He knew you'd be anxious to get settled into your new apartment. We've made quite a good start"-she nodded toward the two lesser goddesses who were assisting her-"but I'd really prefer you to take charge of the more personal items. Most of the furnishings here can remain, of course, since better ones already await you."

Eurybie looked from Philyra to Metis and back to Philyra again. "If we all pitch in, we can be done before supper!"

To her amazement, Philyra found herself busily engaged in moving her belongings. The task was completed quickly, and before long Philyra and Metis stood side by side in the Okeanid's new apartment. No sooner had Eurybie and her helpers departed than Philyra began to sob.

"Oh, Metis, what shall I do?" the goddess asked.

"Quiet," the child warned. As Philyra watched Metis moved slowly about the apartment, her eyes examining everything carefully. After a few minutes the young goddess made her way out onto the gallery. When Philyra joined her she said, "Wait here. I'll be back shortly. On second thought, go sit in the atrium until I return."

Metis disappeared from sight on the gallery. Four or five minutes later she reappeared, this time entering the atrium not from the direction in which she had left, but by way of the main door leading from the outer corridor.

"What are you doing?" Philyra whispered. "Why are you sneaking around like this?"

"It's okay. You can talk normally right now. Come with me and I'll show you what I've found. I suspected something of this sort. You're lucky to have a sister with a mind as devious as Kronos's."

The young goddess led Philyra out into the corridor and then into a neighboring suite of rooms. Dust and lack of furnishings clearly indicated that no one lived in this apartment.

"I asked myself," Metis began explaining, "just what Lord Kronos would have to gain by moving you to new quarters."

"Gain?" the Okeanid asked. "What do you mean? He's trying to seduce me."

The child smiled indulgently. "Yes, I understand that. But he's more likely to have a second-even a third goal in mind. You draw your strength here on Olympos from your family- from Klymene and her husband, even from me. By settling you in new quarters, away from us, he weakens you. He can approach you more easily away from the suspicious eyes of your sisters. Do you follow so far?"

Philyra nodded.

"Now, there's another point not to be forgotten. You're a daughter of Okeanos, and Kronos is just now in the middle of a dangerous plot against that god. It would be to his advantage to be able to keep you under observation-to learn what you know concerning his plot against our father, and also to gain whatever information he can that might be useful in his campaign to win you."

"Under observation," Philyra repeated slowly as she followed Metis through the dusty rooms of the neighboring apartment.

Metis nodded. "Of course. That's what we're doing to him with our sentries posted inside the walls of his apartment. Why shouldn't he think of doing the same to you?"

"But how?"

"I'll show you." Metis led her into a dingy room. Against one wall hung a full-length tapestry. The goddess pulled it aside, revealing an alcove cut deep in the stone wall. A straight-backed chair sat to one side of the small compartment.

"Now you shall see." Metis took Philyra's hand and pulled her forward. At the same time she let the tapestry swing shut behind them.

A pinpoint of light upon the opposite wall became as bright as a star in the night sky. Metis led her sister to it.

"Put your eye to the opening and look," she said.

Philyra did as she was instructed. A gasp escaped her as she peered through the opening. A hole had been bored through the stone wall to look directly into her new apartment.

"What kind of espionage is this-to spy into my bedchamber!"

"Complete with a chair," Metis said, "so that the watcher may watch in comfort, and at length."

Philyra was grateful for the darkness that hid her embarrassment from her young sister. Her face flushed hot with outraged modesty. It was not secrets of state that the Lord of the Titans expected to see laid bare.

"How awful he is," she said, turning away from the peephole and covering her face with her hands. "How dare he- how dare he!"

Metis led her out of the alcove. "Please try to be quieter, sister. He could return here at any moment. We have only a minute or two to talk, for in those new chambers of yours we'll never be sure we aren't being overheard. There may be other devices of this sort which I haven't uncovered, so we'll have to be on guard continually."

"How dare he!" Philyra whispered fiercely. "How evil of him, to plot to steal my modesty. Oh, to be able to tell him what I truly think and

feel! What a joy that would be. I'm tempted to go to him right now-or at supper, when the Titans surround him and can hear all I say-and throw in his face this vile-

"He'd only deny it."

"Yes. Yes, he would," the Okeanid said sadly. "But what can I do? It's so unfair. Must I let him get away with such things? Isn't there some way to turn this dagger against his breast instead of mine?'"

They had come to a stop just within the vacant apartment, beside the door that led to the outer corridor.

"Metis, I will have to leave Olympos, even though I wish now more than ever that I could stay to fight against Kronos. But what can I do? His advances grow ever more insistent. If I remain here-particularly in these new chambers-what hope will I have of keeping him at bay?'"

Metis had no answer to offer her.

"What a shame, though, that I should have to leave now," Philyra continued, as much to herself as to her sister. "Now that I know about the peephole of his-and suspect others everywhere-I could be on my guard. I could say only those things I wanted him to hear. I could punish him by always dressing and undressing in total darkness. I could make him think I was about to change clothes where he could watch, but never do it. Oh, if only there were some way I could be reasonably secure. The new apartment is very beautiful. It would be lovely to live in such a place, if only for a few days."

She turned toward Metis. "If you could come and stay with me," she said, "he'd be displeased, but he couldn't very well deny me my little sister-especially since Mother entrusted you to me. Could you not come?"

The child shook her head. "I have to be able to watch over the mortals, and that means I need access to Ophion's tunnel. Even if there were an entrance in the new apartment-and I haven't noticed one-it would be too risky, with the possibility of Kronos observing our every word and action."

Philyra frowned. "Yes, I suppose you're right."

Nine

A massive, winged figure settled upon the gallery just outside the bedchamber of Klymene, the wife of the Titan Iapetos.

"Here, my lord," Eurybie whispered as she came out of the darkness of the room. "Here I am. I've been waiting a long time."

Reabsorbing the eagle wings into his body and adjusting his dark mantle about his shoulders, Kronos stepped into the room. A quick glance assured him that they were alone.

"Is Iapetos at home yet?" he asked.

She shook her head. "No. I don't think so. I haven't heard anything from his room."

"Good. We should have a short while before he finishes the errand on which I sent him. What of Klymene? Is she occupied?'"

The goddess nodded. In the dim light of the room he could barely see her.



"I checked before coming here," she said. "Klymene is with the Hesperides, just as she's supposed to be. They'll keep her busy for some time yet."

"Do you remember all you are to say? Here, say the words with me."

"Very well. But let's be quick about it-I'm not fond of this type of intrigue."

Standing close together in the darkness, they whispered back and forth, rehearsing the dialogue they would perform when their audience arrived. As they spoke, Kronos stroked the soft curve of her hip and thigh with the tips of his fingers.

"Good," he said at last when he was satisfied. "Your clothing-is it right?"

"Even Klymene couldn't tell it from her own. It's identical with what she wore at supper."

"And your hair style? It's correct, too?"

She nodded. "I've only to change its color."

"Good. Now I must see about lighting this room. There must be just enough light-neither too much nor too little."

"I'd prefer as little as possible," she said, following him as he moved about the room lighting lamps.

"Too little light," he explained, "and Iapetos might doubt the evidence of his eyes. Too much, and he wouldn't be deceived. Dim light, careful placement of ourselves, proper distance from the doorway through which we will be watched, proper concern to never turn our faces in such a way that they can be clearly seen-by such artifice we can create our own reality."

He took her arm and positioned her nearer to the gallery windows. "Stand here, just like that a moment," he said, moving to rearrange a lamp. He changed its position twice more before he was satisfied with the way the shadows fell upon her. "Good. You'll easily pass for Klymene and I for Proteus."

"That's another thing," she said. "Why choose Proteus to impersonate?"

"I find a certain irony in it. Besides, would you recognize him on sight?"

"I've only seen him once or twice. I can't clearly remember his features, if that's what you mean. It was a very long time ago."

"And my brother would have to say much the same. If Proteus, Klymene's brother, were indeed here, he would be able to alter his features as he pleased, so that he could perfectly impersonate anyone he chose. You or I couldn't possibly manage that normally. But here, in just the right setting, with someone predisposed to think he sees what we want him to think he sees- Here, how do I look?"

He began to alter his body as he spoke, becoming leaner. The full beard disappeared, reabsorbed into his face. His mane of dark hair grew shorter.

"There. Can you say I am not Proteus?"

She studied his face. "Your eyes betray you," she said. "Even as changed as you are, I'd know you anywhere by your eyes."

"Iapetos will not see my eyes. Quickly now—he could be returning this minute—change yourself so that you resemble Klymene."

Eurybie did as she was instructed. She became slightly shorter of stature, with fuller hips and smaller bosom. Her golden hair darkened to jet black.

"Will this do, my lord?"

The King of the Gods nodded. "Even better than this morning. Now we need only await his return."

"If Iapetos ever discovers the deceit you have practiced on him ..." she said.

He ran the fingers of his left hand along the slope of her neck and shoulder. "He'll discover nothing."

"But if he should discover it, then instead of binding him more firmly to you, you will have alienated him completely. You'll have made him your most bitter enemy."

"Or my most loyal servant," he countered. "I would rather a steadfast enemy than a faint friend."

As they spoke the night outside seemed to grow even darker. The small lamps within the room, set at odd distances from one another, spread a lambent glow throughout the chamber. Time passed slowly as they waited.

"Oh, I wish he would come," Eurybie complained. "I've told you before—I don't like this type of thing. How do you know he won't rush in at us, to beat Klymene and Proteus? It's too risky. Too much can go wrong."

"I know because I know my brother," Kronos told her. "That's not the way he reacts. He'll listen to all we have to say; then he'll want to think. He'll go off someplace, like a wounded animal seeking a hole in which to hide while it licks its wounds. He'll consider again and again everything he's seen and heard. He'll find collaborative evidence, even where none really exists—all kinds of perfectly innocent things his wife has done will suddenly be imbued with new and ominous significance. Finally, when his imagination has finished the task we only begin here—when Klymene has been tried and condemned within his mind—then my brother will act. At that point he will be mine."

"Prepare yourself," Kronos whispered suddenly. He left her for a moment, crossing the room and pulling almost closed the door to the adjacent room. He waited there, listening intently, then walked silently back to Eurybie's side.

"Quiet!" he told her. "I think I hear something."

"No one's about. You needn't fear. We're alone, at least for a few minutes more."

Their voices were intended to carry into the next room. As they spoke Kronos continued straining his ears. At last a face appeared at the opening. Dark eyes watched them. Now their performance could begin in earnest.

The Titan Iapetos had spent the day sunk in his own melancholy thoughts. By turns he had been possessed by an almost overwhelming desire to confront Klymene and demand an explanation of the scene he had witnessed that morning, and by an intense aversion to just such a confrontation, which he feared would only confirm the bitter evidence already provided by his eyes and ears.

As he entered his own bedroom a noise informed him that Klymene was in the adjoining chamber. Moving toward the door, he allowed indecision to slow his pace. The door was ajar and he hesitated, positioning himself so that he could look through the opening.

Completely across the room from him, near the gallery, a god and a goddess stood together in the dim light. He immediately recognized the goddess as his wife. That their infant son seemed not to be with his mother did not strike the Titan as unusual. Klymene's sisters and a number of other goddesses were often willing to care for Menoitios when his mother required time for other matters.

The god, however, Iapetos could not place. He was tall and supple, with dark black hair and an easy manner. Darkness shrouded his face, making it impossible to distinguish his features clearly.

Crouching in the dimness of his own room, Iapetos pulled the door still more closed, so that only the narrowest of openings allowed him to watch them.

Klymene stood very near her nocturnal visitor, her hand gripping his forearm. She seemed to be possessed by extreme emotion-her voice was oddly different, sharper, more intense despite obvious efforts to keep it hushed. Now, as Iapetos watched, the god kissed her passionately.

"Oh, Proteus," she whispered, panting for breath during a pause in their kissing, "I've longed for your return for so long-so very long now!" Even though she whispered, her voice cut through the stillness of the room. Iapetos could hear her clearly.

The god only drew her close again.

"How much longer?" she asked when they parted a second time. "How much longer must we wait before we can put aside this cruel sham? How cruel you are to let me have your kisses and caresses-then snatch them away again so soon!"

"Quiet, my love," the god answered, his voice barely audible to the Titan listening in the next room. "We have too little time to waste with words."

More than a minute passed before they parted again, still clinging to each other's hands.

"Soon we'll be able to abandon all this stealth and pretense. Be brave a little longer, Klymene. Tell me quickly all you must tell, so that we may share a long good-bye. I am on my way from our father to King Nereus."

"Everything's in readiness," she said. "We only await the signal to act. We're ready, and will not hesitate when the time comes."

"Good. None of them suspects?"

"I don't think so-at least not as far as I can tell. Lord Kronos, of course, is always suspicious of our father, but he has no way of proving

his suspicions."

"What of-your husband?"

The female form shrugged. "What of him? He's Kronos's creature, and will do whatever Kronos tells him to do. Oh, my love," she cried, throwing herself into the god's arms again, "how much longer must we be separated? Haven't I sacrificed more than my share for the good of our family?"

I've done all our father asked of me, but I've grown so tired- so very, very tired of this endless deception."

She faced him squarely. "I've come to long for the day when I can finally tell him how thoroughly I detest him. Each time he takes me in his arms, I long for you, my love. I've only been able to endure it all by reminding myself that eventually, however long it must take, I will be done with all these lying smiles and touches and-"

He stroked her hair as he held her in his arms. "Your trial is almost at an end. Soon-"

"Oh, how soon? Why not now? Tonight? Let us act tonight. The stout prison you told me of-it's all prepared? You said it was, didn't you? Strike down my husband for me- strike him down tonight, into helpless unconsciousness. Once he's locked away where he can do no harm, you can take up his form." She laughed. "None will know, save I, that the god at my side is not my husband, but my lover!"

"Calm yourself, lovely Klymene. Only eight days remain until the wedding of Crios and Eurybie. Soon all our preparations will be completed, and the time to strike will have finally arrived. Until then, be patient-be patient just a little longer yet. As much as I long to be with you, even if I must wear the form of Iapetos, I may not. I'm needed elsewhere."

"Oh!" She threw herself upon him at this reminder that he must soon part from her again. "How soon will you return?"

"I can't be certain-but it won't be long. Soon. I promise you, I'll return soon."

She drew very close to him and rested her head upon his chest. "And then we shall be together at last-at last and forever after!"

From the narrow slit of the doorway, the Titan Iapetos watched and listened. The god and goddess moved out onto the gallery and embraced a final time; then, assuming the shape of a bird, the god disappeared into the night. The goddess stood staring after him into the darkness.

The Titan rose from his crouching position, closed completely the opening through which he had been watching, and made his way quickly and silently from the apartment. Once he reached the outer corridors of the palace, he cast aside stealth and walked hurriedly toward the lower levels of the palace where his workshop was situated. Each step seemed to act as a catalyst in the alchemy that was convening hurt and puzzlement into outrage and hate.

Meanwhile, behind him in the apartment of his wife, the sea goddess Eurybie waited until she was certain that she was no longer being observed. Then she caused wings to grow from her shoulders and flew upward, quickly returning to her own apartment.

Kronos, Lord of the Titans and King of the Gods, awaited her there. She

pulled from her shoulders the mantle she had worn to impersonate Klymene and cast it aside. He had mixed drinks of sparkling nectar for both of them and now handed her a goblet as she sank into a chair and sighed deeply. "You see, there was no reason to be apprehensive."

"Oh, none at all!" she said, laughing. She accepted the drink and gulped down a large portion of it, then tossed back her head and brushed hair from her eyes. "It was dreadfully foolish of me to be worried-I can see that very clearly now. You know how timid and flighty my female personality is, my lord. How silly of me to be concerned. Why, at the worst he might have lost his temper a bit. He might have rushed screaming into the room and hurled his wife out into the night."

She drank again, then continued, "No, my lord, I see plainly that I had nothing to fear. It isn't as though Lord Iapetos might have gotten angry at us-I mean at his wife and Proteus-or at us, if he pierced our disguises. I'm sure he'd be most understanding if he somehow discovered that we have destroyed his happiness for our own purposes. My lord-that was the last of it, wasn't it? You promised it would be."

Kronos nodded. "Yes, as far as you're concerned, anyway. I have no further need of your assistance in this affair."

She sighed, leaning her head far back on her chair. "Those words are sweeter than nectar right now. My lord, I too love the devious route that bristles with unsuspected cleverness- but you go too far, I think. You're like a cat torturing its prey-a great cat toying with some little creature that it's wounded and which it allows again and again to almost escape."

He listened in silence, his expression denoting neither amusement nor annoyance. "Go on, Eurybie. This is most interesting."

The sea goddess was quickly returning to her normal self now that the ordeal she had dreaded was behind her. As she grew more relaxed she warmed still more to her topic.

"Your mind amazes me, my lord. I've told you that before, haven't I? Each time I watch you doing something like this, new intricacies are revealed, new facets. Easy solutions bore you. You're never happier than when you can devise devious plots. But you tempt disaster-and for so slight a reward!"

"So slight a reward? From the portrait you paint, I'd have thought my reward ample-the lovely agony of the little creature Iapetos."

She grimaced. "You know that's not what I meant. Your joy isn't in the suffering you inflict-I know that-but in the artistry of the trap you set."

For a few moments she lapsed into silence, her eyes set upon the marble floor. Without looking up she started to speak again. "I'm afraid you frighten me, my lord. I must never let myself forget just how deadly an enemy you can be." Her eyes rose slowly until they met his, without flinching. "I often flatter myself. I'm very intelligent, as you well know. But my pride makes me think, at least occasionally, that I could defend myself against you. I must never let myself forget the full measure of your cunning."

He observed her through narrowed eyelids, his head tilted slightly to one side. "That you may never oppose me?"

"No. That I may be very well prepared indeed, should things ever come to

that."

He frowned. "Why do you keep coming back to thoughts of this kind? Have I ever done you harm? We're allies. We need never oppose each other.'"

They were silent for nearly a minute. Eurybie watched him thoughtfully. Finally she said, "You did do it, didn't you?"

"Do what?"

"Somehow convince Iapetos to put aside the wife he loved-Themis, your sister-and marry instead the Okeanid Klymene."

He looked away, not answering.

She laughed. "I suppose that's answer enough. But how did you do it? You mentioned the oracle of Gaia when we spoke before. Even you could not control the oracle. ..."

She stared at him, studying his face. "Or could you? I wonder ..."

Kronos's expression betrayed none of his thoughts, and Eurybie continued thinking out loud. "Perhaps, if the circumstances were exactly right-if they could be manipulated to be exactly right, as with this business with Iapetos a few minutes ago, it might be possible. Oh," she exclaimed, laughing, "what an amusing conceit. I shall pretend to be Kronos, and discover how I would accomplish this impossibility."

The Titan leaned back in his chair, smiling. "By all means go on, Eurybie. This should be instructive."

"To begin, I must keep my goal clearly in mind. I want to separate my brother from his Titaness wife and marry him instead to an Okeanid, so that I may lay a claim through him to the throne of Okeanos. First, an excuse is necessary-and easily available. Themis is barren. If Iapetos wants children, he must take another wife. The daughters of Okeanos are renowned for their fecundity-and beauty.'"

She grinned, leaning far forward. "I should start with occasional passing references to this sad state of affairs. Childlessness is such a trial for those who love children. Perhaps I could arrange to have others make similar offhand remarks."

"I, too, am childless," Kronos reminded her.

"All the more reason to console each other, and for you to plant your ideas in your brother's head. Then, somehow, I would arrange for poor Iapetos to be in the vicinity of Delphoi. Now, this is where things become more difficult. ..." She pursed her lips in concentration, then looked up suddenly. "Here," she said, handing him her goblet. "Pour me more to drink, please, my lord, while I work this out. My poor brain must trudge where you would fly.'"

He bowed his broad head and accepted the goblet. When he returned she took a sip of sparkling red nectar, then continued.

"It would all have to be carefully arranged in advance, of course-but then I am the King of the Gods, am I not, and therefore easily capable of seeing to such minor details. I would contrive to bring him there in the dead of night, not to Delphoi, but to some very similar place that could easily be mistaken for the real oracle. Then I would shape a phantom and give it a voice as similar to that of Gaia as I could manage. Poor Iapetos would think himself at Delphoi, in the presence of

the oracle, when really he was someplace very different, listening to the words I want him to hear and believe—a scene not very different from the one we just performed for him."

She shivered slightly, looking away suddenly.

"What's wrong, Eurybie?"

"I know you won't admit it," she said slowly, "but I think something very similar to what I just described must have happened long ago to make Iapetos put Themis aside in favor of Klymene. I find that very frightening."

"That an oracle can be controlled? I've agreed with nothing you've said. All this is only your own conjecture."

She shook her head. "No, that's not what I mean. That you could bend even Gaia to your will does not surprise me— but to be able to look so deep into the future, to plan all this so many years long in advance. ..." She shivered again.

Kronos stared at her. He was both flattered and displeased. Eurybie had guessed far too close to the truth, and he realized now that he had allowed himself to speak too freely with her. Hencefore he would have to guard against such openness.

"Poor Klymene."

"Is that pity I hear?" Kronos asked. "You can hardly afford it just now, if you intend to be Queen of the Aegean."

He took her hand and pulled her toward him. She came and stood at his side, running her fingers through his hair.

"Poor Iapetos, too," she said quietly.

He shrugged. "Once Klymene has been exiled to Tartaros— for she'll never agree to assume her mother's throne—Iapetos will manage to be happy again with Themis or someone else, and none the worse for the exchange."

"Your cynicism amazes me!"

"You mean my realism." He pulled her down into his lap and began unfastening her peplos.

"Wait—you'll tear it," she told him. "Besides, the couch is far more comfortable."

She led him across the room. As he lay down she loosened the catches and let her garment slip to the floor, then sat beside him. He pulled her down and began to kiss her, his hands caressing the velvety softness of her skin. She let her warm body press against his. After a minute or two, however, he pushed her away and sat up abruptly.

"What's wrong, my lord? I thought you were in the mood—"

He rose and started to walk toward the door. "It's that Okeanid," he said gruffly. "I can't get her out of my mind. Every attractive female I see makes me want Philyra all the more."

Eurybie watched him leave. Then, with a disinterested shrug, she recovered her garment and began to adjust it back about herself.

Ten

As he made his way toward the new apartment of the Okeanid Philyra, the mood of the Lord of Olympos grew increasingly gloomy. He had taken little pleasure in the deception of Iapetos, and Eurybie's too accurate conjectures made it clear that he had already confided too freely in the sea goddess.

Even thoughts of the lovely Okeanid Philyra failed to lift his spirits-she was such an obstinate creature. Why did she continue to resist him? What did she expect from him, after all? He had sought to be as generous as he possibly could, yet she declined his every overture while toying with him shamelessly. She was always lovely and alluring, but she might as well be an image of mist and moonlight, for she always slipped through his fingers.

As he walked, he brooded upon the slopes and curves of her femininity, so full of lubricious promise. Whatever might be the cause of her continued resistance, Kronos found himself all the more determined to overcome her objections-by whatever means necessary.

Earlier in the day, after leaving her, he had planned to return tonight and observe her through the peephole from the neighboring apartment. Now he determined to seek her out directly. His patience was exhausted, and he would put an end to these games of hers.

He entered immediately, without announcing himself or awaiting permission to enter. He found the Okeanid sitting quietly in a high-backed chair and looking out a wide window. The moon had not yet risen and dark night lay upon the earth below. At the unexpected sound of his approach, Phi-lyra turned her wide, startled eyes toward him and rose quickly from her seat.

"Good evening, my lord," she said as he stopped beside her. "As you can see, I'm all moved in. Lady Eurybie-

"Let us put aside this pretense," he told her. "I've always found it unbecoming to have to hint and wheedle for what I want. Enough of this foolishness. Let us speak plainly, and avoid all artifice. I want you, and I intend to have you. I don't know what motivates you to keep refusing me, but whatever it is, it will work no longer."

The crushing pressure of his hand upon her arm made her wince in pain.

"I'm not unreasonable. I'll be kind to you, and generous- but I intend to have you, whatever the price."

She tried to pull away but could not escape his grasp. "The price?" she demanded. "What do you mean, price? I am not the object of barter. I am a goddess-a Titaness of the second generation. You may be the King of the Gods, my lord, but your words and actions exceed all propriety."

"Propriety!" He laughed. "What has propriety to do with me? You are so young that you throw such a word at me and consider it a rebuke. Don't you know that it was I who created the very concept in which you take refuge-that for a thousand years I struggled to impose such standards of conduct upon the gods? If anyone has a right to set aside propriety, it is I!"

She was only an Okeanid-how dare she toy with him like this? Her smooth flesh taunted him. He stepped closer, slipping his arms around her struggling body and pulling her close, so that he could press his cheek against the bare skin of her neck and shoulders and inhale the deep, heady fragrance of her body.



"What is it you want?" he demanded. "Only tell me that, and it's yours."

The crushing, suffocating pressure of his arms around her and the terrifying firmness of his hands as they stroked her body threw her into complete panic. She struggled desperately to escape him, twisting frantically within his arms as she cast glances toward the two possible avenues of escape- the door leading out of the apartment to the corridor and the wide window that looked out onto the gallery.

She fought to insinuate her arms between his chest and hers, so that she could shove him away, but his greater strength prevented the maneuver. Again and again she tried to free herself, each time without success.

Her efforts only made him more determined to possess her-now. He began to drag her toward the bedroom. She started to plead, but only for a moment; even in terror such words did not come naturally to her. She threatened vengeance from her father and brothers, she sobbed, all to no avail. Finally, when she realized that every other course of action had failed, she let herself go completely limp and fell into a mock swoon.

For a moment Kronos hesitated, but only long enough to rearrange the weight of his burden, so that now instead of dragging her toward her new bedroom and the enormous bed that waited there, the god carried her easily in his arms.

She fought to overcome her terror, so that she could maintain her pretended faint. Only with great difficulty did she manage to keep her eyes tightly closed. As he carried her she felt the movement of his powerful, bulging muscles. What hope did she have in denying such a god the thing he had determined to have?

She had pretended to faint, hoping by this unexpected response to cool his ardor while at the same time gaining a few moments delay. Now, to her dismay, she felt the thick, plush softness of a mattress beneath her as the King of the Gods deposited her upon the bed. Almost immediately she felt him sit beside her. His hands, with distressing gentleness, began to loosen the ornamental girdle that belted her peplos. She stiffened slightly despite her best attempt to remain impassive. Now he began to caress her, running one hand along her arm, up toward her shoulder. She fought to control herself, but nevertheless shuddered at the contact. His fingers began to unfasten the shoulder clasp of her gown.

Her eyes popped wide open. A startled cry escaped her lips as she found herself staring up into the divine face and lust-glazed eyes of the King

of the Gods. In the loneliness and security of her own room, she had wondered why he pursued her. It seemed impossible that he should desire her when he practically had his pick of the many beautiful goddesses of Olympus. She could not believe herself capable of inciting such passion.

The look in his eyes now, as she lay beneath him upon the bed, erased such misconceptions from her mind forever.

With a shriek she rolled from under him to the opposite side of the bed. He reached for her, grabbing her clothing instead. The material tore at the shoulder and she clutched it to keep her breasts covered. She sprang from the bed and bolted toward the doorway.

"Wait, Philyra-!" Kronos called from behind her.

She was too terrified to wait. She ran headlong toward the atrium, then

out into the corridor and down the stairs. By the time she regained the apartment of Iapetos, she was nearly hysterical. Rushing within, she immediately sought Klymene. Neither Klymene nor Iapetos were at home. She tried to find Metis, but her young sister was not there either.

Now she made her way to her own room. She felt completely alone. Throwing herself down on her bed, she let herself cry. Five minutes passed, then she sat up and wiped the tears from her eyes. Rising, she looked hopelessly about the room.

She had conquered her fear to remain upon Olympos and work for the good of her family. What could she do now but flee? If only she could talk to Klymene or Iapetos. Even though she was not free to consult them concerning Kronos's plot against Okeanos, there was no reason she should not seek their assistance in keeping Kronos at bay. Iapetos, her brother-in-marriage, had wisdom and influence. She should have gone to him at the very first.

She found a pin to fasten the torn shoulder of her peplos, tied a belt about her waist, and threw a light cloak over her shoulders before leaving the room. She paused on her way out to look into Metis's room again; the child had still not returned. Then she went directly to one of the circular stairways and descended rapidly.

She had only the slightest notion of where to find the workshop of Iapetos and was more than a little intimidated by the dark, serpentine passages she found once she descended below the level of the great hall of the palace. The light of the sun never penetrated to these lower levels where rooms had been bored from the virgin rock of the mountain. Even when she realized that only ignorance had led her to think she could locate the Titan within the precincts of this forbidding maze, still she forced herself to go on.

He would be able to help her, she kept telling herself. He was a Titan, a brother of Lord Kronos. He would have influence with Kronos.

Occasionally she stopped and called aloud, "Lord Iapetos-my lord, Lord Iapetos!" The torch she held in one hand surrounded her in a circle of illumination. Her voice echoed back, distant and hollow. After listening in silence for a few moments, she forced herself to walk on.

"You seek me?" a voice asked unexpectedly. A tall figure stepped into the corridor ahead of her.

"Iapetos!" she cried, almost tumbling into his arms in her rush to reach him. "Lord Iapetos-brother! I thought I should never find you, it's so vast down here-and so dark." She paused to compose herself before launching into a recital of the events that had caused her to seek him out. Her effort was in vain; as soon as she began talking again, the words commenced to spill from her. She told him of the unwelcomed attention shown her by the King of the Gods, of her diplomatic attempts to discourage him, of his refusal to be discouraged. Despite her strongest efforts to remain calm, she began to cry as she recounted all the mental anguish to which her delicate and sensitive nature had been subjected.

At last, when she had poured out her heart to him, she wiped the tears from her eyes and looked up at the Titan. She expected comfort and reassurance; instead she found impassive features and stony silence.

"My lord," she said, unable to comprehend his attitude, "won't you help me, my lord?"

For hours the Titan had brooded upon all he had seen and heard earlier that day in the bedchamber of his wife. He had heard, among other things, that the Okeanid now before him, who seemed so innocent, conspired with his wife.

"Please, Lord Iapetos," Philyra continued, sensing but not understanding his hostility, "I have no other place to turn. I beg you, my lord, tell me what I may do."

Unmoved, he stared down at her. She was another of the treacherous, backbiting children of Okeanos. He believed not a word of what she said and would not allow himself to be deceived. Such a viper would not wince at the amorous attention of the King of the Gods. She would be more likely to seek it out, to encourage it as a convenience in her traitorous campaign.

"What's wrong, Lord Iapetos? Surely you will not abandon the sister of your wife!"

"There is nothing I can do," he said stiffly.

"But my lord--"

He had already turned his back on her. As she watched in disbelief he disappeared through the door to his workshop. Suppressing a sob, the Okeanid reeled away, stunned as completely as if she had been struck in the face.

