

SONS OF THE TITANS

PATRICK H. ADKINS

ACE BOOKS, NEW YORK

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

SONS OF THE TITANS

An Ace Book / published by arrangement with the author and the author's agent, Ralph M. Vicinanza, Ltd.

PRINTING HISTORY

Ace edition / August 1990

All rights reserved. Copyright © 1990 by Patrick H. Adkins.

Cover art by Michael Racz.

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, NY 10016

ISBN: 0-441-77524-1

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

To Dixie-

for love and understanding, and deathless patience.

Introductory Note

The age of titans was little known even to the ancient Greeks themselves, and our knowledge of those elder gods of Greek mythology is still more scanty.

This is the third in a series of volumes that reconstruct that lost mythological era. Although a work of fiction, it is based upon extensive research. Proper names appear in their original forms, transliterated from the Greek, and the author has sought to maintain mythological accuracy throughout.

The reader's indulgence is requested concerning any seeming contradictions of established myth. A few of these the author hopes to resolve in future volumes. The remainder reflect variant or little known-but quite genuine-mythology, which is often crowded out of popular reference works.

-Patrick H. Adkins

One

Distant, tinkling laughter brought the youth to an abrupt halt. His handsome face broke into a smile and he reached back quickly to lay a restraining hand on the hairy arm of his companion.

"Quiet, Aigipan," Zeus whispered. "Listen!"

As he spoke, he threw an arm around Pan's shoulders and drew him down to a crouching position. They were both gods-beings of divine proportion-and even though neither had yet reached his full height, they towered above the groves of laurel and holly trees through which they were walking. Now, with only their eyes and the tops of their heads exposed above the waving treetops, they silently scanned the forested hills that surrounded them.

A moment later the sound came again, much closer than Zeus had expected. He turned to his companion and smiled a second time, his dark, full eyebrows raised in silent question and his eyes gleaming.

Pan nodded back at him, large teeth grinning out from behind the scraggly beard that had already begun to cover his youthful face. "Two at least," he whispered, "maybe more."

He gestured ahead of them. "And near, brother-on the other side of this hill, I think."

They crept forward silently, like seasoned hunters closing on their quarry. As they approached the crest of the high hill, shrill voices became more clearly audible, and at last they reached a point from which they could look down into the hollow beyond.

Pan stretched out his arm and pointed downward toward a clearing that lay off to their left, where three lithe figures ran and shouted, the thin fabric of their short white chitons flapping and swirling around them, revealing an abundance of well-rounded calves and thighs. Zeus let out a long, deep sigh at this unexpected display of divine femininity. Pan glanced at his companion, noted his rapt expression, and chuckled.

They had crouched down again to conceal themselves behind the trees at the top of the hill. From this vantage point they had an unimpaired view of the creatures below.

They were dryads-woodland nymphs. One carried a tree branch that had been stripped of its leaves and smaller branches. She and her companion tossed it back and forth as they ran, always managing to keep it out of the grasping hands of the third nymph, who chased them.

Zeus sighed again.

"What's wrong, brother?" Pan asked.

"How lovely they are," Zeus said sadly. "How magnificent-and unobtainable."

"We have a good chance this time."

Zeus shook his head. "Look how fine and nimble they are-how well they run. We've no better chance of catching them than we had of catching any of the other nymphs we've chased these past two days." Zeus studied the other god's face for a moment, then said, "You were lying, weren't you?"

"When?" Pan asked lightly.

"When you told me all those stories about all those nymphs. You must have been lying. I run much faster than you, but I haven't been able to catch a single one."

Pan looked a tinge embarrassed. "I never said I chased them." He let his attention return to the spectacle below.

"Then how did you catch them?" Zeus demanded. "If you didn't chase them, then how . . . ?"

Pan turned back to face Zeus. "I didn't really want to tell you," he said defensively. He paused, then continued with sudden intensity. "What possible chance do you think I'd have otherwise? Oh, you could probably talk softly and coax some pretty thing into letting you get within reach of her- but look at me! If this face and nose weren't ugly enough to make her keep her distance, one glimpse of my goat ears or these shaggy shanks and cloven hooves that pass for legs and feet, and she'd vanish into the forest before I could-"

"Then what do you do?" Zeus demanded.

Pan shrugged. "I hit them on the head with a stick. Not hard-just to stop them for a few moments," he continued quickly, noting Zeus's disapproving expression. "I sit quietly beside a trail and hope one will happen by. Usually they don't, but every now and then I get lucky. Then I pop up and-" He made a striking motion with his hand.

"You knock them unconscious?"

"Not usually. Usually it just stuns them."

"Doesn't it make them angry?"

"Well, yes, after they realize what happened. But I'm stronger than they are."

Zeus shook his head. He looked down at the lovely creatures laughing and playing in the hollow below them, then back at his companion. He had never considered such a tactic, and it made him feel uncomfortable. It seemed unfair somehow, and nearly as distasteful as purposely trampling a bed of flowers. Of course Pan often stretched the truth, and the handsome youth was not at all sure he should believe him.

"Oh, I knew I shouldn't tell you. I knew you'd be stuffy about it," Pan said crossly. "Do you want to catch a nymph, brother, or are we going to stay here and talk until evening? I have a plan. Do you want to hear it?"

Zeus nodded quickly, grinning. "Certainly. Tell me!"

"If you circle around ahead of them and hide among the trees at the far end of the clearing, near those two large rocks . . . and if I enter the clearing from this end, not letting them see me until I come into the open down there . . . what do you think would happen?"

"They'd run straight toward me!"

Pan nodded. "Yes, and you could remain hidden until they were almost upon you."

"And when I jumped out at them, I'd probably frighten at least one into fleeing back in your direction. It's a good plan, Aigipan. Let's try

it."

"There's only one problem," Pan continued thoughtfully, still staring out across the treetops toward the dryads. "You should be able to catch yours easily, but I'll probably come away empty-handed."

"Perhaps I can hold two of them-for a few moments anyway, until you join me."

Pan looked unconvinced. "They're sweet as honey, and just as slippery."

"The plan is good. Let's try it-quickly, too, before they grow tired of their game and vanish back into the forest."

Pan said, "If you had a club, you could clip them as they ran past you. You wouldn't have to hit them very hard, and you wouldn't have to wrestle with even one."

Zeus considered the proposal, but finally shook his head. "No. Let's try it the other way."

Pan shrugged, and a moment later the divine boys began moving stealthily toward the clearing. Pan disappeared down the steep, forested bank into the hollow, while Zeus traveled some distance along the top of the hill before descending. He moved slowly to avoid making noise.

Finally he reached the position Pan had indicated and worked his way into a dense thicket of tall trees. Carefully parting the branches, he peered out. The dryads were not thirty paces away now, and Zeus settled down to observe at close range the enchanting movements of these strange creatures as they sprinted and scampered about the clearing.

How lovely they were, how desirable-and how utterly different from Ida and Adrastia. The two nymphs who had helped rear him were loving, matronly beings, so unlike these tantalizing goddesses of the wilds that they might as well have belonged to a completely different species.

As he watched, his head filled with the elusive curved softness of lush female forms, he became so absorbed in his pleasant pursuit that he momentarily forgot why he was hiding near them. He found himself as startled as the nymphs, at least for an instant, when something emerged abruptly from the forest at the opposite side of the clearing.

The great god Pan lurched out of the trees and stumbled toward them, the long cloak that served as his only clothing pulled up high to free his awkward goat legs for running. His long goat ears stood up-perked. His arms were outstretched and an enormous grin spread completely across his face. For an instant the nymphs stood frozen, staring at the intruder. One began to titter at the absurdity of the thing rushing toward them, but then-as the mad apparition drew ever closer-her laughter became a shriek. Turning, the three nymphs fled-directly toward the place where Zeus lay concealed.

He waited until they were almost upon him, then sprang up when the first came within reach. She let out a startled cry as he lunged for her. His hand fell on her arm, the fingers tightened around her warm, yielding flesh, and he pulled her toward him. Already he could smell the fresh intoxicating scent of her body. As he reached for her with his other hand, she swung around and struck him in the face, then kicked him in the shin with her heel. By now the second and third nymphs were upon him, too. They ran straight into him, knocking him down and stepping on his chest and legs as they rushed past.

By the time he managed to sit up, Pan had reached him. "I told you," he muttered as he ran by. "You should have hit them on the head." One of his hooves grazed Zeus's arm.

Zeus watched the last of the nymphs disappear among the foliage, followed by the lumbering figure of Pan. He got up slowly, brushed off the grass and twigs that clung to him, then walked after them. At first he went slowly, but soon other instincts overcame his chagrin and he increased his pace. Those he followed were still out of sight, hidden by the towering trees that predominated here, but an occasional laugh, teasing and enticing, floated back from somewhere ahead to goad him on; and he could clearly hear both the sounds of Pan's rough passage through a nearby thicket and the god's loud imprecations as he tore his way through the obstructing vegetation.

Soon Zeus found himself on a more clearly defined path. He was out of the valley now, and a narrow trail led upward, through ever higher foothills toward a high mountain in the distance. He paused to scan the way ahead. Not more than a hundred paces away one of the dryads appeared atop a rocky knoll. She caught sight of him, flashed him an engaging smile, then turned and continued running up the trail. The temptation was irresistible, and Zeus charged after her. The low hills through which they passed grew ever larger, and the distant mountain nearer.

When he stopped again, it was to slump down beside a great tree. He berated himself for letting the nymph lure him into her frustrating game. He felt like a fool, and was more than a little angry. As he rested, he looked out into the distance, trying to catch sight of Pan. Eventually he glimpsed him on a distant hill, careening out of a grove of pines and into a clearing, where he paused. Almost immediately one of the nymphs beckoned from her place of concealment not far from where the shaggy god stood panting, and with a shout he charged off after her.

Zeus laughed. If he was a fool himself, at least he had company. Briefly he considered whether he should follow Pan or continue on his own path. They often became separated during their excursions, and he felt confident that they would find each other again soon enough. They always managed to do so, somehow. While he debated, and before he could reach a decision, a chiding laugh made him spin around and stare into the clump of trees behind him. He caught a glimpse of dark hair and glittering eyes; then the nymph was gone.

On and on he ran, up through the rolling foothills. Time and again he paused, ready to abandon the chase; but always a half-seen figure or half-heard sound drew him on.

When he stopped again, much later, he was well up the side of the high mountain he had seen in the distance. He had lost sight of the nymph some time ago, and was no longer following a clear trail. Huge pine trees rose above him on every side. His aching feet led him to search out a grassy hillock for a seat. He settled onto it, wiped his forehead with the back of his hand, and began to rub his feet.

He and Pan had been traveling for the better part of two days, since they had swum to the mainland from their island home. This was the sixth group of nymphs they had chased- or was it the seventh? He was losing count. Each time the same thing happened. Each time he ended up alone, rubbing his exhausted feet.

As he sat brooding upon the inequities of his life, a doe appeared from the bushes nearby and ambled toward him, apparently unaware of the god's presence. Keeping himself perfectly still, Zeus waited until the animal

was very near his foot-which was considerably larger than the little mortal creature's entire body. Then he wriggled his toes violently and derived a modicum of malicious pleasure from watching the startled deer shoot away in terror, back into the concealing underbrush.

Perhaps ten minutes passed while Zeus sat thinking and resting. Amaltheia would be worried about them. And she would be angry, too, when they finally returned. She was always especially unhappy when they stayed away overnight. It was already late in the day, and a second night would pass before they could reach home. Yes, he decided sadly, Amaltheia would be very distressed, and he began to feel guilty about the worry and pain their absence would cause her-but only for a few moments. After all, he and Pan were practically grown now, and old enough to be off on their own. Gentle Amaltheia would have to accustom herself to such absences, he thought with a shrug.

A nearby rustling noise intruded on his thoughts. He ignored it. He was angry, not merely with the elusive nymphs who had led him on this long, fruitless chase, but with himself as well. He had allowed himself-repeatedly-to be made a fool by these delectable creatures. He had made up his mind to start back home. If, after reaching that firm decision, he let them entice him still farther afield, he would be doubly foolish.

Now, however, he detected another sound-a soft whistling. As he listened more carefully, he realized that the whistling represented a tune. Curious, he rose and walked silently in the direction of the sound. Something was moving among the trees a little distance away, and he cautiously crept forward until he reached a point from which he could see clearly.