What did it mean? Why had he repulsed her in this cruel fashion? Could Proteus be right? She had not for a moment thought it possible that Iapetos could indeed be in collusion with Kronos to overthrow their father--but what other explanation could there be for his refusal to even advise her?

Somehow she found her way back up from the lower levels of the palace. What was she to do now, with her last hope exploded? She considered departing Olympos right then, but changed her mind almost immediately. She must first bid her sisters farewell.

She headed again toward the apartment of Klymene. On the stairs, however, she came upon Queen Rhea, who was also going upward. At sight of her a new thought took hold. Noble, righteous Rhea, Queen of the Gods--why should she not face the queen directly and tell her what her husband was trying to do? Normally she would never have sought her out, but coming upon her suddenly just now, the impulse was overpowering. Here was someone, she thought, who could exert a powerful influence in her favor. If she could only tell her story, she knew that the queen would receive her with understanding and sympathy.

The queen was climbing slowly. Philyra caught up with her and said, "Pardon, my lady. May I speak with you?"

Rhea turned to face her. One arm was pressed against her abdomen. She nodded. "For a few moments, yes. You are ... ?"

"Philyra, a daughter of your brother Okeanos."

Rhea nodded again. A peculiar look--recognition, perhaps, but mixed with something else--flickered over her face.

Philyra began to talk, slowly and awkwardly at first. Rhea listened without any outward indication of emotion.

"I cast myself on your mercy, my lady," Philyra said at last. "Please help me if there's any way you can,"

Though she had listened in silence, the mind of the Titan-ess had been anything but placid during the recital. She had recognized the Okeanid almost from the moment she turned to face her. This was the brazen creature who had breakfasted with her husband upon the terrace below the palace, then gone off with him-Kronos's new toy. Holding herself very erect, Rhea met the young goddess's eyes coldly.

"I don't know why you come to me. Do you think I concern myself with every creature that catches Kronos's eye? You have only yourself to blame if you've attracted more than you bargained for-though I certainly doubt that. Be gone from me." Rhea gestured her away, a wilting look of contempt on her face.

Philyra gasped, then fled up the stairs, sobbing uncontrollably. Without thinking she headed for the chambers of Klymene. She had almost reached them when a goddess stepped toward her, hand raised in greeting.

"There you are," Eurybie said, smiling as she walked toward her. "I've been searching for you."

With a shriek Philyra fled into a neighboring corridor. She plunged down the first stairway she found. She had descended three flights before her strength gave out and she slumped down, still crying.

When she looked up she found to her surprise that she was not far from the apartment of Momos, where Metis kept the mortals. Glancing quickly about to be certain that no one was watching, she slipped from the stairwell into the corridor. A minute later she was safely within the apartment.

Quiet reigned. She paused to catch her breath and dry the tears from her eyes, then crossed the dust-covered atrium, passing quickly down a short hall. She opened a door and stepped into a small room.

Nothing moved. She looked about, searching for the tiny, godlike creatures she expected to find. Where were they? She took another step into the room, growing more apprehensive.

A mortal stepped from behind a concealing chest. "Greetings, Lady Philyra! You frightened us. Coming by the route you did, we were afraid you might be someone else-an enemy. "

The goddess let out a long sigh of relief. Now other mortals came into the open. Philyra let herself drop into a chair.

"How may we serve you?" one of the men asked.

"I'm fine," she said. "I need nothing, but to rest." She looked about the room. An odd thrill ran through her; it seemed as if some force outside herself had led her here, to sanctuary.

She could stay in this forgotten room. She could remain on Olympos, free of Kronos and able to help Metis. She could continue to work for the

good of her family. Across the room one of the men succeeded in climbing up to the seat of a chair. He pulled free a coverlet, letting it slip to the floor. Beneath it, revealed now, was the head of Oizys, which the mortals had hastily veiled when they heard her approach.

The Okeanid gasped at the hideous sight of the god. The god's eyes turned in her direction and fastened upon her, looking distinctly baleful.

Eleven

Rhea, queen of the gods, continued to climb slowly toward her own rooms after the departure of Philyra. Neither jealousy nor anger could completely pierce the serenity she had found on the slopes of Mount Parnassos. Her visit to her mother Gaia at Delphoi had acted as a balm to her troubled spirit, so that she could listen to the plea of the beautiful young Okeanid with at least partial equanimity.

She could listen without anger, but not without offended pride. Simply by accosting her the Okeanid had overstepped the bounds of decency. Could she really expect a sympathetic reception from the wife of her lover? However much she might protest to the contrary, she undoubtedly had encouraged Kronos to some extent, and in all likelihood the story she had told was but a subterfuge. Only by postulating some hidden motivation could Rhea explain the total lack of tact that brought the goddess to her.

In her room now, Rhea winced, moving her hands to cover her lower abdomen as she doubled forward in her chair. She had been waiting for this second contraction, which left no doubt that her time was at hand. She waited until the pain left her, let her breathing return to normal, then rose from her chair. She smiled to herself as she began her preparations.

Even now, within an hour or two of delivery, the most practiced eye could not have accurately diagnosed her pregnancy, so little had her girth increased. She paused to let her hands feel the movement within. Tonight she would hold her child in her arms. A feeling of well-being filled her, so that she had to force herself to complete preparations for her journey. Her mind whirled with wonderful reveries of the child that would soon enter the world.

At last she finished gathering her things into a large cloth sack. She carried the sack with her out onto the gallery. When she was certain that no one was nearby and could observe her, she grew wings and flew down from the palace.

The moon had just risen, a quarter moon that flooded the world with its soft, suppressed radiance. Flying leisurely, very much absorbed in her maternal dreams, the goddess followed a course that led due south. The cool night wind caressed her and the heavy smell of lush growing things rose up from the earth to greet her as she flew close above the fields and hills, often skimming just above the tallest trees in her attempt to avoid detection.

At last she came to the twin peaks of Mount Parnassos. She alighted near the great cleft in the earth. Nearby, Daphnis, the attendant, lay buried in deep slumber. As she neared the opening in the ground Rhea called out softly. The wind, echoing through a nearby gulf, seemed to answer.

From the cleft rose a mist, at first tenuous but quickly thickening. It twirled like an eddy, drawing particles of dust from nearby. As it grew the mist took on the distinctive features of a goddess. Infinite tenderness played in the smile upon her lips and her eyes held infinite compassion. Clothed in the image of a tall and stately goddess, robed in garments spun of silken night, Gaia, the earth, stepped toward Rhea and laid an affectionate hand upon her arm.

"Come, daughter; your time is at hand. All is in readiness, but we must not tarry."

Mother and daughter rose into the air. They flew in silence, hand in hand, a million stars shining down on them out of the velvet blackness of the night. Far to the south lay the great sea, and still farther the mountainous, fertile island of Crete. It was here that Gaia led her daughter, to one of the many forest-covered mountain slopes. They alighted amid cypress and cedar.

A hush hung over the mountainside as they climbed the short distance upward, stepping over saplings and bending aside the larger trees that blocked their path. They soon arrived at the mouth of a great cavern. Two nymphs moved toward them as they approached.

"Greetings," one said, bowing low. "I am Ida, the sister of Adrastia."

She retreated and the second nymph advanced. She, too, bowed deeply. "I am Adrastia, the sister of Ida," she told them, then backed away to rejoin her companion.

"They are here to attend you," Gaia explained, still speaking in a soft, hushed voice that more closely resembled the singing breeze than the voice of a goddess, "and to care for your child."

"We'll care for it as though it were our very own," Ida said.

"Indeed," Adrastia agreed, "we're anxious to serve you, my lady. Please come within."

Rhea, her mind still very much in a daze, followed docilely as the nymphs led the way within the enormous cavern. A large stone hearth, ventilated by a small hole in the roof, lit the interior with a fitful light that made the rough walls and the peculiarly shaped outcroppings of rock seem like grotesque, petrified animals.

As they entered, a sleeping form stirred and rose to greet them. Adrastia gestured toward the creature.

"This is Amaltheia, the goat goddess."

Amaltheia nodded her head demurely.

"She can't speak-not very well, anyway. No one knows why a goddess should look like a god-size goat, but she does. She will yeon soon, and will provide milk for the child of Kronos."

Rhea nodded absently, both in acknowledgment of all that Adrastia had said and in greeting to the goat goddess.

A bed of thickly packed leaves had been prepared against one corner of the cavern.

"Come, my lady," Ida said softly. "How foolish we are, not to realize you must be tired. Come, settle yourself and rest until the time arrives."

She led the goddess past the birthing pole, which had been set up not far from the bed.

"How quiet it is tonight," Adrastia said, as much to herself as to anyone. "Even in here, you can usually hear the crickets chirping down below. It's so quiet-almost as though they, too, pay obeisance-"

"Quiet, sister," Ida said. "Do try to imitate the crickets. You do prattle so."

"I do! It's true-I'm just so excited," the nymph continued, laughing. "To care for the Queen of the Gods-to assist at the birth of a child of Lord Kronos-why, how could I be anything other than excited? And we shall care for the child, rear him, perhaps. I do hope it's a son. A son of Kronos! Even though we must remain hidden for however long, it'll be wonderful to hold the dear boy, to feed him on the milk of Amaltheia, to watch him crawl and take his first steps, hear his first awkward attempts at speech."

"Quiet!" Ida insisted. "Can't you tell you're distressing Lady Rhea? Do you think she wants to leave her child with us, instead of rearing it herself? You're dreadfully thoughtless, you know."

"Oh, it's true-I am. Do forgive me, Lady Rhea. I meant no meanness."

Rhea looked up, having heard hardly a word spoken by the two nymphs. A golden euphoria lulled all her sensibilities, interrupted only by the clutching pains that were gradually coming more closely together. She smiled at Adrastia, then started to return to the dreamy pleasure of her own thoughts.

"Has a name been chosen yet?" Ida asked, attempting to change the subject and thus alleviate her sister's embarrassment. "You should select a name for a son and another for a daughter."

Gaia had been standing quietly in the shadows. She stepped unexpectedly toward them. "The child shall be male, and his name shall be Zeus. Call him that, and that only, though in days to come he shall have many names. Zeus Kronion, the Thunderer, the Wielder of the Lightning, the Wise, the Just, the Father of Gods and Men-all these names and a thousand more shall he be called, even to the God-but these names are not for you. Particularly must you not call him the son of Kronos, for terrible danger lurks in that name, even for him."

The nymphs listened in astonished silence. When the great goddess had finished, Ida said: "Oh, yes, my lady. It shall be exactly as you say. To us he will always be Lord Zeus. No other name for him will pass our lips."

The goat goddess Amaltheia shook herself. She rose unsteadily to her feet and came forward into the light of the fire, making low bleating sounds that had a plaintive tone to them. An anxious expression flickered in her wide yellow eyes.

"What's troubling Amaltheia?" one of the nymphs asked. "Look. I think she's trying to say something."

Gaia stepped toward the goat goddess, holding up an imperious hand. "Be still, Amaltheia; your question, too, shall be answered. You, too, shall bear a male child. He, too, shall have many names, but only one that may safely be spoken here. Do you understand, Amaltheia? His name shall be Pan, and his shall be the wisdom of delight."

The goat goddess hesitated, staring up at Gaia, then turned slowly and returned to the shadows, where she curled herself up on the hard floor. Lowering her head, she closed her eyes again. She yearned to say the very thing that Gaia seemed to be telling her not to reveal.

Part goddess, part divine beast, she thought but fuzzily. Resentment

stirred within her. Why had she no nymphs to attend her? She could feel again the stirring of the unborn god within her, and now another of the clutching pains came to make her gasp and lie panting for breath. Her form was that of a beast, but she was a goddess nonetheless. Had she not proven herself as desirable as any goddess? Had she not procured for her unborn son a father inferior to none? She might be hideous, yet she had given her son a father of whom he might boast.

Let the nymphs buzz and flutter about Rhea. Amaltheia had her own secret, and with it she would console herself. It made her feel smug and very proud.

Nearly an hour passed, Rhea and Amaltheia each absorbed in her own thoughts. The contractions that precede childbirth came ever closer together, until the time of delivery arrived. The nymphs helped Rhea from her bed to the birthing pole. The Queen of the Gods disrobed, then grasped the pole tightly in her fingers and squatted beside it. Amaltheia, unassisted, stood alone, alternately constricting and relaxing the muscles that would force out her yeanning. The two goddesses moaned and panted uncontrollably.

Even in her travail, Amaltheia glanced across the cavern at the Titaness. Rhea grasped the pole with a force that made the muscles of her hands and arms stand out starkly. Her head was thrown back and sweat glistened on her face and naked body.

In childbirth, the goat goddess thought, even a goddess grunts and gasps like an animal. In childbirth, she is as much an animal as I!

At last the child of Rhea descended into the waiting hands of Adrastia and the child of Amaltheia dropped to the bare dirt floor of the cavern. The son of Rhea began to cry. The son of Amaltheia made a low bleating sound that might have been laughter.

"Oh, he's wonderfully handsome!" Ida cried, peering over her sister's shoulder. Gaia had joined them and Rhea, her work completed, rose slowly to her full stature and held herself erect with the help of the pole. Pushing aside sweat-drenched strands of hair from her face, she looked down at the infant.

"He is handsome," Adrastia said. "How broad his forehead is-his hair will be black. See, he has a tuft or two already."

"He has lovely gray eyes," Ida said.

Rhea smiled contentedly. After a moment the nymphs noticed her and helped her back to her bed.

Amaltheia, as pleased as if she were the Queen of the Gods, lay on her side now, gently licking the smooth skin and soft fur of her child. He, too, was handsome, shaped like a god, with only the ears, legs, and tail of a goat. From his head protruded two tiny nubs that hinted of horns. He was very beautiful, and his mother nuzzled him toward her udders.

Gaia followed behind the nymphs, then stood to one side as they settled the Titaness in her bed of leaves. They had given the child to Gaia, who now placed him in his mother's arms.

Ida and Adrastia bowed deeply as Gaia said softly, "All hail! Zeus, the son of Kronos, is born!"

Across the room the goat goddess nudged her son a little closer. Yes, she thought-and born, too, is Pan, the son of Kronos!



Twelve

Mothers and sons slept peacefully - Rhea on her thick mattress of fresh, soft leaves with her child cradled in one arm, the goat goddess Amaltheia on the bare floor of the cavern, her offspring beside her in the dust.

Deep in her dreamy reveries, vaguely aware of her surroundings only when drawn back toward full, unwelcome wakefulness by the gentle nuzzling of her infant son, Amaltheia let herself luxuriate in the warm, soft glow of maternal pride. She had earned the quiet joy to which she now abandoned herself.

"Pitiful thing!" they had called her. "Wretched, hideous creature!" Lithe and beautiful, sparkling in the morning dew, the naiads and dryads of the area in which she lived had never tired of amusing themselves at her expense. "Better to be a beast," one was fond of saying, "than a goddess formed like a beast. Ugh! Such ugliness! And she thinks herself as fine as we. . . . Why, there isn't a god on all the broad earth that would give her a second look-in the sea, on the earth, or under the earth!"

Their gay laughter rained upon her, crueler than a shower of thorned sticks. Missiles bounced harmlessly from the impenetrable pelt with which she was endowed, but their endless taunts gradually found their mark. Unaccustomed to any form of attention, at first she had laughed with them, trying to share the joke, even at her own expense. Her laughter was high-pitched and peculiar, like a goat trying to laugh, and the nymphs found it a wonderful excuse to guffaw wildly and collapse on top of one another, helpless with mirth.

They teased her mercilessly. She was a beast, a freak, a creature of such ugliness that no one would ever love her. How amusing she was, trying to be like other goddesses, interested in gossip and feminine things. "Come and sit with us, fair Amaltheia. Tell us, fair Amaltheia, have you found your lover yet? Is he tall and handsome? Does he walk on two legs, or four?"

Gibe followed gibe, often in an endless barrage, to the accompaniment of tittering merriment. Feminine cruelty, in all its barbed splendor, tortured her at every opportunity. Able to speak only with difficulty, the goat goddess found herself surrounded by laughter whenever she tried to respond. The nymphs found her even more amusing at such times, as she struggled to overcome her animal dullness.

Amaltheia came to avoid the nymphs. Their teasing drove her deeper into herself. She knew mere was much truth in what they said-inescapable truth-and the goat goddess began to roam farther away from her usual grazing places, an inarticulate anguish within her breast.

Gradually, over a very long period of time, an idea took hold within her dull mind. She was a goddess, and she should have the love of a god. Only that could disprove the cruel taunts. Like most goddesses, she could alter the form of her body, but only with difficulty and for a short time. She found it impossible to keep up her concentration for more than a minute or two, and as soon as she stopped concentrating, her body slipped back to its natural shape. Now she began to practice each day, assuming the form of a lovely maiden and maintaining it for as long as she could. Sitting for hours beside the mirrorlike surface of a pool, she recast her face, then her arms and upper torso, and finally her entire body. With practice she began to gain proficiency, so that

eventually she could accomplish the transformation with little difficulty. Now she devoted herself to lengthening the time that she could maintain the transformation and to perfecting the new shape.

As other goddesses experimented with cosmetics, Amaltheia tested each possible feature, each angle at which her eyebrows might arch, each slightly different line of the mouth.

In time she settled on a face and lissome form of great beauty and naturalness. Each day, for an hour or a little longer, she would assume it and frolic among the hills and fields, running and laughing aloud as she pretended, for a little while at least, that she was a goddess like any other, not some peculiar freak of the divine order. One day while in her new form she spied a god—a god whose size and bearing bespoke strength and majesty even at a great distance. She recognized him as he came nearer; even she, living far from divine society, knew Kronos, King of the Gods. She remembered her earlier resolve. But did she dare? This was not any god. As he approached she held her breath.

Yes, she would do it! She made up her mind, then refused to think further. She rose up suddenly from her hiding place, revealing her assumed body in all its undraped splendor. She smiled, and when he smiled back she turned to run, displaying another aspect of her charms.

The chase ended not far away in a cypress grove. After he had had his way with her, he fell asleep at her side. Unable to maintain her form much longer, she rose silently and slipped away.

Later that afternoon, grazing languidly in a broad meadow, she saw him pass not far off. While she was in her natural form, he paid no attention to her. He returned often over the following days, as if searching for someone, but she was afraid to reveal herself. She was very proud of her accomplishment. She had proven the nymphs wrong. Hers was not merely a divine lover, but a royal one. She was afraid, though, that Lord Kronos might be angry if he learned of her deceit, and so she only watched him from afar.

Now, with the birth of her son—the son of Kronos—she had living proof of her worth as a goddess. Even if Gaia had commanded her never to speak the name of the child's father, at least she knew. That was enough. She could doze and dream peacefully.

While Amaltheia and Rhea dreamed their proud, golden dreams, Gaia slipped quietly from the cavern after whispering to the two nymphs. Outside she spread her wings and flew north, toward Olympos.

Behind the jutting peak of the palace stood the quarter moon, looking large and silver in the dark sky. The goddess flew directly to the room of the child goddess Metis. Entering by way of the outer gallery, she stepped through the potted plants that littered the floor and walked into the room.

Metis's eyes popped open. She had not yet fallen asleep; her mind was too rilled with interesting ideas. She sat up, looking toward the intruder.

"Who-?"

"Quiet. You have finished, haven't you? Where is the new food?"

The child stared at her unexpected visitor. Moonlight streamed in from the gallery to illuminate her features so that they were clearly visible. The goddess was slender and very delicate despite her height.

She looked no older than a maiden.

"I haven't much time, Metis. Will you not show me the plant? I can easily find it myself, if I must."

"I've only just finished, a little while ago. Who are you? How do you know about . . . ?"

The great goddess ran the fingers of one hand through the girl's dark shock of curly hair, and then Metis knew her.

"You are-!"

"No time for that, I tell you. Come. Show me the new plant."

Metis complied, swinging herself out of bed. She crossed to where a patch of moonlight illuminated a large number of plants and herbs. She selected one and brought it back to the goddess.

"Here, my lady. Taste it, if you like. It's very, very good. I've never before tasted anything like it, or as good."

The goddess smiled, looking down at the golden stalks, iridescent in the moonlight. "You have done well-how well you cannot guess." She broke off two stalks, then handed the plant itself back to the child. "In times to come this will be the sole food of the gods. They will call it ambrosia, and cease to eat mortal food. I must go now, Metis. Tell no one of my visit, for it does not really concern you."

"Wait," the child begged. "A moment longer, please. Tell me-am I right? Does mortal food act as a poison to the gods? Is that why a nymph has died?"

Gaia hesitated, then said, "There are mortal creatures and immortal ones-and creatures only partly immortal. The nymph whose body you have seen was one of these latter. She had a long, full life-a life of many thousands of years- but at last the mortality within overwhelmed her. She withered like the flowers of the field and died peacefully. Grieve not for her. It was time for her to die, nothing more."

"Does mortal food then have no effect upon us?" Metis continued, determined to learn as much as she could before the great goddess departed.

Gaia smiled indulgently. "Had the nymph never tasted mortal food, she would have lived far longer, it is true. But in the end she would have withered nonetheless. Listen, child, this is life's most important truth-each creature has its own law."

"But you haven't fully answered me," the child insisted. "Are we-the gods-truly immortal? Will we live forever? Does it matter that we've eaten mortal food?"

Smiling down upon her and touching the child's dark curls, the great goddess laughed softly. "Speak not of such things. Even mountains may be worn flat before the attrition of time. I will tell you this, though, and then you must ask no more questions, for I must go. Were you able to look upon the Titans as they were long ago, when first they reached maturity, and compare them with the way they are today, you would see that they have aged-not much, you understand. The hand of time has touched them-tenderly. Had they eaten no mortal food, but only nectar and ambrosia, time could not wither their features in a hundred thousand years. Good-bye, Metis."

The goddess walked quickly to the window. Before Metis could delay her further, she opened her great wings and flew into the night. With her she carried portions of the plant she called ambrosia.

She flew far to the west, arriving at last on a verdant island that gleamed like an emerald. Here she alighted. Walking slowly, she broke the plant into many pieces and tossed them in many directions, commanding them to grow. Shoots began to rise from the ground.

Next she called aloud to the doves that were sleeping in trees nearby. They heard her, and soon the trees were alive with them.

"I charge you with an important task," she whispered. "The soil of this lovely island is the most suited in all the world to grow the sweet ambrosia I have commanded to sprout here. Each day you will gather pieces of it and, before dawn- that none may see you-you will carry it in your beaks to lovely Crete with its high mountains. There, in a deep mountain cave, you will find a divine child, a child with gleaming, bright eyes and broad forehead. From your own beaks will you feed him sweet ambrosia, that he may never taste of perishable food. This I charge you!"

The doves cooed in assent. Gaia left them to return to the newborn god and his mother. The night was more than half gone and she had to hasten.

Thirteen

<proofers note: whole page snipped - not OCRd, and proofers pdf is of too low quality to read - perhaps tiff?>

as she noticed Amaltheia, the goat goddess, who was with difficulty rising to her feet.

"Stay, wonderful creature-do not rise for me. I must be parted from my new son, but no such hardship need be inflicted upon you, even for a moment. Lie down beside your son. I give you my thanks. Thank you, dear creature, for nursing my child for me." Rhea's voice quivered with emotion as she spoke.

Once again she started toward the entrance, Gaia almost at her side. Before she had taken three steps, she paused again, turning anxiously toward her mother.

"There may be searchers," she said. "Someone may come, looking for him. ..."

"He is well hidden here," Gaia told her. "Fear not. All will be well."

"We'll be very careful, and look after him," Ida said. "He'll be well guarded."

"Did you hear what Amaltheia suggested?" Adrastia asked, interrupting. "Poor thing, it was so difficult for her to get out the words. She said she would hang the crib of your son from a tree-that he might be found neither in heaven nor on earth." The nymph laughed. "She's well intentioned, at least."

"And the Kouretes," Ida said. "Someone might hear the child Zeus crying, and so find his hiding place. The Kouretes say they'll dance and beat their spears against their shields, to drown out his voice. You see?" She grinned at Rhea. "All of these things have been thought of. Nothing has been neglected."

"Thank you," Rhea said softly. "Thank you all."

"Come," Gaia said, now standing beside her daughter and taking her by the arm.

"Yes, I'll come. I so dread leaving him here, without me. It's strange, isn't it? You let me look into the future, but I'm still afraid. Why is that?"

"A mother always fears the future. Come. We must hurry.'"

Outside, among the jagged rocks and towering trees, the Kouretes came toward them from among the shadows. Savage, almost naked creatures of divine form and stature, they advanced until they were only a few paces from the two goddesses. The points of their spears gleamed in the moonlight.

"These are the Kouretes?" Rhea asked.

"Yes. I summoned them here to guard the child. They are ferocious to enemies, but loyal to those they serve. Come this way, along the path."

The creatures stepped aside to let the goddesses pass through their ranks. Rhea found herself led partway down the mountain slope. They stopped beside an outcropping of rocks. Gaia selected a stone nearly the size of the child they had left within the cavern, then wrapped about it the blanket she had been carrying.

"With this stone you will deceive your husband."

Drawing down mist from above them, she cast an image about the stone, giving it the semblance of the child Zeus. When the image was complete, she passed the bundle into Rhea's arms. The Titaness looked at the cooing, helpless creature, and tears welled into her eyes.

"Now all is complete," Gaia said. "I will accompany you back to Olympos, but once there I must leave you. Everything will depend upon you then, upon how well you can convince your husband that this stone is, indeed, his newborn son."

Rhea looked up slowly, her eyes glinting with hate. "I will convince him!"

They flew back to the palace. On the gallery just outside Rhea's apartment, the two exchanged kisses. Gaia departed into the night, and the Titaness was left suddenly alone, holding the blanket-wrapped illusion that must somehow save her newborn son from the unknown fate that had already claimed his unlucky brothers and sisters. How like her own real child it looked, alert and bright-eyed, kicking and waving its tiny arms in the air. It would save one child-but what of the others? What had Kronos done with them?

A grim smile touched her face. As you have overthrown your father, so shall you be overthrown! she thought suddenly-triumphantly. With that terrible prophecy Kronos justified taking her children from her, and with this lie formed of mist and stone she would bring about its fulfillment!

Carrying the phantom in her arms, she made her way furtively up the single flight of stairs to the floor of the Lord of the Titans. It was very late and she expected to find no one about; still she must be careful. Kronos would be furious if anyone saw her carrying the infant.

She had to be careful, too, that he had no visitor with him in his bedchamber.

She found him asleep, and alone. Returning to an adjoining room, she lit a large lamp and carried it back.

Kronos stirred, then sat up suddenly. "Who-? Oh, it's you, Rhea. It must be very la-"

His eyes fell upon the blanket-wrapped burden in her arms and rested there for a short while. Finally, still not having spoken further, he rose and stood beside her. Rhea threw back the blanket to reveal the face of the child. Then she held her burden out to him.

Kronos hesitated, as though unwilling to accept it.

"I have obeyed you, husband," she said quietly.

He hesitated a few moments longer, then took the infant from her. She began to back away from him.

"But remember," she continued, her voice rising, "no one, not even the King of the Gods, can avoid what must be. I obey you, husband-and I curse you!" Turning suddenly, she fled from the room.

For some minutes after Rhea left him, Kronos watched the dark doorway through which she had disappeared. A movement of the infant in his arms eventually broke through his thoughts. He went to the atrium and bolted the outer doors of the apartment. Then he carried the child back to his bedroom.

Behind him Rhea came out of her hiding place. She had opened and closed the outer door but not exited. She crept after him until she found a place from which she could see into the room. He was facing away from her, toward the bed, where he had laid the infant that was really a stone.

The phantom cooed and gurgled as Kronos lifted it high above his head. At the same moment he caused his body to change. It expanded, became pliant. His head and chest bulged. His mouth distended, became enormous. He held the child above him for an instant, then thrust the wriggling thing down his giant maw.

Rhea gasped, covering her mouth with her hand; but Kronos did not hear her. He was too absorbed in what he was doing.

He shoved it down and swallowed, forcing the stone deep down into himself. With a loud moan he collapsed to his knees, then to the floor, and lay there, his belly bloated.

Rhea stifled the shrieks of horror that screamed within her and staggered back to the atrium, an awful nausea forcing her to double over as she ran. She left the apartment by way of the outer gallery and somehow managed to fly to the floor below.

In her own room her mind began to clear a little. This was what he had done with her other children. It was a horror beyond belief-but what did it mean?

Her children were immortal. They could not be killed. Somehow they must still be alive within that enormous body of their monstrous father. He had devoured them, but could not consume them.

They were divine-imperishable-indigestible! Had he banished them, they might in time return. Imprisoned, they might yet escape. Kronos could trust only one prison to hold them, only one jailer to keep eternal vigilance-himself.

In time, probably within only a few hours, his massive body would accommodate itself to the presence of its new prisoner and return to its normal form-though it might be a little taller, a iittle more massive.

In the darkness of her room, Rhea cried.

Fourteen

The the Naiad Nalassa, far beneath the sea, life had never been so wonderful. Even among the great gods, complete happiness is a rare and elusive treasure. The happiness of the water nymph exceeded all she had ever dared to hope for, even in her youthful daydreams.

In the cool splendor of the coral palace of King Nereus, she and Proteus became a world unto themselves. Hand in hand they swam among the lazily waving fronds of the sea-bottom orchards; wrapped in each other's arms, they dozed and dreamed. Her life seemed full and real in a way it never had before. His kisses were more tangible than all the massive limestone of Olympos. His strong arms, when they held her, made her forget her parents, her sisters, everything but him.

The extent of her happiness, when she paused to analyze it, completely amazed her. Never before had she felt so truly alive-when he was near her. His absence cast her into despair and created waves of longing that wracked her cruelly. When he returned after the shortest of absences, her joy could not be contained. She threw herself into his arms, clutched him to her fiercely.

Day followed day, slipping away, gilded by the intensity of her love. Occasionally troubling thoughts crept into her mind. She knew that vital matters awaited Proteus on Olympos and felt that she was responsible for keeping him from fulfilling his obligations to his sisters and family. As heavily as this weighed upon her, a second concern troubled her even more.

His love resulted from the bewitching influence of Aphrodite. The naiad felt she had won his love unfairly and was afraid that in time Aphrodite's unnatural influence would wear off, or that he would discover the trick she had played upon him and hate her for it. She worried, but not overly much, for she was as fully bewitched as Proteus and incapable of concentrating her mind on such things for long. Love was too distracting.

Finally she came unexpectedly upon Aphrodite and confided to the child the terrible fear she felt. The little goddess answered scornfully.

"Foolish nymph! Of course he really loves you. We've opened his eyes and made him realize it, nothing more," she assured the naiad. "Do you not know that there are two forms of love, one leading to the other? I merely helped you awaken his passions. He had barricaded his heart, but we overcame his defenses. Since then his love has grown deep and full-beyond anything I could control or contrive, beyond the most violent of passions. Look deep into his eyes when next you're with him. He can never hate you now, unless you spurn him. Fear not. His heart is yours as long as you wish it. You have completed what I only began.'"