She was a comely creature, perhaps even beautiful, with a natural dignity of bearing that immediately set her apart from all the dryads and naiads he had seen these past two days. She was of medium height, with short black hair that framed her face in a bouquet of loose curls. Slender and well formed, she wore a long, flowing peplos of elaborate contrivance that swayed fetchingly around her as she moved, or clung to her body in ways that hinted broadly of uncommon delights concealed beneath the thin, finely wrought fabric.

She strolled slowly among the tall trees, carrying a large, lidded basket in one hand, and now Zeus crept after her at a safe distance. Occasionally she paused to examine plants that grew nearby, and once she stopped, knelt beside one that had particularly attracted her attention, and withdrew a knife and a small piece of cloth from her basket. As Zeus watched with growing interest, she carefully described a circle in the soil around the shrub, then proceeded to dig. When she finished, she lifted the plant out of the ground, wrapped its roots in the cloth, then placed it carefully inside her basket.

Zeus followed when she moved on. When she stopped again, it was within a large clearing. He positioned himself behind a thicket of trees and silently parted the leaves and branches so that he could continue to observe her. She had seated herself near the middle of the clearing and was staring at a tall oak opposite her, apparently lost in thought.

She seemed completely preoccupied. If he were going to act, Zeus decided, he would not find a better opportunity. As he turned to make his way toward a point at which he could enter the clearing from behind her, his foot struck something and he glanced down. It was a fallen tree limb. He looked back at the nymph, then down again at the branch.

For two days he had been chasing nymphs up and down mountainsides, across valleys and through forests. He picked up the makeshift club and held it thoughtfully in one hand. For two days nymphs had taunted and tantalized him. Now, finally, fortune was smiling upon him. Here was such a creature for the taking, not thirty paces away, unaware of his presence. He was in no mood to be thwarted again, and would be a fool not to take advantage of the situation. Gripping the club more tightly, he crept toward the entrance to the clearing.

When he reached it, the nymph was gone.

He looked about in bewilderment. Could she have moved away so quickly, without him hearing her? Then he noticed her basket, which still lay on the ground where she had placed it, near an oak tree—a majestic oak of medium height which, he was almost certain now, had not been there a few minutes before. He approached the tree, staring down through its leaves and branches as he slowly walked around it. Near its base he discovered the white peplos the nymph had worn and picked up the garment. A soft, tingling femininity seemed to cling to it.

For nearly a full minute he scrutinized the tree; then he dropped to one knee and reached out hesitantly toward the dark bark of its trunk. At his touch, the tree blurred. An instant later the goddess stood where the tree had been.

Two

"Thank you", she said calmly, retrieving her garment from his still outstretched hand.

Rising, the young god staggered backwards. There could be no mistake. Where a moment before a great oak had reached its stout branches toward the sky, now stood a beautiful goddess—a beautiful, unclothed goddess.

"Who are you, boy?" she asked as she began to drape and adjust the garment about herself with calm, deft skill. If his presence startled or embarrassed her, neither her expression nor her manner betrayed the fact. She was smiling pleasantly, but her jade-green eyes met his with uncomfortable directness. "Where did you come from? I didn't see you here a short while ago."

His attention was riveted on the cruel white fabric of her peplos and the vanishing loveliness it so swiftly concealed.

"Won't you answer?" She fastened the final clasp on her clothing and looked back up at him, her mouth wearing a smile that was probably meant to set him at ease, but which also suggested that she was not completely unaware of the effect her sudden, unadorned appearance had had upon him.

"Wh-what did you ask, my lady?" the young god finally managed to ask. The club he had carried into the clearing now lay near his feet, where he had dropped it when approaching the tree. He glanced down at it, then back at the goddess.

"You could begin with your name. Who are you?" She appeared to be a maiden not too many years past her own youth. Her eyes peered directly into his in a way that compounded his discomfort.

"I'm called Zeus," he said hesitantly. Then, with sudden inspiration, he gained time to compose himself by tossing the conversation back to her. "You were a tree! How did you do that? Why did you do that?"

She laughed. "Trees are very interesting things, don't you think? Serene

in their might. Haven't you ever wondered what it would be like to be a tree?"

He shook his head.

For an instant an almost sheepish expression flickered over her face. "Well, I have." Her voice sounded a tinge defensive, too. "And now I know!"

"What's it like?"

"Very peaceful. Trees don't concern themselves overmuch with the ebb and flow of daily life. The bark's cool and thick, and the breeze blowing through the leaves is very pleasant-comforting. But be cautious if ever you decide to try it. Unless you're very careful, you could remain a tree far longer than you intended."

"Why? What do you mean?"

"Inanimate objects can't think or remember-at least not as we do. When you fully succeed in becoming such an object, you forget who you really are. Unless you've made some provision in advance, you won't remember to return to your natural form."

She was certainly beautiful, he thought as she spoke-certainly a worthy prize. But something about her made him distinctly uneasy. He had never before met anyone even remotely like her. Of course he had very little experience from which to draw comparisons; his circle of acquaintances was very small indeed, restricted until today to those with whom he had grown up. Nevertheless, he felt certain that this goddess would seem unusual in any group. She stood very near him, within easy reach, and he was confident that he could overpower her with little difficulty, but still he hesitated.

"Before the metamorphosis," she continued, "you must fix in your mind the idea that you'll return to your own form at a certain time or under certain circumstances. For instance, I was going to remain an oak until the shadow of those trees over there"-she stretched out a long, slender arm and pointed a delicate finger-"fell across my trunk. The difference in temperature would trigger that fixed idea, and I would regain my normal form. But instead you touched me." She tilted her head thoughtfully to one side. "Actually, that shouldn't have had any effect. I must not have been as completely metamorphosed as I thought...."

"But how do you do it? Change your body, I mean. I've heard of such things before, of course, but I've never known anyone who could actually do it."

"Why, almost all the gods can change forms, at least to some extent. Where do you live, boy, to not know such things? Who are your parents?"

"I live far from here, on Crete, which is an island in the Great Sea. My mother is called Amaltheia. I have no father."

"I see. Why are you here?"

"My brother and I left home yesterday. We set out roving, to see new places, and became separated not long ago. Who are you, my lady? Where do you live?"