It was not difficult for Aphrodite to convince her; she wanted to be

convinced. To believe that Proteus loved her for herself-that was true happiness!

Her other fear was not so easily quelled. Each day she became more aware of the duty that called him back to Olympos. Soon it was impossible for her to ignore it longer. She made up her mind to approach him on the subject, however much she dreaded his departure. She waited until afternoon, when they swam together through one of the underwater gardens surrounding the palace of Nereus.

"Have you decided what must be done? The wedding of Lord Crios and Lady Eurybie grows near."

He nodded silently, not answering.

"Oh, Proteus," she cried suddenly, unable to contain herself any longer. "I so dread being parted from you, but I know I must not keep you. I feel guilty. I've been so happy, but I've kept you here while others need you desperately. ..."

Reaching out, he stroked her hand. "It isn't your fault. I haven't completely forgotten Kronos, if that's what you're thinking, Nalassa ... as much as I wish I could forget. I suppose I've been hoping some scheme would present itself...."

"What will you do? Only four days remain until the new moon. So little time..."

He leaned toward her. "I will kiss you, and spend tonight with you. Then in the morning I'll return to Olympos-well, no, not in the morning. I must travel there by night, to avoid being seen, so I'll leave tomorrow evening."

Her body grew tense as he spoke. "Let me go with you," she pleaded.

"To Olympos? No. That would be very foolish indeed."

She threw her arms around him and kissed him passionately. "I can't bear to be parted from you now that I've found you," she whispered. "Please, don't leave me."

"Only danger awaits you there. I dare not take you back. It's far too dangerous."

She clung to him for a long time. Finally, drawing away a little, she said, "But where shall I go, then? Soon the gods will begin arriving for the wedding. I won't be safe here, either."

"We'll have to find some other place for you to stay until I can rejoin you. Nalassa, let's put these thoughts from our minds for tonight. This is our last night here in the Kingdom of Nereus. Tomorrow we'll leave together and search out a haven for you."

"And tomorrow evening," she said sadly, "you'll leave me there while you continue on to Olympos-and such danger as I dare not imagine."

"Quiet, Nalassa," he said softly. "Tomorrow will come soon enough. ..."

"I won't be able to think of anything but you while you're gone."

"Quiet," he repeated. "We need not speak of those things till then." He drew her to him again and held her in his arms.

She smiled. "You're right. If this must be our last night here, then it



must be even more wonderful than all the others. We must make it last a very long time."

They clung to each other. Afternoon passed into evening, evening into night.

In the morning they said their lengthy good-byes to Nereus and his family. An escort of beautiful Nereids accompanied them from the palace. Others, swimming about the high towers, waved farewell. When their escort finally turned back, they swam on hand-in-hand, phosphorescent fish surrounding them and lighting their way.

During most of the journey they both remained silent. Time and again Nalassa glanced at her companion, and each time she found on his face a look of preoccupation. She knew he must be thinking of what awaited him on Olympos and so did not intrude on his thoughts. She was happy merely to be near him. To swim at his side through the cool, silent depths was enough. Her heart swelled with love and joy every time she glanced at his handsome face and sleek, perfect body.

They came ashore about sixty miles southeast of Mount Olympos. Here the high cliffs of a mountain shielded them from divine scrutiny, should any of the gods happen to peer in their direction. Not far away innumerable bluffs and canyons provided ample hiding places for the naiad should she have to run for safety.

"This will do nicely," Nalassa said, "if we can find a good cave in which I may sleep. The stream over there will give me fresh water to drink, and those look like fruit trees in the distance—all safely hidden from divine spies. It'll do wonderfully. Don't you think so?"

They were standing together high up on a steep slope, looking out over the rugged vista that surrounded them.

"The river over there, cutting through the gorge, reminds me of home," she continued, looking up at him now. When he made no reply, she asked, "Is something wrong, my lord? You're very quiet."

He made a sudden movement, as though startled from his thoughts. "I'm sorry. I don't know what it is. I've had a peculiar feeling since we've been here." He paused for a moment, still looking out over the rocky terrain. "I wish I didn't have to leave you. I feel uneasy about it."

"I feel uneasy, too, my lord. It's because I can't be with you for a few days. Don't worry about me. I'll be very careful. You may look down from Olympos and search these rocks for my form, but never will you see me. That I promise you. I'll be more cautious than the antelope, more timid than the hare."

They continued climbing the mountain, until at last they found a suitable cave.

"This is lovely," she said. "It's almost like having my own humble Olympos from which I can look down on my own quarter of the world."

His expression betrayed his continued concern.

"Oh, please, my lord," she said, coming close and resting her face against his chest. "'It's so hard for me to let you go. But I know you must, and so I'm resolved. You must be resolved too; you can't afford to let even a small portion of your mind be distracted from your business on Oiympos. Set your mind and heart at ease. All will be fine with me. Look!'"

As he watched, smiling despite his dejection, she began to act out a pantomime.

"See, this is how I'll creep to the entrance of the cave and peer out-looking first in this direction and then in that, to be sure that no one is about. Then I'll scurry from rock to rock, until I reach the stream. After I've drunk I'll look carefully again, and then make my way down toward the forest to pick fruit. Oh, my lord!" she said, beginning to laugh gaily. "Oh, Proteus, my love, set your heart at rest. All shall be fine."

They sat together for some time. Later, in the afternoon, he went with her down to the forest to search for food. Finally twilight came and it was time for them to part.

"I must go," he said sadly, taking her in his arms.

She nodded, nestling closer.

He kissed her long and tenderly, then drew away. They walked out onto the ledge in front of the cave and stood together silently, both seeking to postpone his departure.

"Look," she said, pointing toward a herd of animals grazing in one of the canyons. "Horses. I love horses. Now I'll be able to amuse myself, by watching them."

He could delay no longer. Kissing her a final time, he pulled away and immediately transformed himself. In the form of a gull he flew toward Olympos.

The river nymph sat upon the ledge, watching until he was lost from sight. Then with a sigh she looked back toward the horses, which had moved closer to the forest at one edge of the canyon. A slow-moving brook meandered out of the forest, edged on either side by slender, bowed trees.

The trees reminded her of home and made her homesick for the lovely willow-banked streams in which she loved to swim. At the same time she realized that she could never find happiness there again—that she could never be happy without Proteus beside her.

Fifteen

The same morning that Proteus and Nalassa took leave of the palace of Nereus beneath the deep Aegean, Kronos returned to his private quarters to find a messenger awaiting him. Perched on the high back of a chair, the creature croaked softly and began to flutter its still damp wings and twitch its fishlike tail.

At first the King of the Gods mistook the phantom messenger for one of his own eagle servitors. Each morning since the disappearance of the Okeanid Philyra, he had charged a dozen or more of these birds to soar across the sky, scrutinizing the earth below for any sign of her. For four days now they had searched in vain, returning to perch on the gallery outside the personal quarters of their master. Here they would screech out their reports of failure and receive the scraps of food the god gave them in payment of their labor.

Thinking one or more of these birds had returned, Kronos strode quickly across the large room. He stopped short, just before reaching the wide window that opened onto the gallery, and muttered a cross oath as he

recognized his mistake. Snatching up the creature, he clutched it tightly in one hand and stared down at it.

"Speak!" he commanded.

"From Phorkys and Keto, brother and sister of King Nereus," the creature said shrilly, "to Lord Kronos, mightiest of the Titans and king of all the gods: Greetings! We send this messenger to you from the depths of the Aegean to tell you that this very morning Proteus, the son of Okeanos, has departed, taking with him his companion, the naiad Nalassa. Where he goes, we do not know, except that he leaves the Kingdom of Nereus, our brother. We know no more. We await your instructions."

"That is all?" Kronos demanded of the phantom.

The creature squawked and began to repeat its message. "From Phorkys and Keto, brother and-

"Enough," Kronos said gruffly, tossing the messenger aside roughly, so that it had to twist frantically about in the air and flap its wings rapidly to avoid colliding with a table. After a few moments difficulty it regained its perch on the back of a chair.

Kronos threw himself down in another chair and let himself sink deep into thought. Proteus had arrived in Nereus's realm accompanied by the naiad Nalassa, who had mysteriously disappeared while in the custody of Thanatos. For this reason, Kronos had no doubt that the ocean god had been here on Olympos ten days ago-when Aigaion, also, had vanished. More importantly, this son of his greatest enemy had been here secretly, without revealing himself to the Titan. Undoubtedly he was acting as an agent of his father and in direct opposition to Kronos. The Titan could not be certain how much Proteus had learned while he was here, but the fact that he had continued on from Olympos to the Kingdom of Nereus made Kronos deeply suspicious.

He shrugged. Proteus's return made no real difference to him, except perhaps to leaven the monotony of his daily existence. He was surrounded by enemies, often unable to separate friend from foe. He could trust only in his own powers; they had always proven ample protection against his adversaries. A many-layered web of intrigue surrounded the Lord of the Titans and all his projects. Let Proteus seek as he might to penetrate them; inevitably he would become hopelessly ensnared.

Yet there were other strands that still might be spun....

For a number of minutes Kronos remained in his thick cushioned chair, brooding upon these things. Finally he arose, shaking off introspection as a lion shakes off rain when the storm has ended. He made his way out of his own quarters, toward the outer corridor.

Before descending the stairway he decided to look in upon Thanatos. Thoughts of Proteus had led him to remember the sick god, and so he went quickly to the chambers of the son of Nyx. He had no sooner entered the atrium of the apartment than he began to wish he had not come; the stench of vomit was very strong. Nevertheless he persevered, quickly crossing the atrium and making his way to the bedroom of the god. He found Thanatos just as he had last seen him, a number of days before. Stretched on the bed, dressed just as he had been when he took sick, he lay in a lifeless mass. Ill-smelling sheets, pushed into crumpled heaps, surrounded the god.

Kronos hesitated, wanting to flee the room yet fearing that Thanatos

might even be dead. Never before had he known a god to be sick for this length of time. Sickness of any kind was an anomaly. Reluctantly he approached still more closely, until he could look down into the face of the emaciated creature. He bent closer, watching and listening intently. At last he stood up and backed away from the inert form, having satisfied himself that Thanatos was indeed still alive.

Outside of the apartment, he inhaled deeply the fresh air of the corridor, then descended the stairway and headed toward the workshop of Iapetos. As he neared the floor on which the chambers of the sea goddess Eurybie were located, however, he changed his mind and went first to speak with her.

He found her still dressed as she had been at breakfast, in a flowing peplos of finest silk, colored deepest purple.

"Greetings, my lord. Come in. Be seated," she told him. "I'm pleased to see you again so soon. Such attention flatters me more than any mere verbal compliment. It tells me you really do value my company." her broad smile gleamed.

"I couldn't inquire this morning because of the others who ate with us," he said: "what did you learn from Klymene? Has she heard from Philyra? Does she know her whereabouts? "

Eurybie's grin became even broader. "My lord!" she exclaimed. "It was only last night that you first asked me to seek her out again-last night, shortly before I went to bed. You saw me this morning at breakfast. When have I had time to carry out your mission? I haven't even seen her since last ni-"

"She was at breakfast. She ate with her husband and family, and with her younger sister. What is that child's name?"

"You mean Metis," Eurybie said. "Come, sit beside me. Do you intend to stand at the door the whole time we talk?'"

"Yes," he said. "I can stay only a few moments. I have other things to attend to."

"Then by all means take care of them. You think too much about the Okeanid. I can't understand why you don't simply forget her-especially now, when we're only a few days from the fulfillment of our ambitions."

Kronos made a noise deep in his throat that was almost a laugh. "I have many ambitions, not a single one. I want you to go to Klymene as soon as possible and ask-"

Eurybie was shaking her head. "My lord, please put aside such thoughts. You're letting your desire for the Okeanid become an obsession. You have so many things to think about, to deal with-imperative things-things of utmost importance. ..."

"Yes, Lady Eurybie," he said, "and I'm very much aware of all of them. You will please do as I ask. See if there is any more you can learn about Philyra. And don't forget the younger sister, young ..."

"Metis, my lord."

"Yes, young Metis. She may very well know something about Philyra's disappearance."

"Yes, my lord. It shall be as you command," Eurybie said softly,

dissatisfied but resigned.

Kronos left her and continued on toward the workshop of his brother, the Titan Iapetos. Before he had gone very far, a shapeless mass stirred ahead of him on a stone bench. A gray form rose up and a puffy face appeared from amid the wrinkled folds of a faded cloak.

It was Momos, who never tired of finding outrageous things to complain about to the King of the Gods. He had the habit of falling asleep wherever he happened to be in the palace.

His own apartment went unused because it was always too far away when he felt sleepy.

"Greetings," Kronos said as he drew near the paunchy, rumped god. "Have you anything of which you wish to inform me? Is everything here on Olympos to your satisfaction today?"

Momos blinked and rubbed his bleary eyes. "I should say not, Lord Kronos. You still have not attended to these floors. They have wakened me yet again."

"Oh, yes, I recall now-loud marble that slaps too hard against walking feet. My heavy footsteps have disturbed your slumber. I fear I forgot to pursue this problem. I shall have to see what can be done."

The gods parted, Momos gathering himself up and walking unsteadily in the opposite direction, nodding his head and muttering to himself.

Kronos knew that Iapetos was spending even more time than usual away from his family chambers, and so he did not look there for him. Instead he made his way to the lower levels of the palace.

Outrage, resentment, and hate all smoldered within Iapetos since he had seen and overheard what he thought to be his wife Klymene and her brother Proteus. With each day since then his resentment had grown deeper and more difficult to control and conceal. Before, when Klymene was indisputably his, he had been madly in love with the Titaness Themis; now he seldom thought of the other goddess. The wife he had loved-however divided that love might have been-had cruelly deceived him, had encouraged him to build his life on a lie. The revelation left a deep, festering wound. Now his thoughts centered on getting her back-that he might cast her aside for the terrible wrong she had done him.

Brooding upon such thoughts, Iapetos heard the muffled sounds of his brother entering the outer room of his workshop. Laying aside the project upon which he was working, he went to meet the unexpected visitor.

"Greetings, brother," he said as he recognized Kronos in the dim light of that portion of the workshop.

Kronos raised his right hand in reply and nodded his broad head.

"Greetings to you, too, my brother. I haven't seen you for some days now, though I meant to be especially solicitous of you. We're most vulnerable to these we love. The more we Jove, the more vulnerable we are. I know from what you told me that you had a terrible shock, one that's left you stunned and inconsolate. For this reason I wanted to give you time to recover. Still, I must say that I was not surprised. I think you didn't fully believe me when I told you that our brother Okeanos plotted against us-yes, us, both you and me as well as all the other gods of Olympos. You weren't prepared for the depths of his

perfidy. Even I find it hard to believe that Klymene, whom I always loved as a sister, could be so deceitful."

Kronos moved to place a consoling hand upon his brother's shoulder, but Iapetos turned away.

"Forgive me," Kronos continued after a moment. "I set; it hurts you to even talk about the subject. We'll speak of other things. Tell me, what project occupies you today?"

They walked through a series of connected rooms, coming at last to a number of benches arranged to form a long U-shaped table. From a central chair Iapetos could turn his attention to any area of the workbench.

"At least you have work to occupy you," Kronos said, glancing about the room.

In one corner, turned upside down, lay a divan in need of repair. One of its legs had to be replaced. On the workbench, almost side by side, lay a delicate golden wreath, nearly complete, and a dozen spearheads that awaited final tempering.

Kronos examined one of the spearheads. "You've changed the shape slightly. I think you've flared the line toward the rear more."

"Yes. They're for Hyperion and that's what he wanted."

"I'd like to see them when you've finished. I might want to commission a few for myself."

"As you please, my lord."

"Good. Good." Kronos fell silent for a few moments, then said, "Brother. I dislike having to return to a subject, which I know to be particularly painful; nevertheless, it's necessary to do so."

Iapetos faced him, emotionless.

"It's difficult to hold a god prisoner," Kronos said, speaking slowly and moving about the room. Much of the time his back was toward Iapetos. "It's ever so much more difficult, though, to capture a god who is unsurpassed at changing his form. I fear that may not be possible."

"Unsurpassed at changing his form," Iapetos repeated slowly. "I know of only two gods who are especially proficient at shape changing, King Nereus and Proteus, the accursed brother of my wife. Of those two, it's said that Proteus is the more accomplished. Is it he you mean? What of him? Why do you ask this question?"

Kronos shrugged, still not facing his brother. "Answer me first. Is it possible to capture a shape changer? How does one go about it?"

Iapetos thought for a few moments, then said, "If one holds on and doesn't let go, no matter how hard the shape changer fights, no matter how many times he changes his shape and what horrifying creatures he becomes, it is possible to weary him. Finally he'll be exhausted and unable to resist any longer. At least so I've heard. Okeanos, the father of Proteus, is supposed to have so dealt with his son. I've heard you, yourself, say that it was in that way that you once forced King Nereus to prophesy for you. Why do you ask this question? You must already know the answer I've given."

"Is there then no other answer? I need to know how to make and keep such

a prisoner, not merely how to restrain him a short while. I could accomplish as much by knocking him unconscious. I want to know how to keep him a prisoner. You or I could be locked in a room without windows, and that would do; but such a god could seep out beneath the door in the form of a mist-or so it's said."

"I've heard that, too," Iapetos agreed. "Tell me first, though-you ask about Proteus, or Nereus?"

"Proteus. You told me that he was going to the Kingdom of Nereus. Now I'll tell you that I have reason to believe he's returning here."

Icy hatred came into the eyes of Iapetos.

"Why he's coming, I don't know," Kronos said. "I suspect it has more to do with me than with you or Klymene. I wish I knew of some way to imprison him until after the wedding, so that I might deny my enemies his help. But how can I do that, if he can escape any prison I build for him? I wish, too, that I might display him to the world, as proof of his father's treachery."

"He's returning here? When? How soon?"

"Any time. Perhaps today," Kronos said. "Is it possible, do you think, to make a room from which he could not escape? How could that be done?"

"Today?" Iapetos repeated.

"Yes, or tomorrow. Could such a room be made? One from which a shape changer could not escape?'"

This time Iapetos heard his question. His brows contracted in thought. After a few moments he shook his head. "No, I don't think so-not if the door is to open and close. Of course you could seal the doors shut with lead once he was trapped inside. It would have to be done quickly, before he could escape; or he would have to be knocked unconscious and shoved into the room. Then there would be time to accomplish-

"If the doors cannot open and close, it does us little good. I had thought it might be possible to trick him into such a chamber, one prepared in advance, and spring the trap shut on him. ..."

"It need not be a room," Iapetos said. "You would have to find a way to get close to him, to catch him off guard and knock him unconscious. Or you could wound him with spear or dagger, I suppose; I doubt that even Proteus could change shape very readily if he were badly wounded. Whichever way he's incapacitated, once it's accomplished you could place him in a large bronze chest. The lid would be closed and then, very quickly, I could seal shut the seams before he recovered enough to escape."

Kronos nodded slowly. "Yes, that would work. Will you make such a box and prepare the lead, so that it will be available at a moment's notice?"

"I will prepare everything," Iapetos said quietly.

Kronos looked into his brother's eyes. Yes, he thought; yes, I'm sure you will.

Sixteen

As night came upon the land Proteus, the shapechanging ocean god, flew

toward high Olympos in the form of a white gull. Flying between the tall trees of the mountain slopes and low over the bare, jagged rocks of the higher levels, he followed a route that was both direct and inconspicuous. Even a divine sentinel would have been hard pressed to spot him as he darted up a long, gaping ravine or skimmed above a cascading stream.

No moon would light the sky tonight, and so the god was forced to make his way by the light of the stars. They seemed even brighter and more numerous than usual. As he neared the towering bulk of Mount Olympos, he was forced to slacken his rapid rate of progress toward the home of the gods. Now his journey led almost perpendicularly upward, first over hanging forests and then over glistening snow and ice.

Above the clouds that veiled the upper regions of the mountain, he came again upon the precinct of the gods, where warmer temperatures prevailed. The palace of Kronos could be seen from a distance even in the muted light of the stars. Rising from the dark rocks, it seemed to glow with a yellow-golden radiance of its own. Many small lights, themselves like stars in the firmament of the palace, winked and gleamed from windows and doors that opened onto the outer galleries.

Retaining the form of a gull, Proteus settled on the high branch of one of the trees that grew in the orchards below the palace. Here he waited as night settled fully upon the palace and other lamps and torches sprang to life within the edifice.

Finally, satisfied that no one was likely to observe him, he flitted from his high perch and flew partway around the building. At first he flew near the rocky foundation of the palace, but when he reached a darker area, he darted suddenly upward for many floors and reversed his course. Then, when he had retraced part of the distance he had already traveled, he dropped back down to the third floor and alighted on the balustrade outside an unlighted room.

Resuming his normal shape, he crossed the gallery and stepped through a large window, then continued on cautiously deep into the apartment. At last he stopped before a closed door. He leaned his ear against the barrier, listened briefly, then opened the door.

A goddess turned toward him with a startled cry. It was Philyra, and the room he had entered was a part of the suite of Momos.

Proteus reached the Okeanid's side before she recovered fully from the surprise of his entrance. He glanced around the room, nodding toward the godlike mortals who seemed to have found their way into every nook and cranny. "Little has changed," he said, smiling, "though I see that Oizys is coming along nicely. If he keeps growing at this rate, he'll be completely recovered before long."

From across the room the head of Oizys watched him without detectable reaction.

Philyra had risen from her chair, and now she threw herself into her brother's arms, sighing heavily. "Oh, thank Earth and starry Heaven, you've arrived safely I've been so worried about you, wondering if indeed you were coming-and if you could reach us safely."

"Why should I not be safe?"

"Because we think Kronos is waiting for you. At least Metis thinks that. She's in her room, waiting there in case that was where you went first



upon returning to the palace. Both of us have been very apprehensive.''

"Slow down, sister. I don't know what you're talking about. Kronos knows I am here? How can that be?"

"Oh, let me send for Metis. She can explain it all so much more easily than I can."

The Okeanid looked about the floor until she spotted the mortal she was seeking. Picking him up, she quickly instructed him, then set him down inside the opening of Ophion's tunnel.

"He will go to her room and tell her to come here as quickly as possible," Philyra explained. "Come, brother, sit across from me and let me look at you. I'll light more lamps, that we can see each other more clearly."

The lamps were soon lit. Proteus found himself forced into a thickly cushioned chair. Philyra pulled a second chair near to his. While they waited Philyra told him much of what had happened during his absence.

"And so you fled here?" he asked.

She nodded. "Yes. It's lonely here, with only the mortals for company most of the time, but Metis and Prometheus and Epimetheus visit regularly. The mortals are amusing, too, at least some of the time. You'll be amazed when you learn all that Metis has accomplished during your absence."

"I think it might have been better if you had fled Olympos, as I told you to do. You could be discovered here at any time."

She frowned. "I want to help in whatever way I can. I've been able to help by staying-a little, anyway."

"What of Klymene? How much does she know of all this?"

"Nothing! You told us not to tell her."

"But you said her sons come here."

"They do. They and the mortals have been assisting Metis. They know I was forced to flee from Lord Kronos. They're pleased to help me. They bring me food and help me keep watch-oh, Metis will tell you all that. Metis made Prometheus and Epimetheus promise not to tell their mother and father about any of this-about me or the mortals or Oizys- so they haven't."

"Where does Klymene think you are?"

"Metis told her, just after Kronos forced me into my new apartment, that I had left that night to return home to the palace of our parents. The whole subject was so indelicate that Klymene was satisfied with that answer."

"What of Thanatos?" Proteus asked. "Has he recovered yet from the herb Metis gave him?'"

"No, I don't think so." Philyra laughed. "I believe Metis was forced to give him a second dose; but since then he hasn't moved at all, I understand. You know, I don't think anyone in the palace, except Kronos, perhaps, even realizes that he's no longer about. A foul smell is quickly forgotten when gone, but hard to ignore when present.... But

what of you, brother? You look different, somehow. I know that's an odd thing to say. I see you so seldom that you always look different to me. The things we undergo leave their imprints upon us to some extent, I think. ..."

"I've seldom heard you wax philosophical, Philyra. I'm not sure serious concerns really suit you."

She frowned, looking petulant. "I may be much younger than you, brother, but I'm not a child any longer."

He leaned across toward her, taking her hand in his. "I'm sorry. I didn't mean to offend you, Philyra. Of course you aren't a child. You have a right to your thoughts-meditations as well as fancies. Please forgive me."

She patted his hand. "Don't you be so serious," she said, laughing. "The solitude of this place has left me melancholy. Please forget that I said anything. Tell me-I was about to ask you, what of Nalassa? Where is she?"

She listened attentively to his answer, sensing that he left something unspoken. Something in his attitude toward Nalassa had changed. What it was, she could not be certain. He seemed unwilling to talk about the naiad other than to answer her direct questions, and so Philyra let the subject go.

They spoke of other things for a short time, and then Metis appeared from the opening of Ophion's tunnel, followed by both the mortal Alalkomeneus and the man Philyra had sent as a messenger.

Metis threw herself upon Proteus, smothering him with hugs and kisses, and with questions. "Why have you been gone so long?" she demanded. "Have you just gotten back? Where is Nalassa? Did you leave her with King Nereus, or did you take her back to her family? Has Philyra told you what's happened? Has no one tried to capture you since you returned here? Have-?"

He answered her questions or brushed them aside as quickly as he could. "Philyra tells me that you believe Kronos expects me here on Olympos," he said. "Why is that?"

"There are places within Ophion's tunnel from which it is possible to hear what is said in the personal chambers of Kronos-within some of those rooms, I should say. There has been a mortal on duty, listening, for much of the time that you've been gone."

Proteus grinned at her. "You've done well, my cunning little sister. But if Kronos knows I'm here on Olympos, how does he know? Who could have warned him?"

"He received a message from Lord Phorkys and Lady Keto. Probably-"

"Phorkys and Keto," Proteus said. "They plot against Ne-reus too? Such family loyalty! Poor Nereus was shocked to learn of Eurybie's treachery. With such a brother and sisters, he needs no other enemies."

"Probably Kronos received earlier messages from them," Metis continued, "before we started listening, or in other rooms of his apartment, where we couldn't overhear them. He knows that Nalassa was with you in Nereus's kingdom, and so he most certainly has guessed that you were here on Olympos to rescue her from Thanatos."

Proteus nodded. "You need say no more. I understand the situation. I shall have to be very careful."

"Indeed you shall!" Metis cried.

"What will you do?" Philyra asked. "If Nereus will do nothing--"

"Do nothing?" Metis demanded. "What do you mean?"

Proteus told her of his meeting with the sea god. "And so," he concluded, "we're no better off today than when I last saw you. I accomplished nothing. Our father, to satisfy his pride, will walk into the trap Kronos has laid for him."

"But he knows about it," Metis said. "He's forewarned, and thus will be prepared."

"His pride won't let him admit the full measure of the danger that awaits him. He's been separated too long from his brother. His memory has dimmed, and he underestimates the danger. Oh, he may not be captured by Kronos--that isn't what I mean. But once the first blow is struck, once the gods begin to fight each other, it really won't matter who wins or loses. Everyone will lose." He sighed. "I sense a terrible inevitability about all of this."

"Then you really think . . . ?" Philyra asked.

Proteus nodded sadly. "In only a few days, the world in which we live may be rent apart."

"What shall we do?" Metis asked. "We can't just let this happen. We have to try to prevent it."

Proteus was staring at the flagstones beneath his feet. "I don't think we can prevent it," he said softly.

For nearly a full minute the three were silent. The mortals--all save Alalkomeneus, whom Metis still held in her hand--had wandered away to tend to their own affairs. The head of Oizys watched the god and goddesses through wide, unblinking eyes.

"But what shall we do?" Philyra asked, her voice stiff with apprehension.

"If we can't prevent this calamity," Metis said, "then we must do everything we can to protect our father. If we can't keep the gods from battling each other, then it is our duty to save our father from whatever harm threatens him."

"Perhaps you're right," Proteus said after a few moments. "Certainly prudence has gained us nothing. Perhaps the time has come for decisive action."

"Good!" Metis grinned. "I've been waiting for you to decide that."

Proteus sighed softly, not nearly as enthusiastic as his young sister. "Kronos's plot depends in part on the help he receives from Iapetos and Koios. If they were to learn at the last moment that he had changed his mind, that the plot had been called off . . ."

"Perhaps," Metis said, "but that isn't enough. Kronos would proceed on his own, with or without their help. I think you're being too meek, brother. If we are going to risk Tar-taros, then we should seek out a

crime worthy of the punishment."

He ran the fingers of one hand slowly through his thick black hair. His face looked drawn in a way neither of the goddesses had ever noticed before, and his eyes looked very tired.

"Speak on, Metis. What do you suggest?"

"I offer two points for consideration: Thanatos still lies in his bed, unable to move or speak. That is the first point. The second is this--here you are, renowned of all the gods for your ability to assume any form you like." Metis looked back and forth between her brother and sister. "Do those two things not suggest something to you?"

"I detest riddles," Philyra said. "Tell us plainly what you mean."

"I mean," the child said, her eyes sparkling and a grim smile playing on her lips, "that the herb I fed to Thanatos could be fed to the Kings of the Gods just as easily. It could just as easily be Lord Kroros who is confined to his bed, unable to move or speak. In such a state it would be very easy for us to carry him from his room and hide him somewhere in the palace, perhaps here, where he could be carefully watched and fed more of the herb as often as necessary. Proteus could form himself into the semblance of Kronos and take Kronos's place. At the wedding, brother Proteus, it could be you rather than Kronos--you in the shape of Kronos, I should say--who tells Koios and Cries and Iapetos and Eurybie that you have changed your mind, that no move will be made against Okeanos and Nereus."

"Kronos could not be kept drugged indefinitely," Proteus said. "Neither could I impersonate the King of the Gods indefinitely."

"But both could quite easily be done for a few days--long enough to wreck his plot."

"But eventually Kronos would recover, and then he would revenge himself upon all of us."

"But at least he would have to start fresh." Metis said. "His work so far would have been ruined."

"He would rail against us, calling upon all his allies and subjects. A confrontation of force would be inevitable, since force had been used against him."

"How many of the gods will believe him?" Metis asked, an ingenuous smile on her lips. "How many witnesses will he have? Many will have seen him at the wedding of Eurybie and Crios. None will have seen him lying unconscious on some hidden mattress. Some--perhaps many--of those allies and subjects will have doubts about the story he tells them."

Metis laughed softly. "At least we shall have acted," she continued. "And our father will be safe for a while longer. What do you two think? We must do something."

"I think nothing of it," Philyra said nervously. "Whatever you two decide, that will be fine with me. Tell me my part and I shall play it."

After a long silence, Proteus nodded. "Yes," he said quietly, "I'm afraid you're right, Metis. There is little else we can do. Have you more of the herb prepared?"

"Yes."

"Good. When would be a good time to give it to him?"

"Tomorrow, if that's not too soon for you. At breakfast, if you like."

Proteus nodded solemnly.

Before going to sleep for the night, Proteus wanted to reconnoiter the palace. Metis accompanied him out to the atrium, and so had an opportunity to speak with him privately. She wanted to discuss with him her conjectures on mortality and immortality. Even without reference to the things that Gaia had told her, she managed to be convincing. He listened patiently, his interest becoming marked when she came to the subject of Nalassa's pink-tinged ichor.

"Then you think this color is an indication of mortality?" he asked.

Metis nodded. "I fear so. Brother, your face tells me that I've upset you with such talk. I'm sorry, but I thought you would want to know these things."

"You're absolutely right. I do want to know them."

She continued talking, telling him about the new food she had grown, but now he looked distracted. He declined her invitation to taste it.

Seventeen

The head of Oizys had watched and listened from his dark corner of the room while Proteus and his sisters talked. Occasionally he made whimpering sounds, and Philyra or Metis would procure food for him—soft fruit, or shelled nuts, or raw grain such as Thanatos had fed him; sweet, glistening red nectar or rich ambrosia, the new food that the child had brought. The goddess that fed him did so absentmindedly, her attention centered on the conversation in which she was involved.

The conversation interested Oizys little, even though he fully realized its grave significance. During the time he had been here, incarcerated in this room within the apartment of Momos, he had had little else to do but listen to the goddesses and mortals. From their conversation he had learned in detail all that happened to them on Olympos and all that they hoped to accomplish. Oizys felt no partiality toward or against the Lord of the Titans; he had no partisan interest to uphold, and so was not concerned at all that they plotted against Kronos.

Only two things concerned Oizys: He sought to assuage the terrible, relentless hunger that never let up for more than fifteen or twenty minutes at a time. His body was regenerating and needed vast quantities of food—more food than he could chew and digest were he to devote himself to nothing but eating. Neither his brother Thanatos nor the Okeanids ever supplied him with anything approaching the amount of food he craved. The other thing he required was attention. Metis, Philyra, the mortals—they all eschewed contact with him. They never jabbed or poked him. They never cut or pinched him, or even cuffed him when he whimpered annoyingly.

Though Thanatos, too, often ignored him for long periods of time, there were other periods when he lavished attention on Oizys, probing and measuring with feverish interest, slapping him regularly, prodding him with instruments. The long intervals of inattention were more than adequately compensated for at such times.

So intense was his frustration at the lack of attention rendered him by

the goddesses that almost from the time he was brought to this small room, Oizys began to seek a way of returning to the apartment of his brother. He would have explained his desire to them, but his body had not yet grown large enough to make his larynx function. He could only wait and eat. By eating he could make his new body grow more rapidly and so hasten the day when he might return to Thanatos.

He could never get enough food. Twice mortals ventured close to him and he had managed to catch them with his teeth. They turned out to be almost as tasty as young swine, but probably would have been better cooked. He kept hoping that others would approach so he could eat them, too, but they were now even more leery of him than before and all carefully kept their distance. He was sure no one had seen him devour those first two; the goddesses said that they must somehow have gotten lost in Ophion's tunnel.

The growth of his new body had been agonizingly slow until Metis brought the golden food she called ambrosia. How cruel she was to him! She gave him but a single bowl of it, when he could have devoured a whole basket and still have been ravenous for more.

The taste of the stuff was marvelous, but truly phenomenal was the effect it had upon him. His new body commenced to grow with amazing speed. Before it had been about the size of a mortal's body. Now, within a few days, it had increased fourfold in size.

He had practiced walking the last two nights, after Philyra went to sleep. Keeping his head property balanced on top of his undersized body presented a problem of the first magnitude. His muscles were too weak to properly support it. Each time he started to move, his head roiled forward or backward on his neck and threw him off balance. Both attempts ended in his stumbling into things and awakening Philyra, who promptly retrieved him from where he lay sprawled on the floor and returned him to the cushioned corner of the room where he now spent his time when he was not in his chair.

He could have spoken now had he wished, but they had talked too freely in front of him. He feared they wouldn't dare let him reutrn to Tanatos. He kept silent, pretending he was still unable to speak and waited for his opportunity to escape them. Each day his body would be a little larger.

The night grew late and Philyra prepared to sleep. Metis had left some time before. Eventually Proteus returned, spread a blanker over the stone flagging and lay down. Only a small lamp was left burning; in its dim light Oizys watched and wailed.

Long after Philyra and Proteus both seemed to be soundly asleep, the mortals continued to fidget. A few of them carried on conversations among themselves in their tiny piping voices; but at last these, too, grew tired and stretched themselves out on the pillows that had been strewn upon the floor for their use.

Stiil Oizys waited. Finally, when he was certain everyone else in the room slept, he rose shakily to his feet and crept from his corner of the room. His head wobbled wildly on his shoulders and he had to keep stopping to regain his balance.

Metis had replenished the supply of ambrosia, bringing bringing enough to feed off the inhabitants of the room-except, of course, that Oizys could have eaten it all unaided, had she let him. He procured an old cloak from the floor nearby and emptied the basket of ambrosia into it.

Even though he was very hungry, he allowed himself only a small piece of the food. He knew that he would not be able to get any more when it was used up and was determined to make it last as long as possible. Closing up the cloak so that it formed a sack, he carried it over his shoulder.

He was now large enough that he could open and close the doors that led out of the apartment. He tried to be quiet, but his ungainliness made him lurch unexpectedly as he walked.

He wobbled down the short hall that led to the atrium, then made his way to the outer corridor.

He had not anticipated how arduous the journey would be in his present condition. This became clear when he reached the stairs. The steps were high enough that he had to climb them one at a time, pulling himself up with his hands and knees and dragging the sack behind him. Before he reached the next level of the palace, his hunger became unbearable.

Reluctantly he opened the bag and let himself eat for a few minutes. He lingered over the food rather than gulping it down as his stomach begged him to do. He only allowed himself a few pieces. Hungry or not, he was determined to conserve his precious supply as well as he could.

He began to climb again, making pitifully slow progress. The hour was late and so he encountered no one during his journey. That suited him perfectly. He wanted to see no one but Thanatos. He could already feel the wonderful cuffs and pinches his brother would bestow upon him.

The hunger returned even more strongly, but he refused to open his sack again. He felt miserable and dejected and began to whimper softly to himself. Nevertheless, he forced himself to continue climbing.

Hours passed, but finally he reached the topmost floor of the palace. With his goal so near, he began to run down the corridor, his head wobbling wildly. He fell every few feet, pulled himself up again, and continued running.

He entered the apartment of Thanatos, calling out in a hushed, husky voice, "Here I am, brother. It is I, Oizys!"

Thanatos lay on his bed; apparently asleep. Oizys wobbled toward him and poked him two or three times without effect. Then he remembered what he had heard, that his brother had been given some kind of herb to keep him asleep. He stared at the lifeless figure.

Across the room, near the wall, something moved. Oizys turned to look at it. It was a mortal. The creature, realizing it had been seen, ran toward the door that led to Thanatos's laboratory. Oizys lurched after it. He lost his balance and fell, but one of his outstretched hands landed on the man. Without getting up, Oizys brought the creature to his mouth and gulped it down.

Animals within the laboratory had begun to make noises, and now Oizys got shakily to his feet and went into that room. The container of grain, from which Thanatos usually fed them, lay not far from the door, but the animals were more to his taste. They began to make excited, frightened noises as he went from cage to cage. The small ones he ate whole.

For many hours he occupied himself inside the laboratory. When the animals were gone he fed on the grain. Finally, the food all gone, he

returned to the bedroom. Thanatos still lay just as when he had left him. Climbing up on the bed, he tried again to awaken him. The slightest

of groans escaped the god's mouth. For a long time Oizys merely sat beside him.

The sun had already risen when an idea occurred to him. Ambrosia had remarkable qualities. It had drastically increased the speed of his body's regeneration. Oizys wondered if it wouldn't have a similarly beneficial effect on Thanatos.

Sliding down from the bed, he went to where he had left the sack. He opened it and looked inside. He hated to give away any of his precious supply of this food. At the same time he yearned for the attention that only Thanatos was willing to give him.

Reluctantly he opened the sack again and spread out the contents. It seemed to be a pitifully small quantity. With a sigh he broke off a small bit and carried it to his sleeping brother. Holding the morsel above Thanatos's lips, he squeezed it and let two or three drops of liquid fall upon the god's dry lips.

The reaction was almost instantaneous. Thanatos's nose began to twitch. His mouth moved. He licked his lips. Oizys leaned forward, pressing the small bit of ambrosia into his mouth. Thanatos chewed slowly, then swallowed.

Suddenly the god's eyes opened, flashing first to Oizys, then about the room. He sat up in bed, his gaze now falling upon the open sack of ambrosia.

Thanatos staggered from the bed. Oizys tried to stop him, but was shoved aside. Despite his weakness Thanatos succeeded in pulling the ambrosia toward the bed. He sat back down and began to eat. As he devoured the food, strength flooded back into him.

Eighteen

The ambrosia he devoured seemed to revive Thanatos almost instantly. Appearances were deceptive, however; for as soon as the god attempted to rise from his sitting position on the edge of his bed, he found that the strength had not yet fully returned to his legs. Narrowly averting a fall to the floor, he let himself slump down upon his filthy mattress again and clutched his still groggy head between his emaciated hands.

"This new food is wonderful, don't you think?" Oizys told him in his hushed voice. "Remember how well I have fed you, that you may feed me well in the future. Their food was marvelously good, though there was never enough of it. Still, I wouldn't have minded even that, had they not so thoroughly ignored me. During all the time I was with them, not once did they poke or prod me, or even slap me when I whimpered too much."

As his brother spoke, Thanatos tried to make sense from the jumble of thoughts and images inside his head. He had only vague impres-<sup>sions</sup> from the days that he had lain motionless upon his bed. He must have dreamed many dreams, for he remembered a seemingly endless procession of figures and events. Among them were fleet and flitting images that he recognized as different from the others--small godlike creatures who moved furtively about his room. And young gods, too, that he now recognized as Metis and Prometheus and Epimetheus.

Shaking his head slowly, Thanatos tried again to stand up.

Oizys was still talking. "Never did they pinch or slap me, nor cut away strips of my skin, nor stick me with thin-bladed knives, nor any of the



things you do. A single one of those things would have been enough, and I would not have left to return here, for-

Memory was returning quickly now, so quickly that Thanatos had difficulty absorbing it all. He had eaten supper and gotten dreadfully sick, barely managing to regain his own apartment before slipping into unconsciousness. He had been down on the wide terrace not to eat, but to find Lord Kronos. He had to find the Lord of Olympos to tell him something very important that he had learned.

Proteus! Nalassa! The images of the god and naiad sprang into his mind and at the same moment he sprang to his feet, only the slightest

unsteadiness remaining. He turned on his brother. "How long have I been here?" he demanded, glaring down at the ungainly creature. For the first time now he noticed how fully Oizys's body had regenerated. Far more time must have passed than he had suspected. "Tell me," he said, stepping threateningly toward his brother. "How long have I slept?"

"How am I to know?" Oizys asked. "I've been locked away from the sun with the little mortal gods all this time. I don't know how many days have passed."

The mind of Thanatos was working at top speed now, re-enacting in memory how Nalassa had been led away by a god who seemed to be Kronos; how on the stairs that god became first Iapetos and then Momos; how the god he thought to be Momos, instead of allowing himself to be shoved aside, lifted Thanatos above his head and threw him up the steep bank of stairs. These thoughts took a sudden turn at Oizys's mention of the mortals that had disappeared from his laboratory with the river nymph Nalassa.

" 'Little mortal gods'?" he repeated. "What are you talking about?" He stepped toward his brother and grasped him by the throat.

"I've been with them all this time, at the other end of the snake hole, where they took me."

"You were with them?" Thanatos cried. "Where are they? They belong to me!"

"They're at the end of the snake hole, in the apartment of Momos."

"The apartment of-" Thanatos stopped short. "Yes, of course; where could they be safer? What is this snake hole you keep talking about?"

"Come-into the next room-I'll show you. It was by this route that the mortal gods escaped. ..." Oizys waddled in that direction, his large head wobbling so wildly that he careened into the door jamb.

Thanatos had to hold up a lamp to see the opening. "Yes, I remember now," he said after a few moments. "It was I who pried off the stone that sealed shut this hole. That was when Kronos first gave me these rooms. I neglected to close up the hole after I'd investigated it. It seemed to go on and on, and I never did find an end to it."

Now he noticed the slender rope ladder that hung down from the opening, by which Metis and the mortals had come and gone from his apartment. He examined it briefly, then tossed it aside.

"Perhaps here lies a better route to the apartment of my brother Momos than the outer corridors," he continued, more to himself than to Oizys. "Perhaps by following this route I can take the mortals by surprise and

cut off their path of escape."

"You're going?" Oizys asked. "What of me?"

For a long moment Thanatos looked down at him. Then he took his brother by the neck and dragged him across the room. Now he saw the havoc Oizys had wreaked upon his experimental animals.

"I was hungry," Oizys said, licking his lips.

Thanatos struck him roughly, then pulled open a door and thrust his brother into a cage from which he could not escape, closing the door after him and securely latching it.

Thanatos returned to the vicinity of the opening of Ophion's tunnel. Most gods have two or three shapes that are especially suited to them and easy to assume and retain. Thanatos most commonly assumed the form of a vulture, but the form of a snake also suited him well. It was as a divine serpent that he intended to traverse the passages.

The metamorphosis was completed within moments. An enormous head rose up and leaned toward the circular opening. It disappeared within, followed by a long, slithering body that largely filled the passage from top to bottom and from side to side. Thanatos surged forward in great undulations. A long red tongue, thicker than the waist of a mortal man, darted out to taste the air and direct the god's path.

The spoor of the mortals led him unerringly toward the apartment of Momos, his great body gliding through the smooth stone passageway.

The inhabitants of the small room within the apartment of Momos had awakened early. The children of Okeanos had decided the night before that Metis would return with a supply of the herb that had been used to poison Thanatos, and that she and Proteus would descend to breakfast shortly after dawn, so that the shape changer could make the necessary arrangements to serve as one of the attendants at the morning meal.

The disappearance of Oizys, which the mortals had noticed and pointed out to Metis, left all three of them on edge. In the few minutes he could spare, the sea god attempted to find some indication of what had happened to him, but without success. Rather than delay or abandon their plan against Kronos, Proteus decided it would be best to proceed as quickly as possible. If they could succeed in drugging the Lord of the Titans, Oizys's freedom would be a moot point. Once Proteus assumed the place of the Titan he would be able to deal easily with the missing god should he reappear and attempt to reveal what he had seen and heard.

Metis and Proteus had departed only a few minutes before, and Philyra, not yet thoroughly awake, was in the process of splashing water on her face and beginning the abbreviated toilette she practiced each morning here. Some of the mortals had gone back to sleep while others were beginning to eat.

The still air within Ophion's tunnel carried sound well, so that as Thanatos approached the room he could sense how near he was to the mortals; the vibrations produced by even the small noises they made danced upon his skin and tantalized him, so that he did not decrease his pace until he was almost at the opening into the room.

One of the mortals was sitting on the floor with a piece of ambrosia before him. He was the first to glimpse movement within the tunnel. Something long and red flickered out of the passage. Behind the tongue were bright yellow eyes, coming toward him out of the darkness. The man

tried to rise and move back from the opening, but instead he stumbled and fell backwards upon the floor.

As he surged out of the tunnel, Thanatos began to reas-sume his own shape.

The mortals, caught by surprise-for no one had had time to yell a warning-froze in their places at the sudden appearance of the emaciated god. Even before they recognized him, many commenced to quake with terror.

While the mortals hesitated and Philyra stared in astonishment, Thanatos rushed to one side of the room. There he found a chest of medium size. He turned it upside down so that the lid, which had not been latched, swung free and the contents of linen tumbled to the floor.

Some of the mortals overcame their fear enough to scream loudly. "It's Thanatos-run, run-it's Thanatos!"

The god had begun to make his way about the room now, the chest under one arm. Stooping, he snatched up first one man and then another, thrusting each within the chest and then turning to continue his search.

By now Philyra had also recovered from her surprise. As the tiny mortal creatures scurried in every direction to avoid the god, she forced herself to move directly toward him, drawing herself up to her full height.

"What are you doing?" she demanded. "How dare you intrude here? Put that man down!"

Thanatos continued scooping up the creatures, paying no heed to her.

During the time she had been in this room, she had become quite fond of the mortals. Their cries of terror as Thanatos plucked them up touched her heart and gave her courage that she might not otherwise have possessed. When he refused to listen to her, she made up her mind to act. As he bent to grope in a dark recess, she pushed him violently toward the wall. His head struck the stone, but not hard enough.

He turned on her, brushing her aside with a long, thin arm. She tumbled over a low stool and fell to the floor. Thanatos immediately returned to his work. Another mortal was torn from his hiding place and deposited within the chest.

When Philyra regained her feet, the god was on his hands and knees, feeling beneath a divan. She moved to place herself at the door, to

block his exit. Now he crawled around the room, looking and feeling beneath and behind all the furnishings in his effort to locate any mortal that might have escaped him thus far. Finally he rose. He gave the room a final look, then lifted the chest to his shoulder.

"Put those men down," Philyra told him as he came near. "Why have you come here? What right have you to take them?"

Her right hand was hidden within the folds of her clothing. Thanatos hesitated, thinking she might be clutching a dagger.

"I have come to recover what is mine-these creatures. I don't know what's going on here-why you are here in the apartment of my brother Momos-but I intend to take what is mine and tell Lord Kronos that you have had a part in this. Stand aside or you will force me to hurt you."

He stepped toward her and her hand came out of her clothing, carrying a gleaming blade high above her head. The dagger started to descend, but the god was too quick. Even with the chest balanced on his shoulder he easily stepped to one side and caught her wrist. With a twist of his hand he forced her to release the weapon. It clattered to the floor and he shoved her aside.

Before she could regain her feet, he was gone. She started to follow him but by the time she reached the hall he had already passed through the outer door. She slumped against the wall, breathing heavily, trying to collect her thoughts. What was she to do? Her hiding place was exposed. Soon the Lord of the Titans would know she was still on Olympos. Where could she hide now?

Nineteen

Proteus, the shape changer, slipped away from the laughing, talking gods who were eating breakfast on the patio terrace of Olympos and went to a long serving table that held foods of many kinds. Slowly he began to fill a golden platter.

Having assumed the appearance of a minor god of the palace who had eaten and departed early, he was now serving as an attendant at the morning meal. His most searching gaze had been unable to detect suspicion in any of the gods and goddesses around him. Everyone seemed to accept him as the deity he impersonated. Working at a slow but steady pace, he had waited until the King of the Gods took his accustomed seat, then hurried to serve Kronos.

Now he reached the far end of the serving table and was alone except for the young goddess across from him. She too was busily at work and neither looked at the other. They carried nearly identical platters, both heaped high with an assortment of foods.

"It's ready," Metis whispered, setting her dish down beside the one he had carried. "The herb is much more finely ground this time. He'll never notice it. Is everything going well?"

"Kronos has only just arrived. I must return quickly."

Proteus took her platter instead of the one he had brought, and turned to retrace his steps toward the Lord of the Titans.

Kronos sat near the portico that led into the palace. Around him on three sides grew a luxurious bower of myrtle. Lady Rhea, his queen, had not yet descended to breakfast, but during Proteus's absence Eurybie, the sea goddess, had joined him. She was talking gaily as Proteus, still disguised as a functionary of the palace, returned with food for the king. He set the golden dish on the three-legged table at the right hand of the Titan, then slowly backed away, watching and listening as he retreated.

Nectar had been brought to both Kronos and Eurybie during Proteus's absence, and they were both sipping from their goblets—the sea goddess with her usual zest, Kronos quietly, with half-lowered eyelids.

"Where is that boy with my food?" Eurybie asked, leaning forward in her chair to search out the god in question from amid the many who moved about the sparkling garden. Her movement brought her nearer Kronos's food. "Mutton!" she exclaimed, running her slender, carmine tongue over her lips in an exaggerated expression of delight. "I haven't had mutton

in a week. I'll skin that youth and roast him if he doesn't bring me some-and soon."

She leaned still nearer the food and Proteus, who had stopped backing away, watched helplessly as she seemed to be about to pluck a morsel for herself from the plate of her lord.

"Here comes your breakfast," Kronos said gruffly, indicating the approaching attendant with a sweeping gesture of his massive arm.

"Set it right here," Eurybie instructed the young god. "Did you get mutton for me? I must have mutton this morning. Oh, good-you do take care of me."

Proteus turned and quickly crossed the patio to an area from which he could continue to watch Kronos, though he would no longer be able to hear from that distance. Metis had settled at a table and he took up a position near enough that they could exchange whispers.

"Isn't he ever going to eat?" Metis demanded. "All he does is take a sip of nectar every now and then."

"How much must he eat?"

"Even a single bite, however small, should be sufficient. Once he is unconscious, we can force more of the herb into him, to be certain he won't recover unexpectedly. Do you think he suspects? Why doesn't he eat?"

Proteus answered with the slightest of shrugs.

"What if Oizys-?"

"Whatever happened to Oizys," Proteus whispered back, "I think we can be reasonably certain that Kronos doesn't know anything about our plan. Something's on his mind, but it isn't us. If he suspected there was something wrong with his food, he'd at least glance at it."

As they waited on the patio, time and again the King of the Gods reached toward his platter of food. Each time Proteus and Metis waited expectantly, but instead the Titan lifted his goblet. Finally Kronos picked up a leg of lamb. He was talking and he used it to gesture about the garden.

Metis gripped the arms of her chair, clutching them as hard as she could as she watched. Now Kronos lapsed into silence. The food neared his mouth, his teeth were bared and about to bite into the juicy flesh. Suddenly he stopped completely, his eyes fastened on something near the main entrance to the patio.

Metis followed his eyes. "Oh, no!" she exclaimed.

It was Thanatos. The god was descending the stairs, searching for his master. When he had advanced a short distance he spotted him and changed his course toward the bower.

"Sit down," Proteus whispered to his sister. She had half risen from her seat. "Wait here."

The shape changer began to move among the tables toward the Titan. Maintaining his impersonation of an attendant at the meal, he worked his way slowly toward Kronos and Eury-bie, soon reaching a position from which he could hear clearly anything said above a whisper.

Thanatos looked even paler than usual, and as he crossed the terrace a hush spread over the assemblage. On his shoulder he carried the wooden chest in which he had imprisoned the mortals.

Kronos rose to his feet. "You!" he exclaimed. "What happened to you? You were-" His words fell short as the emaciated god came to a halt in front of him.

Thanatos was dressed in the same chiton he had worn nearly two weeks before, when he had suddenly taken sick. A noxious odor emanated from him. Most of the gods and goddesses who sat nearby began to move away at his arrival.

"My lord," Thanatos said, ignoring the commotion he was causing, "I have found the mortals. What happened to me, I don't know, but at least I have found them. ..."

The King of the Gods waved back his servant with one hand while he clapped the other to his face. "This is inexcusable! The odor you carry with you-!"

Metis had taken advantage of the confusion caused by the arrival of Thanatos to edge forward until she, too, could hear as well as watch the proceedings. At the mention of the mortals she stifled a gasp.

"I found them in the room of Momos," Thanatos continued, ignoring everything but what interested him. He patted the side of the chest he carried. "They will not escape me again; you need have no fear of that. How they came to be there, I'm not certain. Philyra had them, but I've taken them back now."

"Philyra?" Kronos stopped backing away. "Did you say Philyra? What do you know of her?"

"Only what I've said, Lord Kronos. She was with them, in the apartment of Momos, my brother."

"Philyra? The Okeanid, the sister of Lady Klymene? It is she of whom you speak?" Now all else was forgotten—the mystery of Thanatos's sudden illness, the disappearance and reappearance of the tiny, godlike creatures, even the pervasive odor that clung to Thanatos. Kronos seemed oblivious to everything except information concerning Philyra.

"Y-y-yes, my lo-lo-lord," Thanatos managed to say. "It was the s-s-same. I am cert-"

"You have seen her?" Kronos demanded. "Where is she? Where is she now?"

Now it was Thanatos who was backing away. "Upstairs, m-m-my lord. W-w-where I left h-h-her."

"Then she's still here, still here on Olympos!" Kronos cried, turning back and forth between Thanatos and Eurybie, who was watching him in amazement. A few minutes before he had been morose, buried deep in his own thoughts; now he seemed the personification of energy.

Kronos turned suddenly back on Thanatos. "How long ago was this? How long since you left her?"

"N-n-not 1-1-long. Only j-j-just-"

"Take me to her," the Titan commanded. Breakfast was forgotten, too.

"Come. Lead me there. Quickly!"

Metis moved close to Proteus as Kronos and Thanatos started toward the portico of the palace.

"Stay here," Proteus whispered. "No, on second thought, go to your room and wait there, so I'll be able to find you easily."

"Where are you going?"

"I'll follow them and try to find out what happened. Phi-lyra may have already left the chambers of Momos. If that's the case, she may have gone to your room. She won't be safe there for very long. If you find her there, send her . . ."He hesitated, thinking.

"Don't worry," Metis said. "I'll find someplace safe for her. But what of the mortals? Thanatos has them in that box."

"I'm sorry. Philyra must be our first concern." Still disguised as he had been throughout breakfast, Proteus left his sister and entered the palace.

Metis was in the process of following him when she noticed the sea goddess Eurybie, who had returned to her meal. Kronos's platter sat nearby, still untouched. As Metis watched, Eurybie devoured the last scraps on her own plate, then cast an appraising glance at Kronos's.

Metis moved quickly toward the bower, pretending to be one of the morning's attendants. "Pardon, my lady," she told the goddess, "I'll take away what my lord has left."

"Not so quickly, child." Eurybie reached toward the platter, intent upon salvaging the leg of lamb for herself.

Metis moved in such a way that her hip brushed the platter. The food plunged to the grass.

"Oh, I'm so sorry, my lady!" Metis cried, stooping to gather up the tainted food and carry it away. "If you wish something more, I'll be happy to fetch it for you."

"No, no," Eurybie said with a sigh, "I suppose I've had enough for this morning."

Breathing a sigh of relief as Eurybie left the patio, the child hastened to make her own departure. She carefully disposed of Kronos's meal, then returned to her own room.

Philyra was not there.

For some minutes the child goddess waited impatiently. She kept thinking of Alalkomeneus and the other mortals, now in the hands of Thanatos. Finally her impatience got the better of her.

As she was leaving the apartment Prometheus called to her. "Where are you going?" he asked, grinning as he walked up.

"Oh, I'm glad to see you. I need your help." She explained quickly. "Come help me get the mortals back, will you?"

"Of course I will."

"So will I," another voice said.

Epimetheus was coming toward them.

"Good." Metis grinned. "Let's hurry!"

Twenty

The sudden appearance of Thanatos in the apartment of Momos had confused and puzzled Philyra. His abrupt departure, carrying away the mortals with him, had left her nervous and frightened. She had half expected him to drag her away to Lord Kronos. Instead she found herself still free, standing aimlessly amid the shambles of the room. All around her furniture lay overturned, the contents of chests and amphorae spilled upon the floor. An eerie stillness hung over the room where wild commotion had reigned only a few minutes before.

What should she do? Where should she go? Proteus and Metis, she knew, would be at breakfast, laying their trap for the King of the Gods. She dared not try to reach them and she dared not stay here. She remained free-but for how long? Certainly it could only be a matter of a few minutes before Kronos learned of her whereabouts. But where could she go? Failing to find her here, the Titan would seek her above, in the chambers of Iapetos and Klymene, her sister.

Slow minutes passed in indecision. If she fled this room, how would she reunite with Proteus and Metis? How would they know which of the innumerable chambers of the palace she had chosen for her new refuge? She stamped her foot suddenly, impotent anger momentarily supplanting her fear. If only she could talk with Proteus for a few moments and tell him where to find her....

Her eyes flickered again to the small opening in the wall. Ophion's tunnel presented a convenient route of escape, but she feared to use it. Now that its existence was known, it would be thoroughly searched.

Time and again she started to leave the room, only to stop before its open door. As she hesitated, minutes passed. She began to let herself believe that luck was indeed on her side, that Proteus and Metis would return before Kronos learned of her whereabouts.

Even as this thought came to her, however, she heard sounds from the direction of the main entrance to the apartment. She glanced frantically about the small room, then through the door at the narrow hall that led to the atrium. She must find some place to hide until she was certain who had entered the apartment. Without really thinking, she rushed into the hall, crossed it, and entered the first door she came to. She closed it quickly behind her and, panting for breath, pressed her ear against it to listen.

She had only a moment to wait before voices and the sounds of sandled feet told her that Thanatos was leading the Lord of the Titans down the hall toward the room she had just quitted. She recognized their voices clearly as they drew near her hiding place.

"This way, my lord," Thanatos said. "It was in one of these back rooms that the tunnel ended and I found the mortals."

Kronos had questioned Thanatos during their trip up the stairs from the terrace, but he had not yet fully satisfied himself concerning the details of the god's story.

"She was there, in the same room with them?"

"Yes, my lord."



"You're sure it was she-Philyra, the Okeanid?"

"Yes, my lord." Thanatos struggled along behind the Titan, still carrying on his shoulder the chest in which he had imprisoned the mortals.

"It was Philyra, the sister of Klymene, Iapetos's wife?"

"Yes, my lord. I'm certain it was she. Here's the room, I think."

As Philyra listened from across the hall, they entered the room. Their voices grew more muffled, so that she could only catch portions of their conversation. Kronos halted near the middle of the small chamber, his eyes flashing about the room, searching every corner of it. "That is the opening?" he asked after a few moments.

"Yes, my lord." Thanatos went to stand near it. "The other end of the passage is in my workroom. Probably it was by that route that the mortals were freed and the nymph spirited away-before she showed up at breakfast yester-I mean, that day." The god smiled in a way that Kronos found distasteful. "I find it hard to keep in mind that I have slept for so long. It seems like only-

"I had forgotten the passages of Ophion. All the entrances were closed up long ago."

"I had forgotten, too, my lord. I noticed the sealed entrance when first I moved into my rooms. I explored a part of it, but must have neglected to seal it back up."

Kronos cast a glowering glance at him but said nothing. As they spoke he moved about the room, examining various articles of apparel and furnishings.

"Certainly that child must be involved in this," Thanatos continued. "You see the containers of food and drink. They must have been brought here."

"You mean Metis," Kronos said. Both were speaking softly, and now no word of their conversation reached Philyra in her hiding place across the hall.

Thanatos nodded. "Yes, it is she who has appointed herself protectress of the mortals. And it must have been their brother, Proteus, who impersonated you and took the nymph from me."