"I am Metis, a daughter of Lord Okeanos and Lady Tethys. I live among the Titans on Mount Othrys, in the palace my father maintains there, though his kingdom lies far away at the edge of the world."

"You're a Titaness," he exclaimed, much impressed. "But why then are you here in these woods?"

"I've been visiting with one of my sisters and her son, who live nearby. Dione, another sister, is visiting, too. On such occasions I always make a point of getting away by myself, at least for a short while. I find places like this very refreshing, and I enjoy seeking out new and curious plants to add to my collection...."

"As to metamorphosis," she continued, picking up an earlier thread of their conversation, "it's both a skill and an inborn ability. There are many who can't fully master it. Many others, with practice, become quite proficient. Have you ever tried?"

Before he could reply, a distant cry interrupted them. Both remained silent, listening, and then the sound came again. "Metis," someone was calling. "Lady Metis!"

Grinning, the goddess twisted around to face in the direction from which the sound had come. "Here I am, Cheiron," she called back. "Over this way."

Three or four minutes passed before the owner of the voice came into view. Zeus turned to watch as the handsome face and athletic upper torso of a young god pushed through branches and thick leaves into the little clearing. On the shoulder of the new arrival rode what appeared to be diminutive god.

"There you are, mistress," the odd creature cried. His tiny fingers quickly busied themselves, brushing twigs and leaves from his thick black hair, smoothing his small, prim beard and short, white chiton. "We've sought you far and wide, mistress, and for a very long time."

As they advanced into the clearing, the foliage fell away to reveal the rest of the young god's body. Below the waist he was shaped like an enormous stallion. His sleek black coat glistened as he stepped into a patch of sunlight.

Metis hastened toward them. "Certainly you exaggerate, my little Alalkomeneus," she said. "I only left you a short while ago." She lifted the creature from the god's shoulder and carried him to her own. He perched there happily, wrapping his fingers in her hair for support.

"It is as you say, Mistress of Swift Wisdom. But it certainly seems like a very long time. We set out in search of you shortly after you left the dwelling of Lady Philyra and Lord Cheiron."

"We mustn't let ourselves fall into rudeness, Alalkomeneus-after all, one of your duties is to instruct Cheiron in the courtesies of Mount Othrys."

The goddess turned toward Zeus, who was observing the new arrivals with curiosity. "Lord Zeus," she continued, gesturing from one divine youth to the other, "this is Lord Cheiron, son of the Okeanid Philyra, who is my sister."

Cheiron nodded shyly, averting his dark eyes.

"And this," she continued, indicating the diminutive creature, "is wise and talkative Alalkomeneus, first of mortals and king of the men of Mount Pelion. He is also Cheiron's most worthy tutor-and my very good friend."

The man bowed gravely.

"My friends," Metis went on, now addressing Cheiron and Alalkomeneus, "This is Lord Zeus, son of Amaltheia. He is a stranger in this region, having only arrived today on an excursion into unfamiliar lands. His home lies far away on an island called Crete."

Each nodded appropriately.

"Now," Metis continued, "why have you sought me out? I told all of you that I'd be back before the evening meal. Has something happened?"

"Lord Prometheus arrived soon after you left us," Cheiron said. He spoke in an unusually soft voice, his eyes fixed upon the ground in front of him. "He's very anxious to see you. He says that he needs to speak with you about some affair of the Titans."

"He needs to speak with you as soon as possible, mistress," Alalkomeneus said, interrupting. "We did not press him further, of course, since it would have been unduly inquisitive to do so-and thus most rude."

"No more rude than interrupting Cheiron just now," Metis observed. "Go on, Cheiron."

"Rather than wait for your return, Lord Prometheus thought it best to begin searching for you. Since we didn't know which way you had gone, Alalkomeneus and I offered to search in one direction while he searched in another."

Metis nodded. "You did well. Prometheus wouldn't have come so far on anything but a matter of importance. In which direction did he go? Shall we hunt for him, or return to the cave?"

"We told him we'd bring you back to the cave if we found you.'"

"Just as well." She retrieved her basket and popped open its lid, then studied the contents briefly. "Not much to show for an afternoon outing." She sighed wistfully. "But I'll not fret. Now I have an excuse to return here all the sooner!"

Metis turned toward Zeus. "Would you care to come with us? I to sure my sisters would like to meet you, and Cheiron lacks for companions of his own age. I'm sure the two of you could find many things to discuss.'" She hesitated. "But what of your brother? I suppose you must continue searching for him."

"Oh, he'll be fine without me, my lady," Zeus answered quickly. "We often become separated during our journeys."

Metis gestured toward the lofty peak that rose above them. "The cave of Philyra and Cheiron lies high up Mount Pelion. The way is arduous at times and-since Cherion doesn't like to fly-we'll have to travel on foot. Still, you're welcome to accompany us if you care to."

Zeus broke into a spontaneous grin. "I'd like that very much indeed."

They made their way out of the clearing and through the thick trees, then headed up a grassy slope. Cheiron ambled a little distance ahead while Metis and Zeus followed at a steady pace. The mortal Alalkomeneus rode on the goddess's shoulder, occasionally interjecting his own observations into their divine conversation.

As they walked, Metis found herself studying the young god at her side. She liked the quick intelligence she had glimpsed in his slate-gray eyes, and the way his sable locks framed his high, broad forehead and handsome face. He was sturdily built, tall for his age and well muscled, with wide shoulders and a deep, broad chest. She scrutinized his features whenever he glanced away from her. There was something quite likable-and curiously familiar-about them.

Soon the grassy slopes gave way to towering pines again, and Cheiron led them up a steep, narrow path.

Metis pointed ahead as they drew near the summit of the mountain. "It looks tiny, doesn't it?" she said. "But that's only the entrance. Three very large caverns lie beyond that small outer opening, one behind the other. It's quite a roomy place to live-quite homey, too. My sister keeps it scrupulously clean, and she's decorated and furnished it with her handiwork. She weaves beautiful rugs and tapestries, and Cheiron has become very skilled at woodwork."

A thin, pale goddess with dark hair emerged from the cave and stood upon a broad, flat ledge. Metis waved to her, and a wan smile touched the goddess's face in acknowledgment.

"So you've found her, Cheiron," she called back as they approached. "Prometheus must still be searching. He hasn't returned yet."