Kronos nodded, his voice dropping even lower. "Say no more. All this is my affair. You have what you want, and need not concern yourself about the rest."

"I still need a nymph for my experiments."

"Make do for the present with what you have." While Kronos and Thanatos talked and examined the room, and while Philyra hid across the hall, Proteus hesitated in the corridor outside. He had followed the Lord of the Titans up the stairs. After a few moments' consideration, he abandoned the form he wore and took instead that of Koios, a Titan who had breakfasted early and, in all likelihood-if Proteus could believe a bit of conversation he had overheard-had already returned to his apartment to attend to the preparations of his family for their journey to the Kingdom of Nereus.

Entering the apartment of Momos, the son of Okeanos paused just inside the atrium. The situation quickly became evident. He could hear the voices of Kronos and Thanatos from the room where the mortals had been kept. That he did not hear his sister's voice made him suspect that she had eluded the Titan, at least thus far. He was upon the point of venturing nearer when he became aware of footsteps approaching the outer door. Just as it opened he retreated into an adjacent chamber and hid himself. From his hiding place he could look across the atrium and down the short hall.

It was Eurybie. She had grown curious and concerned, not so much for the welfare of Philyra as for her own self-interest. She considered it incumbent upon herself to keep abreast of all that happened around the King of the Gods and was apprehensive that his fascination with the young Okeanid might lead him to do something rash.

She followed the voices of the gods down the hall and stood in the doorway, looking in at them. Kronos turned toward her, frowning.

"I thought I might be of help," she said, smiling.

The Lord of the Titans sat on the edge of a couch, fingering a light-colored cloak. He recognized the pattern of doves and dolphins embroidered along its borders.

"She was here," he said, suddenly clutching the garment in his huge fist. "This is hers. I know it from its decorations."

"I told you that, my lord," Thanatos said.

"I knew she was still on Olympos. I felt it," Kronos said, either to himself or to Eurybie. "I should have had the palace searched, as I wished, rather than listening to you." His eyes rose to look at her coldly.

"What good would that do?" she asked. "How could you hope to find her amid all the rooms of the palace?"

Proteus had come out of his hiding place and was now at the head of the short hall. Eurybie still stood in the rear doorway. As he watched a door across from her opened silently. Even in the dim light of the passage he recognized the face of his sister. She glanced at Eurybie, who was looking away from her, and then toward him. He was still in the form of Koios, the brother of Kronos, and her expression clearly proclaimed that she thought herself discovered.

Before she could duck back out of sight, he waved to her and let his face momentarily return to its natural form. An expression of relief passed over her, and he signaled her to continue hiding. She closed the door soundlessly, trusting him to extricate her from her predicament.

Within the room, Kronos turned to Thanatos. "Go below, to the terrace, and find Iapetos for me. Koios and Crios, too."

"What are you going to do?" Eurybie asked.

"Search the palace." He looked again at Thanatos. "Do as I say."

Thanatos hastened to obey, still struggling to carry the chest from which he refused to be parted. Once again Proteus was forced to hide himself while someone passed through the atrium.

If the apartment were searched, Philyra would be found; there could be no doubt of that. If Proteus were to save her from capture, he would have to act quickly. He waited for two or three minutes to elapse, then walked quietly down the hall, still in the form of the Titan Koios.

"You wished to see me, brother?" he asked as he reached the doorway. Eurybie moved into the room, so that now he took her place at its entrance.

The explanation he had prepared for his early appearance, in advance of the others Thanatos was to bring, went unused. Kronos paced the room now, talking to Eurybie. She was trying to convince him that a search of the palace could only draw unwanted attention, particularly since Philyra was a daughter of Okeanos.

Proteus listened until enough had been said that he could reasonably take part in the conversation. "The goddess you seek," he asked, "do you really think she would still be hiding nearby? Wouldn't she have already run far away, perhaps even left Olympos?"

Philyra, listening at the door of the neighboring room, could tell from his voice that he had joined the others across the hall. She ventured to open the door again and peered out.

As she did Proteus saw her from the corner of his eye. He was standing against the frame of the door, so that his right shoulder and arm were not visible to Kronos and Eurybie. With his hand he signaled her to wait where she was.

"She probably left through this little passage," Eurybie was saying.

Kronos frowned in annoyance. "Then she could be anywhere, for the passage traverses the entire palace. It has entrances and exits on every level."

Kronos and Eurybie turned to examine Ophion's passage again. As they did Proteus signaled to his sister. Slipping off her sandals, she left her hiding place and crept past him toward the main entrance of the apartment.

She paused to look out into the corridor before venturing farther. Her heart sank as she glimpsed Thanatos returning with other gods, whose voices she could now hear from around a curve of the corridor, just out of sight. She had only a moment to make up her mind, then hastened to hide herself in a large room off the other side of the atrium. If these gods passed through the atrium and continued on to the rear room where Kronos was, she would be able to make her escape behind them.

Now Kronos, growing impatient, came out of the small room and stood in the hall. Almost immediately his eyes became fixed on the door to the room in which Philyra had been hiding.

"This door was not open before," he exclaimed. Crossing the hall, he stared at the door, which Philyra in her haste had left slightly ajar. He pushed it open. "Bring a lamp," he yelled back to Eurybie, and the sea goddess hastened to do as he bid. She handed him the lamp. Its light fell upon the sandals of the Okeanid. With a loud cry Kronos knelt to examine them.

Proteus had remained in the hall. While Kronos and Eurybie crowded into the doorway of the second room, Thanatos entered the atrium, followed by Iapetos. Just behind them came the real Koios, whom Thanatos had met upon the stairs while returning from the terraces outside the palace.

Instantly Proteus retreated into the room that Kronos had vacated moments before. He must act quickly; only through fearless audacity could he hope to avoid discovery. As he waited he let the form of Koios slip from him.

"I have returned, my lord," he heard Thanatos say. "Here are Iapetos and Koios. Crios I could not find." The three gods were standing close together just outside the chamber in which Kronos had found Philyra's sandals.

Assuming the form of the missing Titan Crios, Proteus stepped quietly from the room and came up behind the others, as though he had just arrived.

Thanatos turned to look at him and he whispered, "I've been trying to catch up with you all the way up the stairs. You were looking for me?"

Thanatos nodded and motioned with his head toward the Lord of the Titans. "Lord Kronos wants you."

Now Kronos came back into the hall, carrying the sandals. "She was here," he said again, fuming. "She was still in this apartment while we were across the hall. She can't be far away." His entire being radiated intense excitement. "Search all these rooms-search the entire floor," he cried, "Iapetos-quick-to the gallery. Watch to see that she doesn't escape by flying from Olympos. Follow her if she does. Koios-Crios-search everywhere!"

Proteus, believing that Philyra had safely left the apartment by now, aided in the search of the adjoining rooms, slowly working his way down the hall toward the atrium. Koios did the same.

Meanwhile Philyra remained in the chamber just off the other side of the atrium. Time and again she looked out furtively. Since her route must lead past the hall, which had been occupied all along by one god or another, she had been forced to stay where she was. Now the real Koios entered the atrium. Philyra mistook him for Proteus still in disguise, and immediately began trying to attract his attention. Proteus, now in the form of Crios, followed into the atrium a moment later, making her task seem still more difficult and dangerous. Whenever the god she thought was Crios looked away, she leaned into the open doorway and waved vigorously at the real Koios.

Only luck saved her from inadvertently revealing herself. Proteus-from whom she had been trying to conceal herself-glimpsed her wild gesturing. Instantly he understood what had happened and began to maneuver himself toward the chamber in which she was hiding.

Philyra, believing herself discovered, turned frantically to search for some place of concealment. As Crios entered the room, she let out a stifled cry. The god crossed the room in an instant, took her wrist and yanked her toward him.

"Quiet, sister," Proteus whispered in her ear.

Outside in the atrium the voice of Kronos boomed. "She's still here-in this room, on this floor, in the palace somewhere. I'm certain of it!"

TwentyOne

After leaving the apartment of Iapetos, Metis and her two companions quickly descended the nearest stairway to the third floor of the palace.

Here were located the chambers of Momos and other children of Nyx. Almost as they reached their destination, they had to hide to avoid being seen by Thanatos as he returned from the patio terrace below, where Kronos had sent him. He struggled under the weight of the chest on his shoulder, the Titans Iapetos and Koios following close behind him.

"He has the mortals in that box," Metis whispered as they watched him pass. "He's carrying them everywhere he goes."

"Does he know we're after him?" Epimetheus asked excitedly.

"No. Not definitely, anyway, though I'm sure he can guess what would happen if he gave me a chance to get them away from him."

"What happened?" Prometheus asked. "He doesn't look sick at all. Yesterday he couldn't even move."

Metis shrugged. "I don't know. He must have gotten better all of a sudden."

When Thanatos and the two Titans entered the apartment of Momos, the divine children followed down the corridor until they found a hiding place closer to their destination. Whispering back and forth, they watched and waited. From within the apartment they could hear muffled voices.

Before long Kronos and the others moved out into the corridor. The King of the Gods was speaking loudly and gesturing with his enormous arms.

"I should never have listened to you before," he told Eurybie. "My every instinct told me she was still here on Olympos. It was only because of your insistence that I failed to have a thorough search of the palace made. That won't happen a second time."

He turned to Iapetos. "I want you to get as many of the gods as you need. Have them arm themselves with spears. Position them on every stairway, at every level, and let none pass until we have finished. Have others search, beginning on this floor and working down to the level of the Great Hall. If she's still not been found by that time, let the search continue from this level upward."

"My lord," Eurybie objected, laying a hand on his arm. "This will accomplish nothing, other than to disturb all Olympos and make everyone curious-something we should not do right now. There are too many ways she can elude those who search for her. Think carefully, my lord. The chances are that you will not find her, and everyone will want to know why this Okeanid is so important."

He glared at her. "You stopped me before, when such measures might have found her. Yes, she can elude us-but she might not. The search may flush her into the open."

Now Iapetos spoke, almost for the first time since following Thanatos up from the patio. "Why do you seek the sister of my wife?" he asked softly. "I was told she had returned home to her family. It appears that was not the case."

Kronos's frown deepened. "I have reasons for my actions. I need explain them to no one."

Iapetos nodded his head in assent. "You need not tell me your motives, my lord," he continued in the same soft-spoken tone; "nevertheless, Lady Eurybie is right. All Olympos will be on fire with curiosity and rumors

if such a search is carried out. Perhaps a compromise is in order. If she was still in the chamber of Momos when you arrived, she may indeed be nearby. It might be worthwhile to search the rooms along this corridor. We can do that ourselves."

Kronos sighed deeply. "Search this corridor, then. Quickly - immediately!"

In their hiding place, Prometheus whispered to Metis. "What does it mean? I've never seen Lord Kronos so upset. He must be even more mad about Philyra than I realized."

"I'm more concerned about us," Epimetheus said. "If they search the corridor, they'll find us. What shall we do?"

"Stay still and be quiet," Metis told him. "We'll be all right."

Now the search extended up and down the corridor. A small audience of curious onlookers soon accumulated. Some were inhabitants of apartments that opened on this section of corridor; others had been attracted from the stairway.

"This is our chance," Prometheus whispered. "Let's join them. We can always slip back in here if someone tries to run us away."

One at a time the three left the dark alcove in which they had been hiding and merged with the onlookers. Someone touched Metis's shoulder, and she turned to find Thalia, the Muse, smiling at her. She and many of her sisters had just arrived.

"What's going on, Metis?"

Metis shrugged. "I think they're searching for someone."

Thalia would have questioned her further, but now everyone's attention was drawn to Kronos. The King of the Gods had just noticed Thanatos, who had taken up a position toward the other end of the corridor. Since the search had been extended from Momos's room he had stood against the wall, the wooden box safely at his feet.

"What are you doing?" Kronos demanded. "Why aren't you helping?"

"Y-y-yes, Lord Kronos," Thanatos answered unhappily. As the Titan watched, he lifted the chest to his shoulder, staggering under its weight. He began to struggle toward the apartment Kronos had indicated.

"What are you doing?" Kronos demanded again, his voice heavy with exasperation. "How do you expect to do anything while carrying that around? Put it down someplace!"

The pained expression on Thanatos's face left little doubt that he did not wish to comply with the command of his master. Nevertheless, he set his burden down next to the wall and walked away from it, casting many glances back over his shoulder to assure himself that it was safe.

Metis watched the chest intently, calculating its distance from her. It was only twenty-five or thirty paces away, yet it might as well be at the far edge of the world, for it was in plain sight of everyone in the corridor and she could not reach it without everyone seeing her.

"What's wrong, child?" Thalia asked. "You look unhappy."

"It's the men," Metis answered, pulling Thalia down toward her so that

she could whisper in her ear. "Thanatos has stolen them from me. He plans to harm them, and I must get them back. He has them in that chest."

The goddess searched the child's face. Though she had not known that more than one of the godlike creatures had been brought to Olympos, she saw that Metis told the truth. She knew enough of Thanatos to be certain that he should not be entrusted with them. Turning, Thalia began to whisper to her sisters.

As Metis looked back down the corridor, she saw Thanatos sticking his head out from the apartment he had entered only a few moments before. The god glanced at Kronos, then at his wooden box. Kronos was busy talking with Koios. Thanatos crept back out of the apartment and toward the chest, intent upon sneaking away from the task assigned him and back to his apartment with his fresh supply of experimental subjects.

As he raised the chest to his shoulder, Kronos turned and saw him. In an instant the Lord of the Titans traversed the corridor. He took the god by the neck and shook him. Only with great difficulty did Thanatos keep the chest balanced on his shoulder.

"Disobey me, will you? Put down that thing!"

When Thanatos had deposited his burden on the floor, Kronos dragged him down the corridor and into one of the rooms.

The moment the two disappeared from sight, Thalia and her sister Muses left the crowd and began to stroll casually toward the chest. Kronos was still inside the room when they reached it. The sisters came to a halt around the box, spreading out in such a way that their bodies and garments concealed it completely from the view of the onlookers. Talking and laughing, they seemed to be examining it. After only a few moments they walked back.

"It's only an empty chest," one of them announced as they rejoined the crowd. "This is boring. Shall we go home, sisters?"

Metis looked on in amazement. She tried to catch Thalia's eyes, but the other Muses completely surrounded her and Kalliope. The Muses continued past the crowd in the direction of the stairway. Before they had gone very far, however, one of them turned and came back to Metis.

It was Melpomene. "Your little friends are safe," she whispered. "Thalia and Kalliope have them bundled up in the skirts of their chitons. We'll keep them safe until you come for them."

Grinning broadly, Metis kissed the Muse's cheek.

The search of the other apartments had been going on for nearly fifteen minutes now. During much of this time Eurybie had been searching one of the largest suites on the floor. When she returned to the corridor she was astonished at how large the crowd of onlookers had become. She called Kronos to her and began to talk to him in a low voice.

"Send them away, if you like," he said. "You attend to it."

She approached the crowd and began to disperse it.

"Wait," Kronos called, coming toward the onlookers. He was looking at Metis, having only just noticed her. "Come here, child. I wish to talk with you."

Metis hesitated. Eurybie was still trying to send everyone else away, but Prometheus did not want to leave. Metis gave him a smile and motioned with her head to indicate that she would be fine and he should go.

"Come, child," Kronos repeated, keeping his voice level and unthreatening.

Metis stepped toward Trim. The two of them were alone in the middle of the corridor. "Yes, my lord?" she answered quietly.

His eyes scrutinized her. "What do you know about this, child? About your sister's presence in the apartment of Momos?"

Metis's face took on a look of complete innocence. "Phi-lyra? It is Philyra you're searching for? Why, Lord Kronos, I know nothing about it! She left to return home to our parents—at least that's what she said. Why would she still be here?"

Kronos stared at her, searching her face. He was about to continue speaking when a loud cry made him turn away.

It was Thanatos. "They're gone!" he shrieked. "Someone has stolen them again!"

He ran awkwardly toward his master, dragging the chest behind him. "Look," he cried, throwing back the lid and revealing the empty interior. Then he noticed Metis. "You! You have taken them. Where are they? Give them back!"

Metis did her best to look surprised. "What are you talking about? Taken what!"

"It was she," Thanatos continued, talking to Kronos again. "Who else cares anything about the creatures? She's taken them, just as she took them before."

Kronos glared at him. "You're right. No one else cares about them. I don't care about them, and I don't want to hear about them anymore. I'm fed up with you. Look at the child. If she has them, where are they?"

"But it must have been she—"

Kronos seemed to be withstraining himself. His enormous hands clenched and unclenched. When he spoke again, his voice was very low. "I no longer require your services today. You will return to your room and remain there until tomorrow, when we leave for the Kingdom of Nereus."

"The Kingdom of—? Am I to go there? I have work to—"

"I may have need of you, and there's no telling how much mischief you might find for yourself all alone here on Olympos. No, you'll come with us, little as I like the idea. Now go. I warn you—stay to your rooms. I do not wish to see you again before tomorrow."

Reluctantly Thanatos turned and departed, leaving the empty chest on the floor where it lay.

Kronos looked back at Metis. Eurybie had succeeded in dispersing the crowd, but most of the searchers had come into the corridor to discover the cause of the disturbance they had heard. Kronos glanced at them, then back at Metis. He seemed for a moment to be sunk deep in thought.



"Is there still no sign of the Okeanid?" he asked.

Iapetos and the others shook their heads.

"We have searched enough," the Lord of the Titans announced. "I am going to my chambers for the remainder of the day. I wish no one to disturb me, unless Philyra is found, Iapetos, you will come there tonight. I wish to speak privately with you, after I've had time to think. You may all go now."

Metis started to leave, but he stopped her.

"Wait, child. I wish a word more with you." He laid an affectionate hand on her shoulder. "You're a clever child- no, make no false protestations. I mean the statement well, as a compliment. If you've managed to recover the men from Thanatos-well, so be it. I hope you have. I bear the little creatures no malice, and he is incorrigible."

Metis tried to keep her face expressionless as she listened.

"He's a creature of overriding curiosity, and might do them unintentional harm. It's good that they're no longer in his hands."

His evident sincerity and the warmth and charm he could call up at a moment's notice forced her to remind herself that this was her enemy, the enemy of her father and sister, of her whole family.

"I'm afraid I've badly frightened your sister," he continued. "I meant no harm, but I can see now that I misjudged her. If she's still here on Olympus, she'll contact you. No- say nothing. I don't want to force you to lie, for I know full well that you'd lie to protect her. If you speak with her, offer her my friendship and apology. I should like to speak with her once more-a final time, if that's her wish. I want her to know I still wish to be her friend. She has nothing more to fear from me."

"If I see her," Metis answered carefully, "I'll certainly relay your message."

"Good. That's all I ask. Thank you." He smiled benevolently. "Now go, child. We all have much to do before tomorrow. ''

She left him, making her way toward the stairs while he remained behind, standing very still, his head bowed in thought. She had rounded the turn in the passage and was near the stairs when Crios stepped into her path from the doorway of a vacant apartment.

"Quiet, sister," Proteus told her, momentarily returning to his own form. "Listen carefully. You must return immediately to your room and close up the entrance to Ophion's tunnel there. Seal it so that no light can show through to the other side. Before long Kronos will think to have the tunnel searched to discover which apartments have open entrances. I'll visit you tonight."

"What of Philyra? Is she safe?"

He grinned, pulling open his clothing. Inside his cloak was Philyra, who had made herself as small as a mortal.

Metis started to laugh.

"Go now, quickly. Be in your room after nightfall, so that I can talk with you."

"I will. A moment longer, though. Lord Kronos charged me to deliver a message to Philyra, should I see her." She addressed her sister now. "He claims he wishes you no harm-offers his friendship and wants to speak with you at least one last time. There, I've fulfilled my promise. I hope you don't believe a word of it!"

She turned back to Proteus. "But what are you going to do, brother? Kronos plans to spend the rest of the day in his rooms. How will you-?"

"Don't fret," he told her quietly. "By tonight I shall have an appointment with him."

TwentyTwo

As evening waned into night the activity within the household of the Titan Iapetos became more pronounced. Klymene, the wife of Iapetos, supervised the preparations for the family's departure to the Kingdom of Nereus. On the following morning Kronos and Rhea would depart for the underwater realm, followed by an entourage of all the gods and goddesses of Olympos. The wedding of Crios and Eurybie would take place not that evening but the one following, when the slender crescent of the new moon came into view.

Metis had few preparations to make. Her baggage, consisting principally of clothing, was quickly packed, and once she had satisfied her older sister of this, Klymene was only too happy to let her remain quietly in her own room.

Metis was worried. After sealing up the entrance to Ophion's passage, she slipped away to visit Thalia. The mortals had been turned loose in the Muse's room and seemed as fully at home there as in Momos's apartment. Questions had to be answered, but the quick-witted child confined her story to Thanatos and his obsession with the godlike creatures. The mortals themselves had been so thoroughly trained in secrecy that they had refused to reveal anything about their adventures on Mount Olympos.

At the suggestion of the other Muses, who had gathered around to listen, it was agreed that the mortals would remain in Thalia's room until after the wedding. The goddesses assured Metis that they would be safe there for the night, and after everyone left the following morning no one would disturb them. Metis was as pleased with the plan as with any she could herself devise.

Only one thing troubled her. Alalkomeneus had not been among the men in Thanatos's chest. No one knew where he was or what had become of him. Metis returned to her room, her heart heavy with dread that some calamity had overtaken her favorite of the mortals.

There was nothing she could do. If he had been in Mo-mos's apartment, Kronos or the others would have found him. She dared not search for him in Ophion's tunnel because of Proteus's warning; besides, the only entrance available to her was now sealed shut. She remembered that she had last seen him the night before, in Momos's room when she had visited Proteus and Philyra there. She told herself how bright and ingenious he was, that wherever he was he would manage to fend for himself and somehow find his way back to her.

Such thoughts occupied her as she waited in her room. She looked up as Proteus stepped in from the gallery outside.

"Oh, I'm glad to see you're safe," she told him, "and Philyra, too-isn't

she?"

He nodded. "We've merely changed quarters. It's only temporary, though, for neither of us will sleep there tonight. I'm sending Philyra to join Nalassa. It's possible that Kronos will have someone stay behind to search for her after all the rest of us have left for the Kingdom of Nereus. The situation here, with Kronos, has played badly upon her. She's as delicate as a flower, and her constitution can't endure this continual tension. The moment she's away from all this she'll start to return to her normal cheery self."

He sat beside his sister on her bed. "What about you? You don't look particularly cheery, either."

She told him about Alalkomeneus. When she had finished, he patted her shoulder.

"Try not to worry," he said. "If everything works out tonight, we'll search for him before we leave tomorrow."

"You still plan-? But how? It's after supper already. What will you do?"

"You remember that Kronos told Iapetos to come to his quarters tonight, to talk privately?"

She nodded.

"Iapetos isn't going. I am-though Kronos will think it's Iapetos."

"Why isn't Iapetos going?"

"I just spoke with him, in the form of Kronos. As he understands it, Kronos visited him in his workshop and told him he'd changed his mind-that his appointment was no longer necessary and had been cancelled. Of course Kronos does not know this and will still be expecting him. Instead it will be I, in the form of Iapetos, who enters Kronos's chambers tonight."

"What will you do?"

"Sprinkle your remarkable herb in his drink, if I can."

"But if you can't?"

He shrugged. "Then I must do what I must do-whatever is possible."

"He's very strong, stronger than any of the other gods. You must not fight him. You can't defeat him that way."

She read the look of resignation on his face. Jumping up, she found her dagger on a table and brought it to him. "Here, take this. Perhaps you can take him by surprise and strike a blow to his heart. Even if you miss the heart, he'll be weakened and you'll have a greater chance of subduing him. Take it. I have another, a more ornate one that I was planning to wear for the wedding."

She pressed the weapon into his hand and he tucked it away inside his clothing. She brought him also a small pouch containing the powdered herb.

"Oh, be careful, brother! Is there nothing else we can do? To meet him face-to-face-even in disguise, hoping to deceive him-is far too dangerous."

He shook his head. "No, Metis. Not now. We've only this one, desperate chance-desperate and bitter, for in the end it may make no difference. Even if I succeed, I can't impersonate Kronos forever. In time, probably very soon, the trick will be discovered."

"An ill is always better postponed than hastened."

He smiled. Rising, he said, "I must go now and see Phi-lyra off. I'll give her your love."

At the doorway to the gallery he paused, turning back to her. "If I succeed, I'll find a way to inform you. Otherwise, you must do what you can at the wedding. Don't expect to hear from me before morning, though." He kissed her cheek and an instant later disappeared, flying along the dark galleries.

As he entered the room in which he had left Philyra, the Okeanid emitted a suppressed cry of surprise, then almost immediately sank back into her chair.

Proteus pulled a chair near her, sat down, and took her hand. He held it gently as he spoke with her. "Are you sure you can follow the directions I gave you? Shall I repeat them?"

She shook her head. "I will find Nalassa. If not tonight, because there is no moon, then early in the morning."

He nodded. "Be sure to find someplace safe to sleep if you must wait for morning. The sooner you're away from Olympus, the safer you'll be. You shouldn't have much difficulty finding the landmarks I gave you if you follow the coastline."

She nodded, emotionless.

Proteus watched her in the dim light of the single lamp that burned in the room. Her face, so given to smiles and easy laughter, was drawn and tense. Eyes that used to dance and glint now stared fixedly.

"I should never have let you stay here."

She squeezed his hand and forced a smile to her lips. "It was I who wanted to stay. Besides, no harm has befallen me. It's my own fault if I let myself get so easily flustered." Even a forced smile was enough to animate her face and highlight her vulnerable, delicate beauty.

"I really don't understand all this," she continued. "What does he see in me? Certainly there are many here on Olympus more beautiful than I. I'm not even beautiful, for that matter. Why does he persecute me when he could easily have so many others? Have I somehow encouraged him, without realizing it? Is it my fault?"

"There's no one else on Olympus like you. Undoubtedly Kronos has recognized that fact."

For a number of minutes they sat together in silence. Proteus was anxious to get her safely on her way, but she did not yet seem ready to depart. Finally she turned toward him, her fingers tightening on his.

"Oh, Proteus-I'm so frightened. I don't remember ever being afraid like this, the way I am right now."

"You'll be safe soon."

She shook her head. "No, I don't mean for myself, though that's true,

too. I mean for you-for Metis and Klymene and our father and mother-for all of us. Do you remember what you said?"

"I've said many things."

"You said that if we didn't somehow succeed in preventing a confrontation between Lord Kronos and our father, that this world we know would cease to exist. I had a dream. I slept a little while you were gone and dreamed that I saw our father's palace, deep beneath the ocean-and it was in ruins. The walls had tumbled and the roof had collapsed. Eels and crabs slithered and scudded among the fallen stones."

He let her put her head upon his shoulder and held her against him. "Such dreams aren't visions of the future, Philyra. They're only our own fears, cast up to warn us to caution."

He put his strong hands on her shoulders, as if to impart some of his own strength. "You must put these thoughts from your mind. They are our enemies, if you let them terrify you and make you weak."

She nodded her head. After a few moments she stood up, indicating that she was ready to leave.

"Probably I'll not see you until after the wedding," he said. "Be brave. Don't worry, for worry is profitless. If I don't come for you and Nalassa within three days, you will know--"

"You will come."

"One last thing. When you see Nalassa--"

"I'll tell her that you love her," she said. "Yes, I know, and I will. You need not look surprised. I've seen it in your face ever since you returned. I'll tell her for you-in fuller words than you could find to utter. I'll tell her what I see in your eyes."

The night was very dark, and she flew down from Olympos in her own form, that she might carry with her the clothes and ornaments she ^ ore. Proteus kept careful watch until she was out of sight; no one followed her.

He sat down again. Soon it would be time for him to act. Near him, on the chair where Philyra had sat, he set the dagger and small leather pouch Metis had given him. With these weapons he must face the King of the Gods.

In his mind he saw Nalassa waiting for him on the rocky mountainside. He yearned to return to her, to abandon his mission and follow Philyra out into the night. What did he care for the palace of his father, its high walls and broad walks shimmering with rubies and garnets and pearls? He loved to roam the solitary reaches of ocean and sea, to lie upon lonely beaches in the afternoon sun, to wade among the rocky shoals. It was to these that he wanted to return, with Nalassa at his side. He wanted to feel the brush of her satin skin against his as they frolicked among the dolphins, to lie beside her on the beaches and listen to the lilting softness of her voice, to watch each graceful movement of her slender body. These were the riches he coveted, not opulent palaces or golden crowns.

Okeanos and Tethys, his father and mother, seemed but distant memories. Stately and magnificent, regal in every movement and slightest gesture-how empty and shallow they seemed compared to the naiad whose

slightest smile could delight him. It was so long, long ago that he had left his family. In all those years he had never been lonely, never felt the need for companionship-until Nalassa.

Love called him back to her, but duty insisted that he remain here.

An oppressive sense of fatality descended on him. His adversary was the most powerful and most cunning of all the gods-only by those attributes had Kronos grasped and maintained his dominance over the other gods for thousands of years. Only through sudden, unexpected, and audacious action could Proteus hope to defeat him. He had grown eccentric and unpredictable-but his very unpredictability could make him more dangerous.

It was time to go. Proteus rose and tucked the dagger and pouch inside his clothing. He walked out onto the gallery, from which he would fly to the topmost level of the palace.

The night seemed as dark as Tartaros.

TwentyThree

Proteus, the shape changer, flew to the gallery that ran along the exterior face of the top floor of the palace of Olympos. He transformed himself into a perfect replica of the Titan Iapetos, then stepped through a large portal into the corridor. A short walk brought him to the private chambers of the King of the Gods.

The great double doors to the apartment stood open, waiting for him. He paused to adjust the pouch and dagger within his clothing, and his fingers recoiled slightly from the cold silver hilt of the weapon his little sister had pressed upon him.

Standing in the doorway, he looked into the enormous atrium of the apartment. The Lord of the Titans was not there. A number of open doors led into other rooms deeper within, where Kronos must be.

"Lord Kronos," he called from the doorway. "It is I, Iapetos, your brother. You asked me to come here tonight."

A voice from one of the adjoining rooms drew him in that direction. Before he reached it, Kronos came out to meet him. The Titan looked tired and disgruntled. "I'm pleased that you've come," he said. "I was afraid you might forget. Come, help me close the outer doors to insure greater privacy."

Together they swung shut the double doors leading to the corridor and barred them. Then Kronos led Proteus to one of the adjoining rooms. He closed that door behind them and carefully barred it as well. Proteus, still in the form of Iapetos, watched these precautions with interest and some apprehension.

They were now in a small room with a single entrance and no windows. Three large torches lit the chamber, which was sparsely furnished and decorated only with heavy wall hangings. When he had finished securing the door, Kronos brought chairs from the wall and placed them near together.

"Sit, brother," the Titan said. He seemed more relaxed now, almost convivial. "I have a few things to discuss with you, before tomorrow morning."

Proteus had already noticed a small table set with nectar and water,

apparently in anticipation of this meeting.

"May I drink? I'm thirsty."

Kronos waved his hand in a gesture that told Proteus to help himself. Crossing the room, the son of Okeanos mixed water and sparkling red nectar, then poured the liquid into two large golden cups. With his back to Kronos, he reached within his clothing and drew out Metis's pouch. He sprinkled a few particles of herb into one of the cups, then quickly hid away the pouch again.

Without a word he returned to Kronos and handed him one of the drinks. He sat down and waited for the Titan to speak- and drink.

"The Okeanid Philyra has still not been found?" the Titan began.

"Not in so far as I know."

Kronos nodded slowly, with resignation. "I suppose she won't be found now. Her mission has been completed."

"Completed?" Proteus asked in surprise.

"Yes. I suppose by now she has scurried back home to her parents."

"Yes, my lord," Proteus said guardedly. "That seems likely."

"It was simple. It was obvious-so obvious that for a long time I couldn't see it, because it was right before my eyes. I let myself be blinded to the truth. She is the daughter of Okeanos, sent here to tease and taunt me-to befuddle me with her soft feminine charms and distract me from my goal. Okeanos must know that I'm determined to be rid of him. Perhaps he even knows that I plan to use the wedding as my opportunity. Through his daughter he hoped to make me neglect my preparations."

Proteus allowed no trace of surprise or consternation to touch the face of Iapetos.

"He was wrong, of course. Even amid all her teasing and flirting, more than enough of my intellect remained free to crush those who oppose me. Does the lion succumb to the flea merely because his mind is set upon the succulent young doe he is stalking? No! It's but the work of a moment to twist back his head and grind the insect between his great teeth."

As he spoke he held his cup so that it rested upon one arm of his chair. He seemed to have forgotten it.

"Is this what you wished to talk to me about?" Proteus asked.

Kronos shook his head slowly. "No. I wish to speak with you about a different flea, one that will soon pester me."

"A flea? You must speak more clearly if you wish me to understand."

"A flea spawned by our brother Okeanos, who, I think, is already here on Olympos. The flea's name is Proteus."

"The son of Okeanos," Proteus said slowly, fighting not to betray his own emotions.

"Yes, the son of our enemy. Unless I am very mistaken, he has already returned. Thanatos saw him when he was first here. He saw him with the naiad Nalassa, whom he spirited away by impersonating first me and then

you, Iapetos. Thanatos was trying to tell me this when he took sick."

Kronos laughed softly, his large, heavy-lidded eyes rising to meet those of his guest. "Peculiar happenings seem to cluster about the shape changer. Now that he is probably here again, I must be cautious even in little things. I wouldn't want what happened to Thanatos to happen to me. I must even be careful about what I eat and drink." He raised his cup a little to gesture with it. "You know Thanatos was eating just before he took sick."

Proteus listened uncomfortably. He sensed that Kronos was toying with him-that the Titan knew full well who lay hidden beneath the appearance of Iapetos-but he was determined to keep up his act until no doubt remained. If Kronos had recognized him, nothing could be gained by abandoning his pretense. He sat quietly, slowly moving one hand toward the dagger concealed within his clothing.

"You think, then, that this son of Okeanos will seek to harm you-to poison you?" he asked when Kronos did not immediately continue. "What good would that accomplish? All the other gods would be outraged."

The Lord of the Titans still appeared tired. He barely moved in his chair. "Yes, I think he means to harm me. He has now been here on Olympos twice within a short period of time. Both times secretly. He went to the Kingdom of Nereus, my other enemy, as well. I can only conclude that he knows of my plan against his father and Nereus."

"Then if your plan is known, wouldn't it be wiser to abandon it, at least for the present? Precautions will have been taken."

Kronos shook his enormous head slowly. "The time for postponements is at an end."

"But Okeanos will be prepared."

"He cannot prepare enough to stop me. He might decline to put himself in danger, but his great pride will not allow that. Now the House of Okeanos can only trust in treachery and cunning. For that reason Proteus has returned. But it is useless; all his deceit cannot overcome me. All I need do is let myself for a few moments imagine myself in his place. What would I do if I had his abilities? I would utilize them!"

"And what does that mean?'"

"First I would impersonate as many of the gods of Olympos as necessary to uncover the plot against my father. I must presume that Proteus did this the first time he was here. Then he went to visit Nereus, to inform him of the plot and to try to work out a counter scheme. The fact that he has returned to Olympos says clearly that no such scheme could be devised-at least not a reliable one. Therefore, as Proteus, I would be forced to take direct action."

"What would you do?"

Kronos started to take a sip from his cup, but caught himself before the nectar touched his lips. With a smile he leaned to one side and set it upon the floor.

"If I had returned earlier, I would have sought to separate Kronos from his principal followers-from those who are to take part with him in the overthrow of Okeanos and Nereus. But too little time really remains for him to do that. Besides, Kronos has already taken precautions in that direction and any attempt by Proteus would almost certainly not succeed."



Therefore I, as Proteus, would be forced to strike against Kronos."

"But what could you do?" Proteus asked, determined to play the role of Iapetos until the last possible moment.

"I would utilize the only weapons I had-stealth, trickery, deceit. And the substance, if indeed there is such a substance, that incapacitated Thanatos so thoroughly. I should try to poison him. Then, while he remained unconscious for many days, I should myself take his place and, as the King of the Gods, simply inform my followers that I had changed my mind, that no action was to be taken against Okeanos or Nereus at the wedding."

"But what if no such substance as you describe really exists? You don't know for a fact that it does."

"No, but I'm reasonably certain. I think an attempt to poison me was made this morning."

"This morning!" Proteus cried, astonished that all his careful secrecy had been so easily pierced. "Why do you think that?"

The Titan stretched his huge arms and readjusted his enormous bulk in the chair. "Only luck and uneasiness saved me this morning. The sight of the child Metis in the corridor outside the apartment of Momos has caused me to reexamine all these things-for she is deeply involved in them all. I remembered then that I had glimpsed her at breakfast, and that thought reminded me of the anxious attention of the god who had served me. Though I had seen him often before, at meals and about the palace, he had never before attended my meals. Some gods and goddesses love to flutter about me and anticipate my every wish. Others are of a different nature, ill at ease in the presence of their king. This god had always before been that sort-until this morning.

"This morning he seemed to actively seek me out, even before I had settled in my chair. Don't you think that a curious change of character? In itself it is nothing, I admit, but it caused me to send for Eurybie and question her. She remained at breakfast after I left, and I wanted to know if that god had attracted her attention. He had not, for she never saw him again after I left the terrace. Instead Metis came to collect the dishes. She made quite a mess of it, too, spilling the food when Eurybie would have gladly picked over what I had neglected to touch."

The god yawned and smiled. "Metis! Always Metis, in and about these odd happenings. Were she not so young, were she not so absorbed in the welfare of the little godlike creatures, I would think her the guiding force behind the efforts of the children of Okeanos here on Olympos. But it isn't she. She's only a helper. Proteus, who probably was this morning's uncharacteristic god, is the one about whom I must concern myself. I must glance away for a moment from my other concerns and grind him between my teeth."

"And how will you do that?" Proteus asked. His hand now lay within easy reach of the dagger. It would take only an instant to draw it from his clothing and thrust it into the Titan's chest.

"A flea hidden in the grass is far more difficult to destroy than one that has been allowed to leap upon the lion's fur."

"You mean," Proteus said slowly, "that you want him to come to you."

"Indeed. It's far too bothersome to try to ferret him out. It was this I

had in mind this morning when I asked you to visit me tonight and announced that I would stay in my room until tomorrow morning. If I won't venture where Proteus can lay a trap for me, then he must come here. For all I know, he may have been in that corridor this morning, in the guise of one of the gods. That even seems likely, if indeed he was my breakfast attendant, for that god must have rushed off to follow me. Eurybie didn't see him again and he would have been concerned about Philyra. But even if he wasn't there to hear what I said, his young sister was. Metis, I think it safe to assume, has faithfully reported my words to him.

"I expect him to come to me," Kronos continued. "He might come by stealth, and I've been on guard against that, but it seemed more likely-for he is a shape changer and given to impersonating others-that he will assume the form of someone I trust. That, brother, is why we arranged our little signal-so that Proteus could not pass himself off to you as me, or to me as you."

The import of his words took a moment to sink in. Proteus had given himself away, either when he assumed the form of Kronos to tell Iapetos not to come tonight, or when he entered this apartment. He drew the dagger and lunged toward the Titan.

Kronos barely moved, seemed almost not to notice the gleaming blade as it shot toward his heart. One hand reached out, closed about Proteus's wrist and brought to an abrupt halt the motion of the dagger. Fingers of incredible strength began to squeeze.

Proteus was on his feet, fighting to pull free from the Titan's grip. The dagger clattered to the floor. Now Kronos rose, a mountain of divine might. His other hand reached toward him.

Proteus's arm became like flowing water and slipped free. He jumped back and turned toward the door.

As he turned he saw Iapetos stepping out from behind one of the wall hangings. The Titan crossed the room quickly and stood blocking the door. Apparently he had been hiding within the room since before Proteus arrived.

And then Kronos was upon him. Proteus twisted away, but the incredibly strong hands of the Titan closed a second time upon his arm. Kronos swung him across the room and into the wall with stunning force. The King of the Gods followed him across the room. Before he could recover from the force of the blow, Kronos reached out and slammed him against the wall again, not once, but many times. When he was too stunned to fight back, enormously powerful arms swung him around and closed upon him from behind, pinning his arms against his body.

The arms began to squeeze. Proteus shook his head two or three times and took a deep breath. Then he began to change shapes. He became a lion of divine proportion, spitting and snarling, but Kronos only squeezed harder, as if intent upon crushing him. He became monsters that lived only in the deepest depths of the ocean, but Kronos refused to relinquish his hold. The son of Okeanos tried to make himself small, so small that he would slip from Kronos's grip, but the Titan was too fast, adjusting instantly to every change.

At last Proteus returned to his own shape, his strength nearly exhausted. Iapetos had advanced to no more than a pace from them. Proteus looked up at him. "Iapetos," he cried, "help me now, before it's too late. You are the most righteous of gods. You can't sanction what

Kronos plans. You can't aid him against the father of your wife. Help me, Iapetos!"

Iapetos glared at him for a long moment, and then his hand swung suddenly up from behind him. In it he held a large club. Proteus tried to throw himself to one side to avoid the blow, but it was not possible. The club slammed into his head.

Kronos released him and he sank to the floor, unconscious. As he lay there his body began to change again.

TwentyFour

"Why did you not wait?" Kronos demanded angrily. "I wanted to force him to tell where Philyra is."

"He might have escaped," Iapetos answered flatly.

Now Kronos looked down at Proteus. Where before had been the unconscious body of a god, now lay a writhing monster, a creature without name. The Lord of the Titans drew back instinctively. As he watched the form continued to change in fluid, slithering motions.

"What's happening?" Kronos demanded. "What's happening to him?"

Iapetos had no answer. He too had drawn away, gripping his club more tightly.

Hideous sounds came from what must have been the mouth of the creature, hissing sounds and croaking sounds, gurglings and jibberings. A tingling sensation crawled up Kronos's spine. Despite his horror, he found himself unable to look away.

There were words, too, among the awful sounds. They came out a few at a time, often cut short or slurred so badly they were unintelligible.

"-ware thy child! -beware thy chi-!"

An electric chill shot through Kronos. The hair at the base of his neck bristled. Some kind of awful fascination compelled him to lean nearer. Many of the words could not be understood, or made no sense, but others were all too clear. They made him quake with terror.

"It is a prophecy," Iapetos whispered. "I've heard it's thus that he now foretells the future."

"-Eater of Gods shall feast no more-deceived by a stone, thy son lives free-!"

The hair of Kronos's head stood on end. His mouth gaped and his eyes bulged.

"-Eater of Go-son lives free-!"

Kronos screamed. He pushed past Iapetos and clawed at the bolt of the door. "Where is she-the traitor! Where is she?" At last the bolt slipped back and he pulled open the door, then rushed from the room. Like a madman he made his way out of his apartment and down the stairs to the level below.

"Rhea!" he bellowed. "Where are you? Rhea!"

She was in her room, quietly sitting near the window. He stood in the doorway, his eyes blazing at her.

"What have you done?" he demanded. "Where is the child? Where have you hidden him?"

Despite his wild manner her face showed only serenity.

He crossed the room and towered over her. "Answer. Answer me, creature! Liar-traitoress, where is the child? I know you've deceived me."

Still she remained silent. A slight smile touched her lips; nothing more.

He laid his hands upon her and wrenched her from the chair. "Speak, you lying wretch. Tell me! Where have you hidden him?"

Now her face seemed to beam with joy. "Yes, I deceived you," she said quietly. "Our child lives. He's free and shall remain so-and shall send you to darkest Tartaros!"

The hands of the Titan quivered upon her shoulders. Only by the greatest exertion of willpower did Kronos restrain himself from crushing her between them.

"Yes," she continued, her voice jubilant. "The new King of the Gods has been born, husband, and only awaits the hour appointed for his coming. Then you'll find him-when you would far rather flee!"

He struck her a terrific blow across the face. "Tell me," he screamed in a voice so loud that the room seemed to quake around them. "Tell me where you've hidden him, or by the vast Earth and high Heaven-by all the gods and deepest Tar-taros-I'll crush your throat to such pulp that you'll never speak again. You deceived me somehow-with a stone. I know that. But where have you hidden the child?"

She drew herself up to look directly into his face. "Yes, I deceived you. I don't deny it. I glory in it! I brought you a phantom-a stone with the image of a child cast upon it. That, my lord, is what you devoured."

He drew back, startled by this evidence that she knew how he had disposed of the thing he thought to be his offspring.

"You thought yourself hidden away, where no eye could see your disgusting, shameful act," she continued. "But I saw, husband. I saw you thrust it down your distended throat. I saw you moaning upon the floor, your body bloated. What a monster you are! There are no words for a creature as vile as you-a creature that devours its own children."

Her proud, fearless eyes met his without flinching. "Yes, I know what you did-and so I know what you've done to our other children. Beware, Kronos, for they, too, are gods. They are immortal and cannot die. You've devoured but not consumed them. Oh, what joy it gives me to think how you must feel when they stir within that enormous gullet of yours, reminding you that they still live-that they only wait. Shriveled up inside you, they wait for the day of their release when their brother-their king!-shall free them. How heavily those meals must sit upon your stomach-heavy and indigestible-waiting!"

"I've warned you."

She laughed, a shrill, mocking laugh that sent shivers through him. "I hear your warning, husband-and I toss it aside. Do as you will to me. Crush me, beat me, destroy me in any way you can. Send what remains to

Tartaros. I don't care! Do you understand? I don't care, because I know that you can't endure much longer. Our son grows each day, each moment, toward maturity. What does it matter how many years must pass? His time is coming, and you can't prevent it however hard you try."

Her eyes gleamed in the dim light of the room. "He's handsome, Kronos-broad of brow and clear of eye, perfectly formed. Oh, what must his mind be like! He will deal with you when his day arrives. Knowing that, I can endure any thing. Do to me as you like. No word shall ever pass my lips that will lead you to him!"

He struck her again, a savage blow that sent her spinning across the room. He came after her, raining blow upon blow on her proudly upturned face.

"Strike me," she cried. "Beat me all you like. Pluck my eyes from their sockets, tear my heart from my breast. I shall never tell you what you want to know!"

Finally he stopped, quivering with rage. His fist clenched and he struck her a final, terrific blow that sent her reeling. As she slipped to the floor, unconscious, he turned and left the apartment.

He returned to his own chambers. As he entered Iapetos came to him.

Iapetos had remained with Proteus until the sea god returned to his own shape. While he was still unconscious the Titan placed him inside a large bronze box. He closed the lid, fastened it shut with metal straps, then sealed the seam where box and lid met.

"I have finished, my lord," he told Kronos. "The bronze chest is sealed and Proteus cannot escape from it. What shall I do with the chest?"

"Leave it where it is," Kronos said as he walked across the atrium.

"But someone might find it," Iapetos objected.

Kronos kept walking toward an inner room.

"I'll hide it in the alcove behind the hanging," Iapetos said after a moment.

Kronos waved him away. He came to the room he sought and went immediately to a cupboard and began digging among the things inside. He pulled out an object wrapped in a cloth, then tossed the cloth aside to reveal the sword Iapetos had made for him. Iapetos followed him as he pulled down three spears from a rack and wrapped himself in a heavy fur cloak.

Now Kronos walked quickly back toward the atrium. As they reached it they heard a sound from the door. The Lord of the Titans hesitated, then opened the door. It was Eurybie. She looked at Kronos in surprise as she entered the room.

"What are you doing, my lord?"

"Must I explain my every action?" he demanded gruffly.

"I'm leaving the palace." Kronos moved now toward the broad doorway that opened onto the gallery. Eurybie and Iapetos followed behind him.

"Wait, my lord," Eurybie said, hastening to catch up with him. "What's wrong? You look furious."

He turned on her so quickly that she feared he would strike her down with one of the weapons he carried.

"For the last time," he said, "I tell you that I need explain my actions to no one."

"But the wedding! We must leave tomorrow morning for the Kingdom of Nereus. You're to lead all the gods of Olyrapes there. What's important enough to send you out suddenly tonight, when you must be ready to leave early tomorrow? There are still many things to be done before we all depart."

"Then you attend to them. I have something I must do tonight. I'll try to be back before morning. If I'm not, then the gods must leave without me."

"Kronos, I don't understand. You will be at the wedding, to see our plan through?'"

"Yes. Yes, I'll be there no matter what. Do whatever need be done in my absence. I'll be in the Kingdom of Nereus in time for the wedding."

He entered the gallery, commanding wings to grow as he walked.

"You must be there," Eurybie said from behind him. "Everything depends on you. You must not-"

He stood looking down over the vast world below. The night was very dark and he began to adjust his eyes to the darkness. Somewhere below a child was sleeping-his child- the child destined to steal his throne. He would find that child even if he had to search the whole earth.

Spreading his huge eagle wings, he cast himself out into the night, soaring down from Mount Olympos.

Eurybie and Iapetos stepped forward to stand beside the railing of the gallery. With their eyes they followed Kronos's flight.

"What's happened to so upset him?" Eurybie asked.

Iapetos shrugged, turning back toward the atrium. "I don't know," he said slowly. "Nothing has happened as far as I know."

Twenty Five

When Tanatos invaded the stronghold of the mortals in the form of a serpent, Alalkomeneus had been at his post in the portion of Ophion's tunnel that ran within the walls of the private apartment of Kronos, Lord of the Titans. The path of the vulture-loving god had not traversed this side shoot of the tunnels, and so Alalkomeneus had been left in peace, ignorant of all that had befallen his mortal comrades.

Eventually he began to wonder why his relief had not arrived, but since this had happened more than once before he placed little significance on it. He lit another torch to replace the one that had almost burned itself out. He drank a little nectar and nibbled from the supply of food that was kept here.

As time continued to pass he grew more and more restless. His sense of duty compelled him to remain where he was, lest Kronos return to his rooms and some important bit of information go unoverheard. When he grew drowsy he fought to keep himself awake, even though he was relatively

sure that any sound from within the chambers of the Titan would rouse him.

It was impossible to keep track of the time accurately in the quiet limestone passages. He ate lightly every now and then, even when his stomach gave him no hunger signals, and occupied his mind with daydreams in which he never had to be parted from Metis and her divine family and friends. When even this palled, he set himself to inventing new and elaborate verbal eloquences that he could bestow upon the Lady of the Gleaming Eyes.

Finally slight noises told him that someone had entered the chambers of Kronos. He began to listen carefully. Soon he recognized the voice of Thanatos. Kronos sent him away angrily, with a stem warning not to venture from his room again for any reason. Now Alalkomeneus really began to worry. How had Thanatos recovered so unexpectedly? Then Eurybie came to talk with Kronos. The King of the Gods questioned her about breakfast that morning. Alalkomeneus tried to memorize their words even though they made very little sense to him.

There was a long period of silence after the departure of the sea goddess. Alalkomeneus stretched out on the floor of the passage. Afternoon passed and it became evening. Still the mortal waited, determined to remain here as long as necessary. Metis had assigned him his task and he would not disappoint her.

Now another god came to speak with Kronos. After a few minutes Alalkomeneus recognized him as Iapetos. He knew that god to be a possible enemy of Metis, and so he listened very attentively. The conversation was so oblique, however, that he could not follow it. Iapetos left-or seemed to leave- but returned a short time later. Kronos led him to a different room and Alalkomeneus followed inside the runnel, taking up a new position from which he could still hear quite well.

Proteus! Kronos had just mentioned the name of Proteus. The mortal pressed his head against the stone wall with such force that his ear began to ache.

As he listened terror grew inside him. Usually he paid little attention to what his gods said among themselves in Momos's apartment-it always seemed beyond his powers of comprehension-but he remembered that they had planned to act against Kronos somehow at breakfast today. Now he knew they had failed-and Kronos suspected.

The words of the king were peculiar. They seemed to have hidden meaning that Alalkomeneus could not fathom. He listened, but understood only that his gods were in great danger.

They were fighting! He heard quick, scuffling sounds.

Now Iapetos spoke-no, it was Proteus. He recognized the voice distinctly. Thudding sounds! What did it mean? What was happening? Were both Iapetos and Proteus in the room?

Every instinct told Alalkomeneus that he should run to find Metis, but he forced himself to remain; he must hear every important word they might say. He must discover what had happened.

There was now a period when he heard only sharp metallic sounds. Then after a while the words came again, but apparently from another room of the apartment. He hastened along the tunnel until he found a place from which he could hear clearly.

It was the voice of Iapetos that he heard. "The bronze chest is sealed and Proteus cannot escape from it. . . . I'll hide it in the alcove behind the hanging."

The anxiety of Alalkomeneus became acute; still he forced himself to remain until the last words had been spoken within the chambers of the Lord of the Titans. Only after Kronos had flown off into the night and Iapetos and Eurybie had returned to their own apartments did he finally leave his post and hasten down the twisting passage to find Lady Metis.

To his amazement he found the opening that led into her room sealed shut. He listened for more than a full minute, then began to yell at the top of his voice. There was no answer. No sound came from within her room. He had no way of knowing that Metis had gone only a few minutes before to bid good night to her sister Klymene and Klymene's sons.

Stunned by this unexpected development, Alalkomeneus turned back into the tunnel. He made his way more slowly now, walking where before he had run. He was tired and very confused. While he had been on duty in the passages far above, his entire world had changed and he had no way of knowing what had happened.

When he finally arrived at the apartment of Momos, his worst fears were confirmed. He ventured cautiously into the room, stepping through the rubble that lay near the opening of the tunnel. No one was there--no gods or goddesses, no mortals. The room was in shambles. The door that led out toward the atrium, normally carefully kept closed, was now wide open. He crept through it and down the long, dark hall, still carrying with him the torch he had brought from his listening post inside the chambers of Kronos.

Nothing moved within the enormous apartment--small to a god, but overwhelmingly large to a mortal. Finally he reached the atrium. Only the dim light of stars came through the broad opening to the gallery.

He sat upon the floor, trying to puzzle out the meaning of it all. Again and again he came to the conclusion that Kronos must have struck a sudden and unexpected blow against Metis and her family. Proteus had just been taken captive. Philyra and his fellow mortals were no longer here. The secret entrance to Metis's room was sealed shut. The conclusion that they had all been taken prisoner seemed inescapable.

He remembered Nalassa, whom he thought of as a goddess though she was really only a naiad, and in his mind he pictured Metis tied hand and foot, as she had been. He remembered Oizys, whose head had been cut from his body, and pictured his goddess in the same condition, subjected to the same awful indignity and pain.

Sitting on the cold floor of the atrium, he clasped his hands to his face and began to cry. He had managed to set his torch upright in the crack between two of the flagstones. Now he lay upon the floor, sobbing.

Eventually he fell soundly asleep and did not awaken until late the following day.

It was now the day before the wedding of Crios and Eury-bie. While Alalkomeneus slept the gods and goddesses of the palace began to assemble within the throne room. All about the great hall baggage had been brought in preparation for the journey.

Kronos had still not returned and Eurybie, anxious and irritable, had taken charge of the operation. She rushed about the vast chamber,



assigning to each new arrival a position that would facilitate an orderly departure.

Metis had awakened early enough to have time to see to the welfare of the mortals in the apartment of the Muses. She rejoined her family only after she had assured herself that they had an adequate supply of food and nectar and that they would not be able to escape Thalia's room and get themselves in danger.

The child was still concerned about Alalkomeneus, but by the time the household of Iapetos assembled in the great hall with all their baggage, the danger that the mortals might face was overshadowed by her fears for Proteus. She had heard nothing from him since last night, before he went to confront Kronos. She waited apprehensively for the arrival of the King of the Gods; if Proteus had succeeded, he might make himself known to her somehow when he entered the hall in the form of Kronos.

As she waited, she fingered the elaborate dagger on her belt. Within her clothing, hung from about her neck, she carried a small pouch that contained separately wrapped bundles of plants that might prove useful to her in the Kingdom of Nereus.

More and more of the gods crowded the hall as minutes passed. Thanatos was there, looking bored and uncomfortable; he stood by himself, at the rear of the chamber where Eurybie had sent him. Rhea arrived with three young goddesses who were acting as her handmaidens. She was eloquently dressed. An elaborate headdress confined her long hair, and her face was carefully concealed within a veil of delicate golden mesh.

The time appointed for the departure from Olympos came and went. Soon a rumor spread in hushed whispers about the throne room. The King of the Gods was not in the palace. He had gone somewhere the night before and not yet returned.

Now Metis was worried in earnest. What could this mean? Certainly Proteus, had he been successful, would not have left the palace in such an unexpected manner.

A cold, empty sensation spread through her. Proteus had failed.

But why would the real Kronos leave the palace? Metis's first inclination was to slip away from Klymene and the others of her group and search for her brother, however dangerous that might be. A moment's reflection, however, dissuaded her. If Proteus had failed—if Kronos had defeated him—would he still be here on Olympos? Why had Kronos gone off at night, as everyone was saying he had?

Suddenly she understood. Proteus had failed, and Kronos was personally transporting his prisoner to Tartaros. There could be no other explanation. Tartaros lay far away, and could easily account for the prolonged absence of the Titan. She fought back the tears that crowded her eyes and turned so that her companions would not see her.

It took her only a few moments to regain control of herself. Proteus had told her what she must do. He expected her to go to the Kingdom of Nereus, just as planned. Now it was up to her to do whatever lay within her power to defeat Kronos.

A look of grim determination passed over her features. She touched again the dagger at her side, made certain the pouch was securely in place.

Soon Eurybie quieted the assemblage. They were about to depart. Lord

Kronos, she said, would soon join them in the Kingdom of Nereus.

Lady Rhea and her handmaidens led the entourage, followed by Crios and Eurybie. Next came the other Titans and their families, followed by the lesser gods of the palace, many of whom carried the baggage of the great gods. A long train of winged figures spread across the sky.

TwentySix

That same morning, while Alalkomeneus slept and the gods assembled to leave Mount Olympos for the Kingdom of Nereus, Philyra continued traveling toward the south.

Despite the careful directions given her before she fled from Olympos, she had been unable to find the place where Nalassa waited. Reluctantly she decided to postpone her search. She found a safe place to sleep in one of the rocky ravines and fell quickly asleep.

This morning, rested and refreshed by her night in the clean, fresh air, she had little difficulty spotting in the distance the high peak that was the final landmark Proteus had described to her. She began walking toward it, carefully avoiding open places where eyes upon Olympos might be able to see her.

Already Olympos seemed far away. All around her forests cloaked the low hills. Small wild creatures scurried away at her approach or paused in their activities to watch her pass. She walked briskly, the sights and sounds of the forest soothing her.

She was still greatly concerned about the welfare of Proteus and about the outcome of the wedding of Crios and Eurybie, but these things seemed somehow less immediate here. The serenity of nature made it difficult to believe that harm could befall anyone.

She was passing through a valley between two high hills when Nalassa saw her. The naiad was sitting in front of a large cave partway up the slope of a mountain and recognized her immediately. The two called and waved to each other. Philyra altered her path and Nalassa descended to meet her.

"Philyra, why have you come?" Nalassa asked as they met near the bottom of the mountain. "What has happened?" The nymph was out of breath and anxious to learn about Proteus.

Philyra explained why Proteus had sent her and reassured Nalassa time and again that no harm had befallen the ocean god.

"Oh, I'm so glad you've come," Nalassa told her. "I don't really mind being alone-I have so much to think about-but it'll be nice to have someone to talk to again. You must tell me all that's happened on Olympos, about everyone there, and, of course, about-"

"About Proteus in particular?" Philyra asked, smiling. "Yes, I shall. We'll talk to your heart's content."

They returned to Nalassa's cave, where the nymph offered her companion the fresh fruit and spring water she had collected. Together they sat on the wide ledge, eating and talking as they looked out across the vista below them.

Since Proteus had left her, Nalassa had divided her time between vague apprehensions and dreamy reverie. She slept and ate little, for the needs of her slender body were small and sleep only stole from her time

that could be better utilized in daydreaming of Proteus's return. Even though she knew the magnitude of the danger he faced, she had no doubt that he would return to her. It was impossible that any serious harm could befall a god such as Proteus. She spent as much of her time as she could sitting in front of the cave, watching for him.

She listened with interest as Philyra related in detail the events that had led to her flight from Olympus, drinking in each word when the story reached Proteus. Her face beamed with pride as the Okeanid narrated how he had rescued her from the apartment of Momos, with Kronos often only a few steps away. Nalassa questioned her about every slightest detail, and Philyra, laughing, did her best to answer adequately.

Philyra, for her part, found the company of the river nymph a pleasant diversion. She had not completely shed the heavy pall of anxiety that Olympus and its master had cast upon her. The easy, congenial talk of the naiad helped her forget her own concerns. Nalassa's simplicity and the deep love she revealed at every reference to Proteus touched Philyra's heart.

The day passed quickly for both of them. When their conversation came to a temporary end, they sat together silently, enjoying the gentle breezes. Below them stretched a ragged range of hills and smaller mountains; between these ran a narrow, grass-covered canyon. In the canyon grazed and gamboled a herd of horses.

"I love to watch them," Nalassa said at one point. "They are among the most lovely and graceful of mortal creatures. Look how the ponies prance, how the stallion raises his long neck and surveys all about him. They look very happy down there, far from the gods, don't they?"

Philyra nodded. "Yes, very happy." She shivered slightly and Nalassa looked at her questioningly.

"What's wrong?"

Philyra shook her head. "Nothing. I was just remembering for a moment. It's easy for me to be happy here, far from Olympus, where the hands of Kronos can't make my flesh cringe."

For some time they were silent, one yearning for the return of her lover, the other dreading the sight of hers. As dusk approached Nalassa suggested that they descend to gather food and water for the night. They climbed down slowly, assisting each other.