Now a second goddess appeared upon the rocky ledge. When they at last reached the level area in front of the cave, Metis set Alalkomeneus aside on one of the large, flattened boulders that served as divine stools and led Zeus toward her sisters.

"This is Philyra, the mother of Cheiron," she said, indicating the thin goddess with weary features. "And this is Dione, yet another of my numerous sisters. For many years she's lived in the Kingdom of Nereus, the sea god, but occasionally she ventures outside that briny realm to remind herself of what the rest of the world is like. She's been visiting here for a few days now."

The second goddess smiled and inclined her head toward the youth. Zeus smiled back, assaying her quiet beauty. She was more full-figured than Metis, with soft, pale green eyes and long, dark hair. He sensed a mature openness-and approachability-behind her amiable greeting and was very glad he had accompanied Metis here. This new goddess was every bit as attractive as the first one, and not nearly as peculiar.

Dione crossed the little clearing and seated herself on a boulder. When Metis looked around again, she saw that Zeus had gone to stand beside her and that the two were already deeply engaged in conversation. Before she could follow them, Prometheus returned, grinning and waving as he strode out of the forest below. Metis went to meet him.

"I hate to interrupt your holiday like this," he told her. "You know I wouldn't-"

"Don't be silly," she said. "I'm flattered. It seems Mount Othrys can't do without me for more than a single day. Catch your breath, then tell me why you've come."

"Epimetheus has had another fight with Helios. This time he really got himself hurt. Helios had Pallas and Perses along to help him, and they taught my brother a lesson he's not likely to forget-but the wrong lesson, I fear.''

"The wrong lesson?"

"Oh, you know what a dimwit Epimetheus is. He never thinks anything out. He only reacts. And to make matters worse, Menoitios is egging him on."

"He plans revenge?"

Prometheus nodded. "Tonight, if he can drag himself out to find them. What a fool he is, Metis. He can barely walk because of his wounds. He's in no condition to fight anyone, yet-"

Metis frowned. "Does Iapetos know about this yet?"

Prometheus shook his head. "Epimetheus made me promise not to tell our father."

"Bad promises are usually better broken," she observed thoughtfully.

"Epimetheus listens to you, Metis. Will you come back with me and try to talk some sense into him?"

"Sometimes he listens to me, though I fear Menoitios has more influence over him these days than I do. But I'll try. We certainly don't want yet another feud to break out."

Metis turned toward Dione, who seemed even more deeply involved in her conversation with Zeus. "Prometheus and I have to return to Mount Othrys. Since you were planning to come with me when I returned, do you wish to come now? Or would you rather remain here for the present?'"

Zeus glanced apprehensively at Dione, fearing she would want to leave.

"Oh, I think I'll stay," the Okeanid answered. "Philyra and I have barely begun our visit. I have much to say to Cheiron, and our new guest is most interesting...." She glanced toward Zeus and gave him another smile.

"That's best," Philyra agreed, wiping her forehead with her arm. "Let Dione stay, and you can come back when you've straightened out the Titans."

"May I accompany you, mistress?" Alalkomeneus asked. "I haven't been to Mount Othrys in a long while, and we've had little time to spend together of late."

"What of your people? Can they do without their king?"

"Certainly, mistress. They seem to manage quite well without me. Their resourcefulness is a bit disturbing, actually. I sometimes feel they do not really need me at all."

Metis laughed. "Then you most certainly may come. I'll be delighted to have your company. I'm sure Cheiron can do without your instruction for a few days. He can learn about the sea from Dione while you're away."

She retrieved her basket and gently placed Alalkomeneus inside it. A few moments more were spent in kissing Philyra and Cheiron. Finally she turned to say good-bye to Dione and Zeus. They were still talking, and obviously enjoying each other's company greatly.

A flicker of annoyance that she found difficult to explain passed through Metis, and as she watched them an odd thought rose unbidden into her mind: She's flirting with my future husband! The thought startled

her, and she forced herself to laugh. What a ridiculous thing to think concerning this untutored boy. She called to them, waved, then turned quickly to rejoin Prometheus.

Zeus looked back toward them just in time to see huge, owl-like wings sprout from her back, where she had drawn her clothing aside. Prometheus stood a short distance from her, similarly prepared for flight. As the youth watched, their wings stretched and began to beat. A few moments later they were soaring down the mountainside, toward the southwest.

"I must learn to do that!" the boy shouted as he watched them. Then he swung around to face Dione again. "Can we see Mount Othrys from here?" He had already decided that eventually he must make his way there and see the home of the Titans for himself.

Dione nodded. "We have an excellent view from here. It's that broad range in the far distance ahead of them. And if you look that way"-she pointed toward the north-"you can see Mount Olympos towering above all those lesser mountains."

Zeus looked back at the lovely face of the Okeanid. Yes, he thought, there were many places he wanted to visit. But at the moment he was far more interested in being right here, beside this lovely goddess. When she glanced away, he edged a little nearer to her.

Cheiron called out to his mother. "We're low on firewood. I'm going down to the forest to gather more."

Philyra nodded toward her son, then reentered the cave. Suddenly Zeus found himself alone with Dione.

As he turned back toward her, he noticed the stack of firewood nearby. A few sticks remained. On top of the pile lay a stout limb that bore a striking resemblance to a club.

Three

Near the summit of one of the many peaks of Mount Othrys, within the many-towered palace of the Titan Iapetos, Epimetheus limped painfully down a long stone corridor toward the apartment of Menoitios, his youngest brother. A dark cloak draped his broad frame and partly concealed the sword that swung at his side.

Near the end of the corridor he tapped lightly upon a towering wooden door and a voice from within invited him to enter. The massive door swung inward easily at his touch. "Close it behind you," the voice told him from across the room, and he struggled to comply.

A slender, handsome youth with long, dark hair stood near the rear of the chamber, observing his elder's difficulty with a bemused expression. He held a large bull mammoth in front of him, gripped between his two hands. As Epimetheus advanced into the room, the mammoth reared suddenly backwards, trumpeting and lashing left and right with its great tusks.

"There, there, Little Thunder," the young god said soothingly, now shifting his grip so that he could stroke the creature's back with his thumbs without weakening his hold. "It's only Epimetheus. You've no reason to be frightened . . . well, not much reason anyway. He is quite a startling sight, stumbling along like that, I must admit. And his wretched taste in clothing would shock even the most primitive sensibilities, I suppose. . . ."

He grinned playfully as he spoke, then let the corners of his mouth

slide into a frown. "This is a new mammoth. I only captured him yesterday. I almost had him calmed down, too, until you came in."

"What's wrong with my clothes?" Epimetheus asked with great seriousness as he came to a stop a pace or two from the other god. He looked down at his own simple cloak and short chiton, then back at his brother and the intricately bordered garment of finest linen that he wore.

Menoitios laughed. "Nothing's wrong with them-if you don't care how you look. They're so very plain."

Epimetheus shrugged. Just behind Menoitios a row of tall, wide windows admitted light and air; below them a rectangular enclosure had been constructed along the entire length of the wall, its outer edge rising to above the knees of the young god. Epimetheus looked past his brother and down into the enclosure, pausing briefly to study its interior. A whole landscape had been transported from the earth below and reconstructed here in a single narrow strip-low hills and rolling grasslands, a narrow stream that meandered through groves of low-growing juniper and tamarisk and laurel to empty into a small pond at the other end of the terrarium, and animals of many kinds.

"It's coming along nicely, don't you think? Do you see the saber-tooth? I've just added him, too."

Epimetheus nodded, then said, "It's almost time for us to go. You aren't ready yet."

Menoitios bent over the edge of the terrarium and set the mammoth down inside a little clearing. Two other mammoths were still grazing a short distance away, and Little Thunder immediately set off to join them. Menoitios turned and slowly crossed the room. He stretched himself languidly upon a low divan.

"Aren't you going to get ready?" Epimetheus asked.

The youth lay on his side, his upper body supported on many large pillows. "I've been thinking about that since I left you this morning." He spoke slowly, a small, taunting smile playing on his lips. "I've thought a great deal, and I'm no longer certain that I really should go with you. After all, it's you who have a grudge to settle. Helios hasn't done anything to me. Neither has Pallas, nor Perses. ..."

"You said you'd come with me." Epimetheus shifted his weight from one foot to the other, and winced. "You said you'd help me punish them."

Menoitios rolled onto his back and held his hands together above his chest, fingers touching. "Actually, I've always gotten along quite well with all three of them. And I am not in love with Asterie," he continued slowly. "If you hunt them down tonight and repay them for your injuries.... why, you're completely justified. Everyone will say so, and no one will argue the point. But if I do it, I'm merely an interloper- a troublemaker."

"But Pallas and Perses are helping their friend. Why shouldn't you help me? How is that any different?"

"Oh, but it's not the same at all." Menoitios's tone indicated surprise at the comparison. "This isn't the first time you've argued with Pallas or Perses. Isn't that true?"

Epimetheus looked puzzled. "We've argued, but we've never fought before. They're annoying whelps...."

"Well, don't you see? They aren't meddlers helping their friend against his enemy. All three are your enemies, each with his own complaint against you, even if no blows were exchanged prior to last night. That's very different from some uninvolved god stepping in where he has no business. You can see that, can't you?"

Epimetheus nodded uncertainly, and Menoitios smiled. It amused him to toy with his simpleminded brother, and for that reason he had led Epimetheus to believe he would accompany him tonight. Actually he had never intended to expose himself to such unnecessary-and unrewarding-danger. At the moment it amused him to see if he could convince Epimetheus to undertake the mission alone.

"You're right, of course, to feel that they must be punished," Menoitios went on, now intent upon shoring up what he judged to be Epimetheus's wavering resolve. "You look terrible!" he said suddenly, simultaneously frowning and looking sympathetic as he stared at the ugly wound on his brother's forehead. "What cowards they must be, to have kicked you like that when you were already on the ground. Miserable cowards, Epimetheus. No punishment is too great to repay such ill treatment."

"No punishment is too great," Epimetheus repeated. "They should be run off from Mount Othrys."

"Why, if you were to lop off their legs and leave them wallowing among the rocks, you'd be completely within your rights-at least as far as any reasonable god would be concerned. As an added benefit, Helios couldn't very well pester Asterie without his legs, and it'd take a while for them to grow back. Even Father would think you did the right thing, though of course he couldn't say so openly. He always has to try to discourage everyone from fighting. But I know he'd be very proud of you."

"You're right," Epimetheus agreed, his chest expanding a little at the thought. "He couldn't say it, but it would make him proud if I taught them such a lesson."

Menoitios sat up a little. "Actually, now that I think of it, I'd do you a genuine disservice if I accompanied you tonight. I'd selfishly steal away some of the glory that's rightfully yours, and I can't let myself do that. You know, not everyone knows how brave you are."

Epimetheus was listening intently.

"I don't think even Asterie knows how brave you really are. Tell me, have you planned out the evening? How will you exact your vengeance?"

Epimetheus shrugged. "I thought you'd figure out the best way."

Menoitios lowered himself back upon the soft pillows. "I suppose I could offer advice without unduly involving myself." He thought for a few moments. "You must begin with the son of Hyperion, since he's the most dangerous of your adversaries. Yes, go first to the palace of Hyperion. Then, after you've dealt with Helios, you can search out the others. It's almost night now, and you can wait in the darkness for them to venture outside. Let them get well away from their homes, so they can't call for help. If Pallas and Perses leave home together, you'll have to follow them, being careful not to let them see you. Usually they go their separate ways, don't they? I think they do. That's when you'll get your chance. Wait until each one is alone, then challenge him."

As he listened, Epimetheus became more and more excited by his brother's

words. His hand moved to grip the hilt of his sword. "Yes, that's a good plan. I will make them pay terribly for what they've done to me. Perhaps I will cut off their legs!"

Menoitios shook his head suddenly. "No, you mustn't challenge them openly. That wouldn't be fair to you, with your wounded shoulder and leg. You'd merely give them another opportunity to defeat you, perhaps still more viciously. Instead you must attack each one unexpectedly, by stealth. Strike before he even knows he's threatened. Find some hiding place he must walk past, then leap upon him. Anything else puts you at too great a disadvantage.... This vengeance of yours may occupy more than a single night. Have you thought of that?"

Before Epimetheus could answer, a tapping at the door drew their attention.