As they descended, a god paused to watch them from the crest of a distant mountain. He watched for a number of moments, then began traveling toward them, choosing a route that would conceal his approach.

All the long night before the Lord of the Titans had searched the hills and valleys, the jagged mountainsides and broad, grassy meadows. Sometimes he sprouted wings and flew high above the earth, but more often he traveled on foot, searching for any clue that would lead him to the hidden child he sought. In one hand he carried slender spears pointed with bronze; in the other flashed the long, curved sword forged for him by Iapetos. About his shoulders was draped his heavy fur hunting cloak.

He searched without pause or rest. The tall, stout trees tore at him with their branches, but he paid no heed. The jagged mountain slopes jabbed at him with their pointed rocks, but he ignored them. Nothing mattered but that he find the child- the child destined to tear him from

his throne.

The long night passed. Morning came and still he hunted, refusing to pause, refusing to relinquish a single moment that might bring him nearer to his goal. Dirt smeared his face and body; his hair was wild and tangled. As the bull, blinded by pain, gores madly this way and that in its effort to reach its invisible tormentor, so the King of the Gods sought first in one direction and then in another, brushing aside everything that impeded his path. When trees blocked his way, he tore them up by their roots and tossed them aside.

Then, from a distance, he saw the two nymphs or goddesses. His first inclination was to continue his search in a direction leading away from them. His mind was wholly occupied with something far more important. But he glanced toward them a second time and recognized Philyra. In an instant his other concern was forgotten-driven from his mind by the slender form of the elusive Okeanid.

He traveled quickly now, purposefully, masking his rapid approach behind the hills and trees that separated them. The lovely goddess who had thwarted his desire so often in the past would not escape him today.

Philyra and Nalassa had descended from their mountain aerie and were walking along the side of a high bluff when a slight noise made them turn and look back.

A startled cry leaped from Philyra's mouth. "Run," she cried, "oh, run!"

The Lord of the Titans was already very near them. He dropped his weapons and let the cloak slip from his shoulders. In an instant he overtook the Okeanid. Her clothing ripped as she struggled to escape him.

Nalassa, who could easily have escaped now, paused, then rushed back to help Philyra. The Okeanid was struggling to free herself from the grip of the Titan. Nalassa threw herself upon him, pounding at his chest and face with her little fists.

With a curse he shoved her aside, and she went sprawling in the dust; but only for a moment. She jumped to her feet and flung herself back upon him, this time from the rear. He was holding Philyra by both arms so that she struggled uselessly. Nalassa clapped her hands over his eyes and began clawing at them. He tried to shake her off, but without success.

"Run," she cried to Philyra. "It's you he wants, not me. Run!"

Now Kronos was using one of his hands to try to dislodge the water nymph. Philyra pried at the fingers that still held her, all the while kicking at him. At last she pulled free. She hesitated, unwilling to leave Nalassa.

"Run," Nalassa screamed at her, "quickly-before it's too late."

She hesitated an instant longer, then turned and ran along the side of the bluff. Just ahead, beyond a turn, lay the canyon she had seen from the mountainside.

Now Kronos had only Nalassa to deal with, and alone she posed little problem. He pulled her from his back and tossed her aside, then started after the Okeanid. But no sooner had she landed on the ground than she righted herself and sprang back after him.

With an angry snarl he struck at her. His enormous hand hit her face with the force of a bludgeon. The blow lifted her completely off her feet and threw her against the nearby wall of rocks. There was a sharp cracking sound as her head struck. She slipped lifelessly to the ground, thick pink ichor gushing from a gaping wound in her skull.

Kronos only glanced at her, then rushed after the Okeanid.

As soon as she rounded the turn and stood within the grassy canyon, Philyra spotted the herd of horses almost at her feet. Her sudden appearance startled them and they were now stampeding away from her. She looked left and right, seeking someplace to hide. There was none. Almost instantly an idea occurred to her. She stood still and began to concentrate. Her body started to shrink and change form. The transformation took only a moment, and then she raced across the grass in the form of a horse, following the herd toward the other end of the canyon.

A moment later Kronos entered the canyon. He saw Philyra's clothing lying upon the ground. This told him that she had changed forms to escape him. His eyes went to the sky, but there was no flying thing in sight. Now he watched the retreating horses. He stood for a few moments, then went back the way he had come. Once out of sight he, too, changed forms.

He had immediately understood what she had done. By taking the form of a horse she hoped to conceal herself among the real horses. She could not deceive him so easily.

A black stallion came into the canyon and trotted in the direction of the other animals. It joined the herd near the far end of the canyon. It went slowly from one horse to another, approaching each closely, sniffing and nuzzling them. Finally it moved toward a lovely young mare.

Terrified, the white mare bolted from the herd.

TwentySeven

When Alalkomeneus awakened, it was already late in the day. Sunlight streamed into the atrium through its broad window. For a long time he sat in the warm, sparkling light.

Gradually he became aware of the unusual quiet of the palace. He could not have described just what noises were absent, but he realized that the silence seemed complete, without the distant, indistinguishable sounds that he had previously accepted without thought. Now he listened in earnest.

Returning to Ophion's tunnel, he sought out a fresh torch among the rubble near the entrance. The one from the night before had burned itself out. When he found what he was looking for, he had to climb to the top of a table to light it from the huge lamp there, which was itself dangerously near extinction.

Once he had accomplished this, he entered the tunnel. He planned to listen carefully as he walked and thereby learn if anything could be heard in other portions of the palace. No one had told him that the gods would leave the palace to travel to the Kingdom of Nereus, and the silence puzzled him intensely.

He had progressed only a short distance when he thought he heard something. He halted, listened carefully, then went on a few more paces before stopping to listen again. After traveling a little farther, he

retraced his steps and hurried down an adjacent corridor. The sounds guided him and he soon found a place from which he could hear them plainly. Now he recognized the sounds as voices--the voices of his fellow men.

"Can you hear me?" he cried as loudly as he could. "Can anyone hear me?"

A moment passed, then from the other side of the wall someone called back. "Is that you, Alalkomeneus? Where are you?"

"In here. Inside the wall. It sounds like you are very near."

"Yes, it does," the mortal answered. "Are you in the passage of Ophion?"

"I am. Where are you? What room are you in?"

"We are in the room of the Muse goddess Thalia. All of us are here, except you."

"How did you get there?" Alalkomeneus asked. "What has happened? Where is Lady Metis? What happened to the room we were in? Why is the palace so quiet?"

The mortals answered him, explaining as best they could. A great relief came over Alalkomeneus. His goddess was safe. He sat on the floor talking with them, putting together in his mind all that they told him. Gradually he understood that his fears had not been completely unfounded. Metis was safe only for the time being; she had gone to face the great danger he had heard her discuss with Proteus and Philyra.

A shiver of dread ran through him. Proteus was upstairs, in the chambers of Kronos, somehow made a prisoner. As long as he remained there, Lady Metis would have to face that danger alone.

"Where is the entrance from this passage into your room?" Alalkomeneus demanded.

"There is none. We've searched all this room."

Alalkomeneus considered for a moment, then said, "Wait where you are. I will look for an entrance from within this passage. Hope that I find one, for not all of the gods have left the palace. Lord Proteus remains far above, a prisoner of the king, and Lady Metis and all her family are in great danger unless we can release him."

He searched up and down the tunnel, finally finding at the end of a short side passage the place where the opening had once been. It was now tightly sealed shut. By returning to where he had talked with the other men, then walking along the passage and calling loudly to them, he eventually succeeded in estimating its location. It seemed to be in a neighboring room of the same apartment.

At Alalkomeneus's direction the other mortals went to work trying to open the door that confined them within the bedchamber of Thalia. A chair had to be moved into position near the door; from this platform they struggled to retract the stout wooden bolt that Thalia had been able to throw so easily from the outside with her clever key.

When they at last succeeded and the door opened for them, they found that still another door barred their way to the room they must reach. This one was merely closed and they at once began prying and pulling at

it until an opening appeared large enough for them to pass through.

Now only an ancient limestone plug separated Alalkome-neus from his fellows. After a short rest the men set to work on it, bringing an old knife from another room of the apartment. They scraped around the edge of the plug, four of them at a time hefting the enormous tool.

It had taken nearly two -hours to reach this chamber, and during that time night had fallen. For nearly four hours more they struggled to unseal the opening, chipping away small fragments of limestone and prying at the crevices formed in this way. Even working in teams, the labor was exhausting. The night grew later and their morale lower. Work stopped frequently, for longer intervals.

Finally the mortals could work no more. They had been up since morning and were thoroughly exhausted. Alalko-meneus, from the other side of the wall, did his best to keep them going, but they were merely mortals. At last he had no choice but to let them sleep.

He too lay down. He tried to sleep, so that he would be refreshed when work resumed. He kept remembering all that he had heard far above them and picturing in his mind the innumerable horrors that would be inflicted upon Lady Metis if he did not succeed in freeing her brother.

While Alalkomeneus twisted and turned restlessly, far away beneath the Aegean Sea the child goddess Metis swam hurriedly from her room within the quarters assigned to the household of the Titan Iapetos. The coral corridors were lit by tiny creatures that had attached themselves at irregular intervals to the walls or ceiling. Nevertheless she had commanded a number of phosphorescent fish to accompany her and light her way.

She had just learned that her father and mother, King Okeanos and Queen Tethys, had arrived a short time before with their entourage, and she was anxious to greet them. She was anxious, too, to tell her father all she knew of the danger that faced him and to confer with him concerning what coun-termeasures they must take.

The quarters of the King of the Ocean were already in the midst of conversion from the simple beauty they already possessed to the royal opulence of the king's own palace. As she entered one of the anterooms a number of attendants paused in their work to greet her. Brothers and sisters gathered to kiss and hug her and to exchange affectionate words. She did her best to disentangle herself from them as tactfully and quickly as she could, then continued searching for her father.

She found him at last in a large room, surrounded by busily working gods. Some were mounting upon the walls massive hangings woven of golden wire and beaded with diamonds and sapphires. Others were arranging a huge mother-of-pearl throne against the far wall. Okeanos stood near the middle of the room, directing their activities.

"Metis!" he cried, noticing her suddenly after she had waited for almost a minute at the doorway. "Come, child, and kiss me."

She swam quickly toward him and threw her slender arms about his bulging neck. He was very large--almost as big as Kronos, his brother Titan. Gold ornaments glistened from his arms and ankles. Two small horns peaked from his long sable hair, which was held in place by a headband woven of rubies and pearls.

"We've all missed you, child. Have you and your sisters been having a

good time? -No, no, it must be more to the right, and a bit more in this direction, toward the entrance."

He left her to help the gods reposition the throne, then turned gracefully in the water and began to issue abrupt orders to other attendants, sending them off to fetch more furnishings.

When he seemed to have finished, at least for the moment, Metis approached him again. "Father," she said softly, "I must speak to you."

"Of course, Metis." He smiled down at her. "Nothing pleases me so much as the company of my children. What's on your young mind?" He ran his fingers through her hair lovingly.

She drew closer, so that her whispers would be heard only by him. "I must speak to you about Kronos--and tomorrow!"

He blinked in surprise. "What can a child such as you have on your mind about those topics? You should be playing, or working. -Yes, that's right," he told the gods mounting the hangings. "But if they're too long, you'll have to tuck them at the top, not at the bottom." He turned back to her and began to muss her hair again.

"Father, I don't know if you realize how serious this has--"

"Serious! Come\* come; such things are for me to think about, not you. I won't have it. Do you understand? I won't have my beautiful daughters filling their pretty heads with such concerns. Serious concerns are my province, not yours. Now hurry along and find something fun to do, child."

"But, Father," Metis cried in consternation, "you must listen to me. So many strange things have hap--"

He chuckled softly and ran a finger under her chin. "Kronos will do nothing. He is no fool. I have a hundred of my sons here. He would be mad to attempt anything. Now listen to me, Metis. Go greet your mother, then find something to occupy yourself. These are not your problems."

"But, Father, I haven't even told you about Proteus--"

The King of the Ocean had already turned away and heard no more. She hesitated, her face burning, then swam from the chamber. She went to find her mother--to greet her, nothing more, for the worst thing she could do would be to tell Queen Tethys all she knew. Her mother would go straight to Rhea and in an hysterical scene demand an explanation. Then she would go to each of the Titans. If Tethys were told, fighting could break out tonight. If anything were to be accomplished, Metis concluded sadly, she would have to do it herself.

While Metis swam to find her mother, in another part of the palace Eurybie, the sister of Nereus and betrothed of Crios, called her Titan conspirators together in her room.

"Though Kronos has not yet arrived," she told them, "I'm sure he'll be here before the wedding begins tomorrow evening. He promised he would. Still, it would be wise for us to plan what we will do in the event that he is detained and does not arrive in time."

"But where has he gone?" Koios asked. "What could be important enough to draw him away now?"

"I've told you everything I know," she said. "I'm sure he has good



reason for doing whatever he's doing."

"Maybe he won't come at all," Crios said quietly. "This has all been a mistake from the start."

Eurybie turned an icy stare on the god who would tomorrow become her husband. "That's what we're here to talk about. As far as I'm concerned, it makes no difference whether or not he comes in time. Our plan must continue."

"How can that be?" Koios demanded. "Without Kronos it won't work!"

"Now listen," Eurybie said slowly, her eyes moving from one to the other of them. "I don't intend to let anyone-not any of you, or Kronos, or Okeanos, or Nereus-destroy my work. We must all go forward with our parts, just as planned."

"You can't expect us-" Crios said.

"Oh, yes I can-and so can Kronos. That's exactly what he'll expect. He hasn't changed his mind about anything, and anyone who doesn't do his part is going to have to answer to him."

"And just how are we supposed to accomplish anything without him?" Koios demanded. "Okeanos is second only to Kronos in strength, and Nereus is a skilled shape changer. Besides, there will be many gods there to defend them."

She looked at him in scorn. "No god yet lives who can't be subdued by a heavy blow to the head or a dagger thrust to the heart or brain."

"Have you grown as rash as Kronos? The gods would turn on us and rend us to pieces if we did such a thing. It's Kronos who has the grievance against them-not us!"

Eurybie made a motion with her hand, as if to brush aside the objection. "Grievances can be invented for any occasion or circumstance. Leave that to me. If Kronos hasn't arrived by the end of the wedding ceremony, I shall blame that on Okeanos and Nereus. I shall say that they had him waylaid and that we must ?'. to defend our king."

Koios rolled his eyes. "You are mad! You would dare such a thing? Yes, yes you would!"

She laughed, her full golden hair swirling around her in the water. "Disabuse yourselves of any doubt in that regard. I'll dare and risk anything rather than see this plan fail." She laughed again. "Oh, woe to all you gods had I been born a god instead of a goddess. No prattle of duty and necessity and justice would muddle my thoughts. No tittering young females would distract me from my goals."

Koios looked at Crios. "And you've agreed to marry her! By Heaven and Earth, brother, you're certainly to be pitied."

Crios slouched lower on his bench, staring glumly at the floor.

Koios turned back to Eurybie. "You speak very boldly, but you are not a god. You are not Kronos. You are merely Eurybie, and nothing more. I promised to help my brother Kronos, not you. If he doesn't return in time-"

Now Iapetos spoke, standing up from his bench. "I will deal with Okeanos myself. No one need help me with him."

Koios stared at him in disbelief.

Eurybie smiled broadly. "Good, my lord. Kronos knew he could count on you, and so did I." She fought to conceal the amazement she felt. She had never dreamed that Kronos's trickery would be so successful-and useful.

"Thank you, Lord Iapetos," she continued. "Together, even without Koios, we can accomplish all that must be accomplished. Once I address the multitude of gods and lay before them the offenses of Okeanos and Nereus, they will join with us overwhelmingly." She looked again at Koios. "Think well, Titan, for wherever Kronos has gone, he will in time return. In all likelihood you have said the traitorous things you have said without cause, for probably he will be here tomorrow. Were we to repeat your words, he would be gravely displeased. But if you fail to help us in the event of his absence, then truly will he be angry with you."

Cowed by the unexpected support she had received from Iapetos, Koios fumbled for words. Finally he said, "Speak on, Eurybie. I shall do as you command."

Eurybie smiled. Her manner became relaxed and pleasant. "Good. Now we must discuss the little details, so that everything will be in readiness when I give the signal to act."

Iapetos listened in silence. Inwardly he, too, smiled-a cold smile filled with hatred.

TwentyEight

Alalkomeneus slept little that night. It was not until shortly before dawn that he succeeded in rousing his fellow mortals and getting them to return to work. Once again they carried the tool they had found to the limestone plug that sealed the entrance to Ophion's tunnel. Again they began the thankless task of chipping and prying away at its edges.

Alalkomeneus did his best to cheer them on and keep them at work. Finally, after more than two hours of labor, a spot of light appeared within the tunnel. Leaping to it, Alalkomeneus began to issue directions, telling them how to fit the point of the knife into the new opening so that they could pry out the plug. Before the men had worked in shifts, four or five at a time; now all of them contributed their strength and weight to the effort.

The plug began to give, at first slowly, and then with a sudden lurching motion. It tumbled from its place and fell to the floor. In an instant Alalkomeneus joined his fellows.

He allowed only a minute or two for celebration. "What of Thanatos?" he asked. "Has he, too, gone away?"

"Lady Metis said he was supposed to go, but that we should be careful, too, for he might not," one answered.

Alalkomeneus nodded solemnly. "We shall be careful even in our boldness. To reach the chambers of the king by the path the gods use-by what they call stairs-would take too long for us. Therefore-"

He gave directions. From the sewing basket of one of the Muses they took thread, which would serve them as rope. Alalkomeneus correctly foresaw that the rope ladder they had left at the end of the tunnel in

Thanatos's secret room would no longer be in place. When all was in readiness, he led them into the tunnel. Almost an hour was consumed in their passage to the top level of the palace. Once there, Alalkomeneus had to bring to bear all his influence upon the others to convince, and in a few cases compel them to descend the rope to the floor of the foul-smelling chamber.

The door that separated the laboratory from the rest of Thanatos's apartment was closed and no lamp burned within the room. A few held the torches they had brought while others struggled to position a stool near the lock, so that they could work its mechanism. Once they had breeched the door, they made their way easily through the series of vast rooms toward the outer corridor. Here another door blocked their way. It was closed but not locked, and by now they had gained much experience in negotiating such obstacles. A knife was brought and the door pried open enough for them to pass through.

Now Alalkomeneus encountered another difficulty. He had in his mind only the foggiest of pictures regarding the location of Kronos's chambers. Far more time had been used in arriving here, in the corridors, than he had realized; it was already nearly noon. The men were tired and discouraged; he had to spend much of his time making them continue. They dragged along with them a knifelike object from Thanatos's apartment, and with it they pried open the outer doors of the apartments that Alalkomeneus thought might be the one they sought.

Four tries led them only to storage rooms. On the fifth they found themselves looking into the magnificent atrium of the Lord of the Titans. Quickly Alalkomeneus directed his followers to spread out and search the other rooms of the apartment. All along he had been beset by the feeling that he must act as quickly as possible to free Proteus. That feeling was growing more extreme, though he did not really understand the danger that faced Metis or that nightfall on this day would bring that danger to full force.

A mortal came running back toward the atrium. "I have found the little room behind the cloth wall," he cried.

Alalkomeneus ran to meet him, followed by the others. They pulled the hanging aside to find the gleaming bronze sarcophagus in which Proteus had been imprisoned.

"Lord Proteus! Are you within this box?" Alalkomeneus cried.

A voice replied from within, distant and muffled. "Yes, it is I, Alalkomeneus. It's good to hear your voice, little friend. But is it a box I'm in? All is blackness here, and I have no way of knowing where I am."

"Yes, my lord, it is a metal box. Feel content in your heart, for I and the other men will free you."

The mortals began to swarm over the box. It rose to over three times their height and more than once the climbers slipped back to the floor and had to begin again.

"It is bound with straps of metal, my lord," Alalkomeneus told the god. "We will free the straps, and then you will be free."

His incredible success in all that he had attempted so far gave him confidence. The mortals brought the knifelike tool they had used on the door, and others went off to procure other implements. They began to

poke and pry at the straps.

The straps resisted their every effort. The men slipped from their positions and slid to the floor, but immediately got up and began again. Still the straps held tight. The mortals could do no more than scratch them.

At last Alalkomeneus said, his voice laden with sorrow, "We have failed, my lord. The straps hold fast. We cannot cut or snap them loose. What shall we do, Lord Proteus?"

"You have tried," the god answered. "Even the immortal gods can do no more than try, Alalkomeneus."

Alalkomeneus sat beside the gleaming bronze wall of the sarcophagus, miserably considering his failure. As he sat, far below him in the palace a gray figure stirred upon a bench. Slowly Momos sat up, stretching his ungainly arms and yawning. He sat still for a few moments, then rose shakily to his feet. He rubbed his eyes, standing with his head cocked to one side.

"It's very quiet," he muttered to himself. "Far too quiet. How can anyone expect me to sleep when everything is so unnaturally still. Makes it seem like something isn't right."

He began walking.

"Usually it's too noisy," he continued to himself, "but no noise at all isn't right either. Far, far too quiet now. I told Kronos it was too noisy before, but now he's gone too far. I shall have to complain again. Lord Kronos must command each of the gods to make a little noise. A little soft, quiet noise."

Muttering under his breath, he climbed the winding stairway toward the chambers of the King of the Gods, intent upon registering his objection.

"A god! A god is coming," one of the mortals cried. He ran from the corridor outside the apartment of Kronos, where he had wandered when his muscles were no longer needed, toward Alalkomeneus, who still sat beside the enormous bronze chest in which Proteus was confined. "A god comes! He comes this way!"

"A god?" Alalkomeneus demanded. "What god? None is supposed to remain in all the palace."

"I don't know. He was just entering the corridor from the stairway."

Alalkomeneus hastened to the atrium. As he reached it, Momos came to a halt in the doorway. He rubbed his eyes and looked again at the little godlike creatures who confronted him.

Alalkomeneus stepped forward from among his fellows. "O God-Whose-Name-We-Do-Not-Know," he cried, "we implore your help!"

Momos blinked his eyes, staring at them in puzzlement.

"In the next room," Alalkomeneus continued rapidly, "lies a god who needs you. We beg you to come and help him."

"A god?" Momos asked. "What god? Why does he need my help?"

Alalkomeneus thought quickly. He feared to say too much. "We know not his name, my lord. Please come and see for yourself. A terrible trick was played upon him."

Shaking his head, mumbling just above his breath, Momos followed them. They led him to where the bronze chest lay.

"Can't see it back here," Momos said. "This hanging keeps getting in the way." As he complained he grabbed hold of the box and laboriously dragged it out into the room.

"The metal straps hold it shut," Alalkomeneus explained.

"But who is within? How did he come to be where clothing should be kept?"

"I do not know his name, my lord. He tried to tell us, but we could not hear him clearly. He was tricked into crawling inside, then some other god cruelly trapped him there, so that he could not attend the wedding. It was a cruel trick, and not funny at all, do you not think?"

Momos nodded his head gravely, examining the metal straps as the mortal spoke. "Yes, a very cruel one. Kronos should forbid such tricks. Only funny ones should be allowed. I must remember to talk to him, and have him make a law about it."

Each of the metal straps passed through a bucklelike fastener; each was also riveted at two or three places. Momos looked about, took up the knife that lay nearby, and began awkwardly to pry at the rivets.

Alalkomeneus waited anxiously. The god worked with agonizing slowness, muttering the entire time. Finally one strap came free and he turned his attention to the other.

"Oh, please hurry, my lord!" Alalkomeneus said. "The god is already late for the wedding."

"What wedding?" Momos asked. "Who's getting married?"

"Oh, please keep working, my lord. I'll tell you all I know while you work."

At last the final strap came loose. Within the box Proteus shoved upward with all his strength. The lead that sealed the seams began to crack and crumble. Momos moved back as the lid was pushed aside.

Proteus rose up and was out of the box almost instantly. He looked quickly about. He saw Alalkomeneus. "This is the day of the wedding? How much time remains until night?"

"Yes, Lard Proteus-this is the day. I do not know how much time remains. Go-go quickly, to save Lady Metis and the others!"

Now the god of ocean looked at Momos, who was blinking at him. "Will these little creatures be safe here with you? Will you help them and let no harm befall them?"

"Go, Lord Proteus," Alalkomeneus cried before Momos could answer. "We will be safe-go and help Lady Metis!"

Proteus nodded, then turned and ran toward Ae atrium of the apartment, causing wings to grow from his back. Through the atrium he ran and out onto the gallery. Without pausing he threw himself into the sky, flying toward the Kingdom of Nereus.

As he flew an uneasiness crept upon him. Ahead lay the glistening blue Aegean; to the south he could see the mountains where Nalassa and

Philyra were waiting for him. As he looked in that direction his uneasiness became stronger. He tried to shake the feeling but could not.

From the position of the sun he knew that he had perhaps two hours before nightfall. The wedding would not begin until the new moon rose. He changed his course, swooping in a wide circle and heading south. He must satisfy himself that Nalassa and Philyra were safe. He flew even faster now, his great wings beating furiously. As he raced toward the mountains his uneasiness became still more intense. Even though he had never before approached them from this direction, he had the sensation that he was reenacting something that had happened before, perhaps long ago.

He came to earth near the cave in which he had left Nalassa. The cave was empty. All around him reigned silence. He stood upon the ledge and looked out over the vast terrain below, then raised his voice.

"Nalassa! Philyra!" His voice echoed back from far away.

After a few minutes he descended, pausing regularly to look and call again. Finally, from the direction of the canyon, a female figure appeared and called back weakly. Now he darted downward toward her in great leaps. He reached the valley floor and ran toward the point where a wall of rock opened into the canyon.

Before he reached it Philyra came toward him. Her face was bruised and streaked with dirt. Her clothing was ripped and disheveled. She was crying.

"Oh, Proteus," she said, throwing herself into his arms. "Oh, brother-

Just ahead an outcropping of rocks hid a part of the high bluff. He stumbled to a stop, Philyra hanging from his neck. His head reeled. He knew what lay beyond. In his mind he saw Nalassa's broken body lying at the foot of the wall of rock, her skull split open. A part of him knew-had known all along-that she was mortal and must die.

"Oh, brother," Philyra sobbed, "I think-I think she's dead! Kronos has killed her."

He staggered around the rocks and fell weeping upon the naiad's lifeless body.

"Nalassa," he cried, "oh, Nalassa! This-this is what I foresaw so long ago!"

Twenty Nine

The wedding of Eurybie and Crios began when a dozen beautiful Nereids entered the great hall of Nereus through the large portals in its high ceiling. They swam in circles, performing a graceful aquatic dance to announce the appearance of the new moon. At their arrival a cry went up from the multitude of gods assembled in the huge chamber. A few moments later Eurybie began to swim from one of the corridors at the rear of the hall toward a broad platform that had been erected for the ceremony.

She was garbed in white. Behind her followed a procession of Nereids who strewed crushed seashells in every direction. The multicolored fragments hung suspended in the water, glistening. Crios was already in place on the platform, awaiting his bride.

The throne room of Nereus was decorated with innumerable flowers that had been brought from land and sea. Some hung festooned from the walls

and others carpeted the floor of the platform. The vast floor of the hall was covered with petals and small, bright shells.

As she joined Crios, Eurybie looked out over the assemblage. It was the custom of many of the gods to carry their weapons on formal occasions, and the room bristled with spears and with the tridents of the followers of Okeanos. Kronos had still not arrived, nor had any message been received from him. Eurybie's quick eyes sought out her accomplices, Iapetos was within the entourage of Okeanos, very near the ocean god himself. Koios was positioned not far from Nereus, near the far side of the room. All was in readiness. She turned to face Crios, and the ceremony began.

Metis had not failed to notice the positioning of Kronos's conspirators. She noticed, too, that by instinct or design her brothers-nearly a hundred of them-had taken up places surrounding her father and mother so that Okeanos and Tethys were shielded on every side by a wall of armed guards. Only Iapetos could reach her father easily, and the child watched him carefully as the wedding progressed. Much of the time he was looking at Okeanos. Beneath his cloak he was carrying something of fair size, which he seemed intent upon keeping hidden.

Kronos's continued absence puzzled and worried her, but the positioning of Iapetos and Koios, and Eurybie's quick glances toward them, convinced her that her father was still very much in danger. She was determined to do whatever lay in her power to prevent any harm from befalling him. Within her clothing she still concealed the pouch she had brought from Olympos. In the golden girdle of her chiton she carried her small, ornate dagger. More than once she rehearsed in her mind the movements that could thrust it into the back of Iapetos should he attack her father.

The ceremony proceeded slowly, with rich, elaborate words that Eurybie mouthed with untroubled insincerity. Crios, stiff and looking dazed, managed to recite his part in turn.

Finally, as the wedding neared its conclusion, a disturbance caused everyone to look back toward the main entrance of the hall. An opening appeared in the ranks of the assemblage and through it swam the King of the Gods. Suppressed whispers spread through the crowd, dying to silence as he took up a position in the front ranks near the platform.

He was dressed only in the loincloth he had worn two nights before, when he suddenly departed from Olympos. In his right hand he carried the longest knife Metis had ever seen. His hair and beard were in wild disorder and his wide, piercing eyes blazed. He barely looked at the other gods he joined, instead directing all of his attention toward Eurybie and Okeanos.

Since leaving Philyra the previous evening, Kronos had continued his frantic search for his newborn son. And that night he had searched and on into the next morning, until at last exhaustion claimed him and he fell asleep. He had only awakened a short time ago. Somehow he had managed to remember the wedding and had hastened here.

"Let the wedding continue," he said, his huge chest still heaving from the exertion of his rapid journey.

Eurybie recovered her composure quickly, turning back to her groom. An attendant handed her an enormous skin flask, the type from which the water gods consumed nectar. She held it above her head with its narrow neck near her face.

"May our love be like nectar," she said, "may it be sweet and satisfying and imperishable."

She put the skin to her mouth, pinched open a metal clasp, and drank deeply. Then she handed the flask to Crios. "Drink well, O my husband."

"Like nectar may our love be," he answered, the words sounding pinched and unnatural on his lips, "sparkling and heady and beyond the touch of time." He drank quickly, then handed the container aside.

Eurybie took his hands in hers. "Ours is the kiss of marriage," she proclaimed, "the kiss that binds us one to the other, in perpetual love."

"Ours is the kiss . . ." He began to stumble upon the words.

Ignoring his difficulty, Eurybie stepped close to him and raised her lips to his, kissing him. A roar of approval rose from the assemblage, for this marked the completion of the ceremony and the two were now married in the eyes of the gods.

Smiling broadly, Eurybie turned to face the crowd. As the roar died away, she addressed Kronos.

"My lord Kronos, we've been waiting for you. We feared that-that some harm-might have befallen you."

Her words were heavily weighted. Though he barely glanced at her he instantly understood her true meaning. Stepping forward, he turned with one hand raised to address the gods. Absolute silence fell over the assemblage.

Slowly his hand fell, until it pointed directly at Okeanos. "Brother, you have failed!" he proclaimed, his voice booming through the watery medium. "Your lackeys found me, brother-they found me and crept upon me, taking me by surprise. By their number they wrestled me to the ground, swarming over me and holding me fast. But they could not keep me a prisoner. They lie far away, upon a wide plain, crippled and wailing in pain."

The face of Okeanos was impassive. His followers were fully alert, nervously gripping their tridents.

"But I do not blame you alone," Kronos continued, slowly moving his arm until now he pointed at Nereus, who stood to the far side of the room. "I accuse you, too, God of the Sea who is called 'truthful Nereus.' Will you be truthful tonight and acknowledge all your treachery? Or must I lay it bare before all the gods, who haven't even a suspicion of the guile that lies in your heart?'"

A look of sadness passed over the features of the King of the Aegean.

"You must somehow have learned that I knew of your plot against me-that I knew what you planned to do here, tonight, among these festivities, where you planned to take me off guard. Somehow you had deceived yourselves into believing that all these gods and goddesses of the great broad world would acquiesce to your cowardly treachery.'"

Now he let his arm fall to his side and his eyes move from face to face among the gods that thronged the room. "These two planned to lure me aside, where no other eyes could see, and with cowardly blows strike me unconscious. Then, with their followers, they would carry me to dark



Tartaros and confine me there in the dank world from which no one escapes. Okeanos and Nereus—they would be your new lords. They would divide the world between them, and rule to their own gain.

"They think the gods have short memories. They think you will not remember who led you to tame the world and bend it to your use—who elevated you above the beasts of the forest and made you worthy of the name 'gods.' They think you will forget the allegiance each of you has sworn to Olympus and to me!

"But I know better. I know that most of you will not waver in your loyalty. You have not forgotten—those of you who are old enough—the long dark night of ignorance and filth and deprivation, from which I led you so long, long ago. Deceit and lying promises will profit them nothing in your eyes. I am your king, and you will not forsake your pledges to me."

For a moment he was silent. Slowly his eyes returned to Okeanos.

"Ungrateful brother! Upon you I have rained privileges and honors without number—yes, and love. I have honored you above all the other Titans and gods. I have endured the bitter spite in your heart, the envy and the lies that you have strewn upon me from your lair at the edge of the world—because of my love for you. In the face of even this affront, I could be patient. But I must not. Your rash actions have not only me as their target; the welfare of all the gods is at stake. My forbearance must end, however much I regret it. You threaten not me alone, but the welfare of all the gods—and that I cannot allow.'"

On the platform Eurybie listened with delight and surprise. Kronos's hectic, distraught manner upon his arrival had made her anxious. To her intense satisfaction he had slipped easily into his cunning speech. As she looked about the chamber she could see that most of the gods were already being swayed by his words. Most of them were from the broad earth, unfamiliar with Olympus. They had little or no personal knowledge of the Lord of the Titans. They gripped their weapons and listened with unconcealed outrage.

"You sent out your followers to waylay me in secret," Kronos continued, "because you thought I would not come here, since I knew of your plot against me. How wrong you were. I face my enemies. I don't run from them. Look, Okeanos. Look, Nereus. I am here. Come—I await you!" His sword glistened at his side where he held it.

The reaction of the gods was instantaneous. A great cry went out.

"Punish them!" someone shouted. "Punish Okeanos and Nereus." The gods began to surge toward the two.

"No," Kronos cried, holding his sword above his head. "No, take them prisoner. Do not harm them if that is possible—for I love them both despite their crimes."

Now gods armed with spears began to push against the tridents of the sons of Okeanos. Shouts and the sounds of battle filled the underwater throne room. A similar crowd surged toward Nereus, but Koios was already upon the god, pinning his arms to his chest. Beautiful, golden-haired Nereids tried to free him, but the followers of Kronos held them back.

Now another uproar began from the rear of the crowd. "Wait!" a loud voice called. The gods began to part and through them swam Proteus and Philyra. Proteus carried in his arms the limp body of Nalassa. He swam directly toward the platform, stopping a short distance in front of it. Kronos, his face reflecting both surprise and anger, stared at them.

Proteus reverently laid the body of the naiad upon the floor, then stood

and looked slowly about the room. Metis edged her way through her brothers and sisters to be near him. Some kind of change had come over his face-it bore lines of anguish, but there was also an odd, distracted quality about his features. His eyes looked, but did not seem to see the gods all about him. When he spoke, his voice too was altered- sinuous and flowing and distant, as though it came in part from a source other than his deep chest and fine lips.

"Oh, Proteus!" Metis cried, finally succeeding in penetrating the cordon of guards about her father. She threw herself down beside Nalassa.

At the name of the god a whisper ran through the crowd, like the voice of the surf upon a shore. His name was well known, as was his gift of prophecy. The crowd fell silent as he began to speak.

"View your work, King of the Gods. You have sought death, and found it. The naiad Nalassa lies dead at your hands."

The listening gods reacted with incredulity to his statement; nevertheless they struggled to get near enough to look upon the river nymph's body.

"Yes, Kronos-not all nymphs are immortal. You knew that from the body of another nymph, in the hidden room of your servant Thanatos. You set him the task of discovering the secret of death, and found it yourself. In her ichor is the taint of mortality-it speaks for itself by the pinkness of its color. She was tainted with mortal blood, and you have slain her!"

"What nonsense," Kronos cried. "The nymph is merely unconscious. In time her wound will heal and she'll awaken. Why do you blame me for her condition? I've never seen her before, son of Okeanos."

"This god speaks true," a voice cried. Prometheus had followed Metis through the entourage of Okeanos, pulling his brother Epimetheus behind him. "We've seen the secret room. In it is the decomposing corpse of a nymph. We've all seen it-my brother and I and Metis. What this god says is true."

Behind and to one side of the platform upon which Crios and Eurybie still stood, the god Thanatos was watching and listening with intense interest. At last he could restrain himself no longer. He swam rapidly toward the body of the naiad. His path brought him upon Kronos from the rear.

The King of the Gods must have glimpsed the rapid motion, for he struck out instinctively, as though he were being attacked. His gleaming sword flashed downward almost with a life of its own, decapitating the god. The momentum of Thanatos's body continued to carry it forward while the head, its eyes wide and its mouth spread in a silent scream, went spinning upward in the water.

"Witness your king!" Proteus cried. "In that same room on Olympos was another god whose head and body have been severed. The weapon he holds in his hand was forged for the purpose it just served."

Eurybie stepped forward on the platform, determined to defend Kronos in any way she could. "These are lies," she cried. "There is no such room as the one of which they speak. I would have seen it if it existed."

Kronos followed her lead. "Yes, all lies, intended by this son of Okeanos to deceive the gods. Will no one defend me from them? Iapetos-you know the truth of these matters."

Iapetos stood inside the group of bodyguards surrounding Okeanos. Klymene, his wife, stood beside him. Drawing aside his cloak, he revealed his own sword, the twin of the one Kronos held. He drew it back above his head to strike Okeanos.

Before the sword could fall, Klymene let out a startled scream and leaped between her husband and her father.

"Iapetos!" she cried. "What are you doing? Husband, would you do violence against the father of your wife?"

The face of Iapetos was contorted with hate. Still he hesitated. The sword remained above his head, ready to descend. Okeanos had turned to face him now and signaled back those of his sons who started to interfere.

"Strike down the adultress," Kronos cried. Though he was surprised to see the weapon Iapetos carried, he was ready to turn any development to his own advantage. "Strike them both down!"

"Adultress!" Klymene repeated the word, her face pale with astonishment. "What does he mean? Why does he call me that?"

Instead of answering, Iapetos pushed her aside so that again he faced Okeanos. The ocean god made no move to defend himself, but only looked at his assailant.

"Strike, Iapetos," Eurybie cried excitedly, "before it's too late."

"Look well at those who defend Kronos," Proteus said, his voice still strangely distant and his eyes rolled up so that they looked not at any of the gods but toward the high ceiling of the chamber. "Each has been promised a kingdom for his help. Iapetos shall rule in Okeanos's stead if Kronos succeeds, and Eurybie shall be Queen of the Aegean."

Proteus's words produced an immediate reaction, but not among those to whom they were addressed. Klymene had again insinuated herself between her husband and her father, and while Iapetos struggled to push her aside the sea goddess Keto sought out Phorkys, her husband. She spoke to him quickly, casting frequent glances toward Eurybie, and then after a few moments she swam to the bride.

She whispered to her sister and Eurybie whispered back. The conversation seemed to develop into an argument. Now both goddesses approached the very edge of the platform and spoke with Kronos. The noise within the hall was so great that only the gods in the immediate vicinity could hear what was said.

"Quiet, Eurybie," the Titan said gruffly. "This is not the time to speak of this matter. We will discuss it later."

"We will not!" Eurybie said. "You've promised the Kingdom of Nereus to both me and Keto. I want to know right now who is going to get it."

Kronos glanced anxiously about, then turned and addressed a number of armed gods nearby.

"Well, Kronos," Eurybie said, summoning every bit of her self-restraint. "I demand your answer."

"Silence, traitor," he cried. "Take her prisoner," he told the gods. "Hold her fast, lest she escape." Now he again addressed all the gods.

"How they twist the truth in their lying mouths. I've promised Eurybie nothing. She's an ally of her brother Nereus. This wedding was her idea, to tempt me here into a trap. She knew I could not decline an invitation to my own brother's wedding. This and her own personal gain are the reasons she sought him out as husband. She connived to have the wedding held here, where I would be among my enemies."

A number of gods surrounded her, but before they could take hold of her she had drawn her dagger. Like a wild cat she fought, bristling and slashing on every side. She wounded three of them before they drew back.

"Traitor? You call me a traitor, you King of Deceit? You've chosen the wrong goddess to betray. Let your gods take me. They'll carry me to Tartaros kicking and screaming and denouncing you with every breath of my body. He lies! He promised me the rule of this kingdom, and for that reason I have supported him in every way."

Kronos laughed. "None who know you could possibly believe that. Would I put someone like you on a throne? Quickly, take her!"

Her eyes and tongue were as sharp as the dagger with which she drove back the gods again. "Iapetos," she cried. "It isn't Klymene who deceived you, but Kronos. It wasn't your wife you saw in the arms of Proteus-it was I. Kronos himself was disguised as Proteus to deceive you. We tricked you into thinking her unfaithful. Neither she nor Okeanos ever plotted against you."

"But that isn't all-not the depth of the cruel, heartless deceit that Kronos has played upon you," she continued. "Long, long ago he determined to create some excuse for ridding himself forever of Okeanos and making the Kingdom of Ocean his own-in fact if not in name. It was then that he began to cast about for some alliance. He plotted to make you put aside your wife Themis and take to wife a daughter of Okeanos. Childlessness was an excuse, but when that was not enough-he devised a false oracle. Do you hear, Iapetos? That oracle was false! And now, under changed circumstances, he connived to turn you against another wife you love. He has betrayed you-cruelly. He has sacrificed your love and happiness to his own heartless ambition. Kronos is your enemy, not Okeanos!"

"Take her! Bind the sister of Nereus!" Kronos continued to shout as she spoke.

The clamor within the great hall was so great that only the gods near the platform heard all Eurybie said. Iapetos, however, heard clearly.

Eurybie still succeeded in holding at bay those who would have taken her prisoner. The majority of the gods remained firmly on the side of the King of the Gods.

"You who are loyal," Kronos cried, turning back to the vast assemblage, "take prisoner those who would deceive and betray you."

A portion of the gods surged toward Okeanos and again spears and tridents began to flash.

"Let me speak," a female voice called out. It was Philyra. She came a little forward, to stand in front of Proteus. She was still clothed in rags and the scratches on her face and body were easily visible to those near her. "Quiet!" she cried. "It is my turn to speak."

The noise fell to a murmur, then finally to absolute silence.

"I am Philyra, a daughter of Okeanos," she said, her voice stiff and shrill as it rang through the hall. "For almost four months I have lived upon Olympos, a guest of the family of Iapetos. It was my misfortune to-to have the King of the Gods-find-find me attractive."

As she spoke her voice began to crackle with emotion. "I was yet a maid, with no interest in love. But my innocence and . . . virtue . . . had no effect upon him-or the wrong effect. He became more and more insistent. At last, when I could escape his advances no longer, I fled Olympos. . . . It was yesterday that he found me again-with the river nymph you see behind me!"

She gestured toward the limp form of Nalassa. Metis was still bent above the body. She had taken something from the pouch within her clothing and was applying it to the naiad's mouth and wounds. Puffs of pink ichor rose from the wounds.

As she continued to speak Philyra became more and more impassioned, sobbing out her story. "He came upon us unexpectedly. Nalassa fought bravely to help me escape. He threw her into the rocks, killing her-because she tried to protect me. Still I fled from him. I didn't know what had happened to Nalassa. I-I hid myself among-among a herd of horses. I took upon myself the-the form of a-of a mare. He became a horse too-and tried to-to take me while we both were in animal form. I fled him again, resuming my own size and shape. Because of the . . . madness . . . that was upon him-or because he could more easily overtake me-he retained the shape of a stallion but-returned to his natural size. The beast caught me easily. It pushed me down across an outcropping of rocks-and-and so great was the- frenzy of his lust-that-that-that he took me while still in the form of a horse!"

She was sobbing uncontrollably now as she screamed the final words. Proteus moved beside her and put an arm about her, drawing her back a step. Now he spoke again.

"This is your king. In his mad passion he has begotten upon her a monster child-a creature tainted by the manner of its conception." Proteus's head was tilted upward and all his features seemed transfigured by the prophetic spirit that was upon him. "Yet the child shall be a monster in body only. His mind shall be unsullied. Across the broad earth he shall be known for his wisdom and gentleness."

"Lies!" Kronos screamed. "Lies of my enemies-of the children of Okeanos. I never touched the Okeanid-or the naiad. Take them prisoner-all these traitors who would destroy the world we have built!"

The gods stirred uncertainly. Most of them wanted to believe Kronos, but were now unsure. Before any could act another figure moved toward the platform, looking tall and regal. It was Rhea. She pulled from her face the golden veil that concealed her battered features.

"Am I a child of Okeanos, husband? Am I one of that lying lot?"

He glared at her. "Quiet, Rhea. I warn you- keep silent!"

"No more, husband. I've gnawed my own lips so long that I can bear their taste no longer. Listen, all of you! I, too, shall tell you of your high-minded King of the Gods, who has brought righteousness and the ways of law into this world. I know him-oh, I know him as no other! I, his wife and queen, can attest more accurately than anyone to the nobility of his character, the greatness of his heart. He is a god above all

others-for whom no law is sacrosanct, no lie too daring, no crime too heinous!"

Fury gripped the Titan as she spoke. He started toward her, his sword drawn back, but at a gesture from Okeanos a line of tridents sprang forward to block his way.

"Look upon my face-it is as much the work of Kronos as is the body of the nymph or the suffering of Philyra. All his words have been lies. No followers of Okeanos or Nereus attacked him to keep him from this wedding. I know full well why he arrived so late, with signs of long exertion clearly visible upon him. He was seeking his son-his newborn son and mine-that he might devour him!'"

Her face beamed with exaltation as she watched her husband's vain efforts to reach her.

"Six children have I borne him in secret, and five he has eaten! I've seen his distended body as he forced down his throat what he thought to be his sixth child-for I deceived him!" She laughed. "I've seen him writhe upon the floor, his body bloated like some reptile that has gorged itself. But this last child escaped him-and shall continue to escape him-for he is destined to depose his father and rule in his father's place. It is this prophecy that Kronos fears. To avoid it he has sunk to such atrocity."

Horror and aversion gripped the gods. They shrank back from Kronos, so that now a large space separated him from the assemblage.

"Liar!" Kronos screamed, almost insane with rage. "Traitor of a wife!" Behind him on the platform still stood a few of the gods who had gone there to withstrain Eurybie. From one of them he grabbed a spear. His great arm drew far back and then drove the weapon straight toward Rhea.

Proteus acted the moment Kronos reached for the spear. With the practiced skill of his long years beneath the water, he shot toward Rhea, intercepting the missile before it could strike and deflecting it upward above the crowd.

"Enemies," Kronos shrieked. "All of you are my enemies. Come and face me, cowards! I'll fight all of you-every last one of you!"

An opening appeared in the ranks of guards about Okeanos. Through it stepped grim-faced Iapetos. In his hand he, too, carried a long, glistening sword. Without a word he advanced toward his brother and king.

"No!" Proteus cried, now swimming between Iapetos and Kronos. "Do not strike him, Iapetos. It is not for you to punish him. His doom is ordained. It awaits him in the fullness of time and is not ours to dispense!"

For a long moment Iapetos hesitated, his face filled with hatred and loathing. Then he threw down his sword, turned, and swam from the great hall. Klymene, his wife, swam after him.

Silence reigned. Then slowly, a few at a time, the gods began to leave.

"Come back," Kronos commanded. "Where are you going? Stay! I, your king, command you to stay!"

No one listened. Singly, by twos and threes, then in large groups they left. Laughter from the platform behind him made Kronos turn and look in

that direction. It was Eurybie. She, too, was leaving. As she swam away she laughed and laughed.

With a cry like a wounded animal Kronos propelled himself through the water toward Okeanos, his sword waving wildly. The sons of Okeanos blocked his attack and forced him back while they, too, slipped from the room.

Proteus felt a tug on his arm. It was Metis. "Quickly," she said, "we must carry Nalassa to shore-while there's still a chance."

He stared at her in puzzlement. "There is no chance, sister. I have looked into the future. She is dead. Kronos has slain her."

The child was crying, the tears immediately washed away by the water all around them. Her voice rang with angry determination. "No! She can't be dead. Your vision must have been wrong. I won't let her die!"

At her insistence he took up the body of the naiad. Metis led the way and Philyra followed him.

Behind them Kronos continued to shout orders, but all the gods had left him. Only Thanatos remained, his head floating aimlessly about the vast chamber.

Thirty

On the beach of a small island Metis tended Nalassa through the night. She let ambrosia dissolve in the naiad's mouth and applied it to her wounds. Proteus built a bonfire to keep them warm and to provide light. At first Philyra hovered about her young sister, ready to offer assistance, but in time she acquiesced to their suggestion that she lie down and sleep. When her stock of ambrosia began to grow small, Metis scattered fragments upon the ground and commanded them to grow into a fresh supply.

Finally, as the night neared morning, the child goddess came and sat at the bonfire, near her brother. He looked up at her approach, his features no longer imbued with the strange quality they had borne in the hall of Nereus.

"She is dead," he said simply, without any trace of question in his voice.

"No," Metis insisted. "At least she isn't completely dead, in the way you mean. Listen, brother, I've done much thinking about this matter of mortality and immortality. I-I think Nalassa is indeed mortal-but she's divine too. I think this must be true of many, if not most, of the nymphs, perhaps of all the lesser gods. But they do not die as animals die.

"Even the largest of animals-a mammoth, for instance- would die instantly from such a wound. She did not. She was dying slowly, I think, one part of her divine body at a time. Parts of her were already dead when we arrived here. Deterioration had set in, but I'm almost certain that the material I've been applying to her wounds has arrested its progress. If it has, then she may begin to heal. Her divine body-the part that still lives-may begin to reclaim the other parts of her and to rebuild them.

"Oh, Proteus," she cried, "don't give up yet! She may still live."

He shook his head sadly. "No, Metis. It was this I foresaw so long ago.

Long before you were born, when my visions came clearly, not in hideous fits, I saw my love for her-and the pain of her death. I could not bear the pain, and so I hid it from myself. From that day until this, I could not look into the future except in the fits that came upon me, and I never remembered what I saw or heard in that state."

"Your vision has returned," she said. "I could see that in your face when you came into the palace of Nereus."

He nodded, staring into the great fire.

"But these clear visions-are they really clear? Could you not be mistaken? Have you looked again, to see if Nalassa truly must die?"

"No, I haven't looked. I shall never willingly look into the future again."

"But could you not be mistaken? Brother, if I'm right and Nalassa is indeed mortal, then she will die-but that may be far in the future, not today. Was it not you who warned us against trying to interpret a prophecy?"

"I don't know. Even clear visions are but glimpses and feelings. Metis, I saw her lying upon the ground-just as when I actually found her-and I knew that she was dead. Or that she was dying and would soon be dead. Oh, how worthless these visions are. I had seen much of what has happened to us, but only in fragments."

From a short distance away they heard Philyra stirring in her sleep. After a few moments she settled down again.

"The poor child," Proteus said. "She's suffered greatly, too. She won't easily adjust to what's happened to her, and to the child she must bear. It's a bitter destiny that faces her. We must try to comfort her as best we can, Metis."

Looking sad, Metis nodded. "Still, she's strong and young. . . . I'll do whatever I can to help and cheer her."

The child went to check on Nalassa. After applying fresh ambrosia, she returned and again sat near her brother in front of the roaring fire.

After some moments he said quietly, " 'The gull shall weep, the eagle cease to soar . . . ' "

" ' . . . when the white mare rears her hooves and the broken willow pierces their hearts.' Yes, I remember the prophecy," Metis said. "It has been fulfilled. The white mare was Philyra. She reared her hooves against Kronos when she bravely denounced him. Poor Nalassa, the river nymph-she is the broken willow whose plight has pierced your heart- and that of Kronos, the eagle, by the part she played in defeating him. -Oh, I'm sorry. I'm upsetting you."

"No, it's all right, Metis. Yes, Kronos was the eagle-and I, the gull that weeps. . . ."

"But has Kronos truly ceased to soar?"

Proteus shrugged in the darkness. "Perhaps. We will learn in time."

"What was the rest of the prophecy? There was more, but I can't remember it."



" 'Change follows change when god devours god . . . ' "

"When god devours god!" she said. "That must mean Kronos--and his children."

" ' . . . Titan against Titan,' " Proteus continued, " 'god against god . . . power unleashed, force undreamt. . . .' "

"We have seen Titan against Titan and god against god."

"Yes, but we've only seen the beginning," he said slowly. "This much I know from what I saw today, with the return of my vision--we've witnessed only the first of many changes that will come upon the earth. A new era is beginning, brighter and grander than that in which we live. There will indeed be new and terrible forces. . . ."

"This newborn god--this son of Kronos--is it he who will inaugurate the new world?"

"I think so, but I have only glimpsed the future. The world of Kronos is not dying; it's fading away. Another will grow strong and rich and bright in its place. What role any of us will have in this new world--that I cannot say." He looked up suddenly, shaking his head and blinking his eyes.

He seemed to be trying to cast off the mood that had possessed him.

The new day dawned and Metis continued to tend Nalassa. "I think her wounds are beginning to heal themselves," she reported excitedly.

Proteus refused to allow her enthusiasm to infect him. When Metis or Philyra sat and talked with him, his spirit seemed to rise a little; but as soon as they left him to himself, he slipped back into deep depression. He was convinced that nothing could return Nalassa to him.

Toward noon a winged figure approached from the direction of Olympos. It was their sister Klymene, who had seen the bonfire when leaving the Kingdom of Nereus the night before. She brought with her a large basket. As she set it down the lid popped open and a number of mortal heads appeared.

With a cry Metis bent toward them, scooping up Alalkomeneus. Within moments the others were out of the basket and crawling over her.

"Thalia and Prometheus convinced me to bring them to you," Klymene explained. "They thought they would be safer here than on Olympos. Kronos is broken; the gods will follow him no more, for he no longer deserves to rule. All the gods are leaving Olympos. They're packing now, and by nightfall none will remain. Even Momos is leaving, after someone managed to explain to him all that had happened. The secret room of Thanatos was opened and Oizys found. He, too, is being carried away."

"What happened to Thanatos?" Metis asked, looking up from me mortals.

"Nereus wouldn't have him in his kingdom--in two pieces or one! He had the head and body carried ashore and put in a cave, where they can grow back together.'"

"What of you and Iapetos?" Philyra asked timidly.

A slight smile touched Klymene's lips. "All is well between us, sister. I've always known that he still loves Themis, but that doesn't matter. He loves me and is my husband. He wants to remain my husband and--and I

want him to remain." She laughed self-consciously. "We're packing now, too. Iapetos is leading all the other gods to Mount Othrys, where we shall make our new home."

Sometime later Klymene left them, returning to her family on Mount Olympos. Metis continued to apply ambrosia to the naiad's body. Late in the day she brought Proteus to look at Nalassa.

"Do you see? The wounds are healing. I told you not to give up. The ambrosia has marvelous regenerative properties. You saw how quickly Oizys began to grow when we fed it to him."

"Oh, Metis, please-I can't bear this," he said, almost sobbing. "Don't you understand? She can't live. I know that she must die."

"No!" the child answered firmly. "You don't know that. In such a state, overwhelmed by all you saw, you might easily have misinterpreted the vision. You knew that she was mortal and you saw her lying there, the evidence of her mortality oozing from her ghastly wound. Perhaps at the same time you remembered the dead nymph in Thanatos's workshop, and got all of that muddled together in your head. If she is indeed mortal, as I fear, then perhaps you saw that as well and mixed in a premonition of her death sometime in the far future."

"Please, Metis--"

Just then a sigh came from the lips of the naiad. Both Metis and Proteus bent over her. Nalassa's eyes flickered open. She seemed to be looking at Proteus. The corners of her mouth drew back in the slightest of smiles, and then the eyes closed again.

Metis quickly examined the naiad. "Oh, brother! I told you-she lives! She grows stronger with each moment. Her heart can be plainly felt. She will live, brother!"

Sobbing, Proteus was kissing the naiad's face and lips. Metis had to pull him away. She was crying and grinning at the same time. "Patience, Proteus. You must give her time to regain her strength." Metis squeezed drops of ambrosia into Nalassa's mouth and the nymph swallowed weakly.

All that night the naiad grew stronger. Proteus refused to leave her side and Metis continued to tend her with ambrosia at regular intervals. By morning Nalassa had fully regained consciousness and was able to sit up with help and talk quietly.

Later, when Nalassa slept again, Proteus and Metis spoke privately. "I've been thinking about what you said-about my vision. Some explanation like the one you gave must be the case. I'm fairly certain Nalassa is indeed mortal-that someday she will die. But that doesn't matter, not if I can be with her until then, whenever it may be."

"You could look into the future and see."

He shook his head. "I shall never willingly look into the future again. I want my joys to be fresh and my sorrows hidden until their time."

They stayed upon the island two more days, long enough to be certain that Nalassa was fully recovered. Finally all of them walked down to the beach. Alalkomeneus rode on Metis's shoulder, one hand wrapped in her hair for support, and the other mortals crowded around their feet.

"What will you do now?" Proteus asked Philyra and Metis. "Will you go to Mount Othrys with the other gods?"

Metis nodded. "In time. Philyra and I have talked, and she's going to come with me. I want to find a safe place for the mortals to live. Somehow I feel that they should have a home of their own. Philyra is going to help me. Probably then we'll go to live with Iapetos and Klymene, at least for a while."

"What of you two?" Philyra asked.

Proteus looked questioningly at Nalassa.

"Well," the naiad said, smiling, "I want to see the Kingdom of Okeanos, of course. And I want Proteus to show me all the lovely, lonely places he loves so much. But first, I think, I want to take him home and show him off to my sisters!"

They embraced each other briefly. Then Proteus, Master of the Fearful Depths, took Nalassa's hand and waded out into the surf with her. Together they dived far out into the water.

Metis pointed excitedly as they came to the surface again. She and Philyra and the mortals continued to wave long after the two had vanished from sight in the great expanse of the wine-dark sea.

#### Epilogue

Kronos sat upon his ivory throne. All about him was silence. Around his shoulders he wore a heavy cloak of fur, drawn tightly across his chest.

Through heavy-lidded eyes he looked out across the vast emptiness of his throne room. A wide doorway opened out upon a portico, and beyond the portico he could see the terraces where once the gardens and lush orchards of Olympos had bloomed. Snow covered the terraces now. Frost had settled on the floor of the portico and was making inroads upon the floor of the throne room itself.

Many months had passed since the other gods had left. Each day the palace seemed to grow colder.

Occasionally he roused himself and walked the silent corridors, letting the memories of the past flood in upon him; but more often he merely sat upon his throne and thought.

There was so much to think about, so many plans to devise; but he was tired, very tired, and his mind tended to drift to happier times-to the long golden years of his reign.

He was still the greatest of the gods, still their king-none dared claim his title. He needed only the right plan to win back the allegiance of the gods and return Olympos to its former grandeur. Only the right plan... There was time, much time... and so much to think about, to remember....

The soft fall of sandled feet echoed in the stillness and Kronos looked up slowly. It was Thanatos, returning from the mission on which he had been sent.

He was the last of Kronos's subjects, the last inhabitant of Olympos other than the king himself. He stopped before the towering throne, shivering from the cold.

"I have returned from Mount Othrys, my lord," he said in a voice sounding shrill and discordant in the silence of the great hall.

Kronos nodded. His bleary, tired eyes rested upon his servant for only a few moments, then wandered back toward the snow-covered terrace.

"All you have heard is true, Lord Kronos. The Titans have built a new home for themselves upon Mount Othrys, to which the gods and goddesses of the world have flocked. They eat no mortal food there, but only a stuff they call ambrosia, which they say is as imperishable as nectar and the only food fit for a god."

If Kronos was listening, no change of expression betrayed the fact.

"Even Eurybie is there, though at first the Titans refused to admit her. She begged Crios to accept her as his wife, promising to be faithful and obedient. At last he agreed, and now she lives there with him."

Thanatos hesitated, but forced himself to go on. "What you heard of Philyra, the Okeanid, was true as well. She has a child-a son-that she claims is yours."

Now a flicker of emotion betrayed the king's interest.

"But the child-the child is unusual," Thanatos continued cautiously. "He is shaped like a horse. From the waist up he looks like any male child, but from the waist down his body is that of a colt. He has been named Cheiron."

Still Kronos remained silent. Thanatos began to become uncomfortable. He had something else to say, but feared to say it. Finally he bowed his head and left the room to return to his own quarters, where he would begin to pack his belongings. He was afraid to tell his master that he, too, was leaving. The Titans had refused to accept him, but he could endure the bitter, eternal cold no longer.

Behind him, on the throne, Kronos turned over and over within his mind all he had learned. The child of Philyra was a freak-a monster-not fully a god at all. He was not the child of the prophecy. But the other one, Rhea's son ... He was still free, growing daily toward maturity.

That child must be found. He must devise some stratagem, some subterfuge to learn his whereabouts. Soon he must rise and search out that child, bringing all his unmatched wit and cunning to bear upon the problem.

But not now. He was tired, very tired, and there was so much to think about and remember. ... It was so much easier to let himself drift slowly back into his kingdom of dreams.

Like a statue, the Lord of the Crooked Paths sat upon his ivory throne.