"Come in," Menoitios called out wearily, without stirring. "By all means, do come in!" He covered a yawn with the back of his hand.

Metis entered, still carrying her basket and with Alalkomeneus riding on her shoulder. Her long peplos flared behind her as she crossed the room briskly. Prometheus followed, struggling to match her pace.

"Oh, good," she cried as she saw Epimetheus. "I was afraid we might be too late. We stopped at your apartment first and found it empty."

She set the basket aside and approached to within a few paces of the older god, her quick eyes surveying him from head to foot. The sword at his side caught her attention, but she did not comment upon it. Finally she said, "You must be in terrible pain. Won't you please sit down?"

Prometheus swung a chair out from its normal position against the wall and placed it behind his brother. Epimetheus sank into it with an expression of gratitude.

Metis leaned over him, first examining the scuffs and cuts that covered one side of his forehead, then the great swollen knot above his knee. Finally she began to gently press her hands against the clothed areas of his body. When he cringed, she pulled aside the material covering his left shoulder and exposed a large, jagged wound. It had reopened at her touch, discharging a few drops of ichor, the thick, translucent fluid that is the immortal blood of the gods.

"Tell me what happened," she said. "Prometheus has already told me some of it, but I want to hear the story from you."

Menoitios had rolled over on his side and was watching them with ill-concealed disdain. He was not fond of Metis, and particularly resented the influence she exerted over his older brothers.

Epimetheus sat for several moments staring at the floor. Finally, feeling Metis's steady gaze upon him and growing more and more uncomfortable in the continuing silence, he muttered, "You know I've been arguing with Helios."

"No," Metis answered, smiling quietly back at him, "I certainly did not know that. If I had, I might have prevented what has happened. Arguing about what?"

When Epimetheus hesitated, Menoitios sat up on the edge of the divan. "Tell her what he said about our father."

Epimetheus shook his head.

"Yes, tell me. What does Helios say about Lord Iapetos?"

Prometheus glared at Menoitios. "Why do you bring that up? It doesn't really have anything to do with this. Besides, everyone says unkind things occasionally."

"Unkind!" Menoitios exclaimed. "Unkind, indeed. Such insults are insufferable and cause enough for a dozen battles."

Metis glanced at Menoitios. "You seem to have suffered those insults easily enough—at least without incurring bodily harm. But what did he say?" she demanded, turning back toward Prometheus.

"He questioned our father's competence as leader of the Titans. I understand he did it in a rather crude and insulting fashion."

Metis frowned. "That's not good. Many of us seem to have frayed tempers these days. Just last week some of the Muses got into a tussle with the Hesperides. Go on, Epimetheus. Are there other reasons for your argument with him?"

"This has been going on for many weeks now." Epimetheus shifted uncomfortably on his chair. "It's real beginning, I suppose, was when Helios realized that I was seeing Asterie. He decided he liked her more than he'd originally thought and tried to get me to step aside. I refused, and words led to blows."

"They've fought a number of times," Prometheus said, "but in the past neither emerged as the clear victor. Someone always stopped the fight."

"Koios's daughter has grown into a lovely maiden," Metis said. "Are you actually courting her?"

Epimetheus looked embarrassed. "Not exactly. But I have been see—"

"I think she was in love with him," Menoitios interrupted. "I saw them together, and her face always had that foolish, lovesick sort of look on it. His chances with her were really quite good, until Helios took an interest in her. I mean, we all know that Epimetheus has many fine characteristics, but good looks aren't among them."

"He's right," Epimetheus said sadly. "Helios is very handsome. I'm afraid he's turned her heart away from me."

"And how did this latest fight occur?"

"They were waiting for me when I went to see Asterie. As I drew near the palace of her father, they jumped at me from the shadows. They tripped me and began to pelt me with stones. When I tried to get up, Helios kicked me in the head. The wooden sole of his sandal did this." He tenderly touched his forehead. "Perses leaped on me and struck me in the shoulder with a big pointed stone. Then Pallas ran up with a great rock and smashed it against my leg, not once but a number of times."

"They were trying to break his leg," Menoitios said. He grinned. "Visiting Asterie would be a difficult matter for one who couldn't walk."

"Are you certain the other gods with Helios were the sons of Crios? You saw them clearly?"

Epimetheus nodded. "I saw them very clearly."

Metis stood thinking for a moment. Then she said, "So now you plan to revenge yourself upon them."

"Of course he does. There's no other honorable course," Menoitios said.

Metis smiled. "Revenge is only sweet when it pains your enemy more than you."

Menoitios had been growing increasingly annoyed at Metis. He stood up, sneering at her. "What should he do, then? Swallow his pride and pretend it didn't happen? Let Helios have Asterie? Why don't you just leave him alone? You probably want him to take his complaint to Iapetos and the Council of Titans, so they can do what they always do about such things-nothing. That's what a coward would do!"

Alalkomeneus had been listening quietly and intently to all that was said, but the arrogance with which the young god addressed his mistress was more than the mortal could tolerate. "Lord Menoitios," he cried, his small voice surprisingly loud in the enormous chamber of the deity. "You forget yourself, my lord. Who are you to speak in such a tone to Lady Metis?"

Menoitios laughed sarcastically. "Who am I, indeed! I'm a god-a Titan! Who are you to address me at all? You forget yourself, creature of blood. This discussion is among gods. You belong over there, with the rest of the animals."

He swung around and pointed at the terrarium, then strode quickly to it. Reaching in, he drew out a snarling saber-toothed tiger and carried it back toward them, holding it by the scruff of the neck and dangling a divine finger in front of the infuriated beast. The god grinned maliciously as it swatted and snapped at the provocative digit.

He stopped just in front of Metis and glared at the man on her shoulder. "You've spent so much time among the immortals that you've forgotten your mortality. That can be easily remedied." He thrust the tiger at him, so that it hissed directly into his face.

Metis reacted instantly, striking Menoitios's hand aside. The animal arched away, spinning across the room. With a shriek Menoitios lunged after it, but he was too late. The great cat had already struck the stone floor.

"Look what you've done!" he cried as he carefully picked up the dying creature and cradled it in his cupped hands. He turned on Metis in a rage, his lips trembling and tears of anger glistening in his eyes. "You shouldn't have done that. I'm not ever going to forget you did that!" He glared at Alalkomeneus. "And you'd better keep your little friend away from me, or he'll wind up where he belongs"-he gestured toward the terrarium-"in the belly of one of my bears or lions or jackals. Now get out of here. I don't want you in my rooms anymore."

Metis met his gaze calmly, to all outward appearances completely unruffled. "Touch this man, Menoitios," she said quietly, "and you'll learn just what kind of vengeance I do countenance."

She felt Prometheus's hand on her arm and looked toward him. "Let's go," he said softly.

They both turned toward Epimetheus, but he was no longer in his chair-or anywhere else in the room. Prometheus ran toward the outer door. Metis scooped up her basket and followed just behind him.

"The fool!" Prometheus cried. "He must have gone to find Helios and the others."

Four

"But certainly you must know that", the Okeanid Dione continued pleasantly, smiling yet again into the handsome face of the divine youth who sat beside her. "Is it truly possible that you've never heard of the Nereids? Why, all the world praises the beauty and grace of the daughters of King Nereus and Queen Doris—who happens to be yet another of my sisters."

"All the world knows them, perhaps," Zeus replied, grinning sheepishly, "except me. I must be terribly ignorant."

She laughed. "At least you admit the possibility. I've known quite a few gods and goddesses who'd far rather pretend perfection than admit to a single tiny failing." She leaned her head to one side, studying his clear eyes, finely shaped nose, and perfectly formed mouth. "But I'm not sure I believe you. I think you know a good bit more than you let on."

The ocean goddess was enjoying herself. She appreciated the companionship of the charming young god and was pleased that she had chosen to remain here with him on Mount Pelion, at the home of her sister. The boy offered a welcome opportunity to escape, however briefly, the gloomy atmosphere that so often surrounded Philyra and her son. Of course Dione could have accepted Metis's invitation to visit Mount Othrys, but that would have meant abandoning her effort to bring a little cheer into Philyra's otherwise dreary existence. Zeus provided a temporary respite, one that she could enjoy in good conscience since it did not require her to completely abandon her sister and nephew. And, too, it would not hurt at all for Cheiron to be exposed to the company of someone his own age, if she could arrange to get the youths to talk to each other.

She and Zeus had been sitting quite close together, but now the boy slid still nearer, so that their bodies were actually touching, and his arm slipped around her waist from the rear. Dione's expression indicated her surprise.

"Oh, you are a frisky one, aren't you?" she cried. Reaching around behind her back, she took hold firmly of his arm and removed it from her body. Then she moved farther away from him on the boulder. This unexpected display of amorous intent, which she had not foreseen at all, had startled her; but she was flattered as well. Had some other, older god acted in a similarly familiar manner, she would have rebuked him instantly and firmly. But this boy was another matter. His youth and inexperience—not to mention his boyish good looks and charm—made it easy to overlook what in others would have constituted an outright affront.

"You may not know much about Mount Othrys or the Kingdom of Nereus," she said, laughing, "but I'll wager no one's ever called you slow. Tell me, son of Amaltheia, do the nymphs back where you live allow such uninvited liberties?"

"There aren't many nymphs there, and none that I know well enough to talk to like this."

"Ha! And here I thought you were different. I see you aren't at all. You lie and evade just as facilely as all the other gods. A handsome youth like you—I'll bet they come to your cave in droves, every last one

begging you to kiss her!"

He looked away, neither confirming nor denying, and Dione decided she enjoyed teasing him.

"Come now, you can tell me the truth. How many have you kissed?"

She was grinning expectantly, waiting for his answer so that she could throw back some similar remark. But when he looked up his great deep eyes caught hers and held them, and when he spoke a chill ran through her-whether of gladness or alarm, she could not tell.

"Certainly none as beautiful as you."

His wonderful eyes and winning remark seemed to hold her mesmerized for a few moments, and when she shook herself free of them she realized to her consternation that he had edged back toward her, and that now he had both his arms about her and his lips were descending toward hers.

"Oh," she cried, pushing against his chest, "please stop! What are you doing?"

But he did not desist, and she turned her head aside at the last moment so that his kiss landed on her cheek instead. She laughed despite herself.

All this time Zeus had managed to keep himself carefully under control; but the touch of her divine flesh was too much for him. The more she struggled to extricate herself from his embrace, the more tightly he held her. The more she twisted away to keep her lips from his, the more determined he became to taste them. Now he crushed her to him, felt the sweet softness of her breasts and the fiery heat of her body against his chest.

Dione was laughing no more. "You know this isn't right," she said firmly, still trying to push him away. "Really now, you must stop this instant! My sister will come back out any moment, and Cheiron will return soon."

His face still wore that same charming-almost reassuring-smile. In her struggle to free herself, she slid from the boulder. Instead of trying to pull her back up, he followed her down, still holding her tightly in his arms; and now she found herself lying beneath him at full length upon the rocky ground.

"Stop this instant, I tell you, or I'll call Philyra. Perhaps they do things this way where you come from, but they most certainly don't among the great gods. You must let me go- immediately!"

He was still trying to kiss her. Each time his mouth drew near she turned away. His face weaved back and forth above hers, searching for an opportunity to complete the kiss she kept denying him.

At last she said, "If I kiss you, will you release me?"

Zeus briefly considered her offer, then said, "Yes."

"You promise?"

He nodded.

Dione turned back to face him, her mouth undefended. Her eyes were open, but she closed them as their lips met. His kiss was pleasant, she

thought, very pleasant indeed-gentle, but also hungry, insistent. When he drew away, she looked up again.

"That was nice," she said softly, smiling at him. "Not proper at all, any of this, but still quite nice. I wonder where you learned-or is it a natural talent?" She stretched up and gave him another kiss, a gratuitous peck. "Now, be a proper young god and let me up."

She might as well have asked a thunderstorm to unleash but one drop of rain or the storm-lashed sea to cast but a single tentative wave against the beach. Before she could foresee the danger, his mouth plunged down upon hers again and stayed there, devouring her.

She gasped and fought to turn away, but only at first. Something strange and wonderful and terrible was happening inside her, and her resistance diminished. Instead of fighting back with all her strength, she found herself becoming pliant before his ever growing insistence. Somewhere, dimly, she became aware that his hands were no longer gripping her so tightly, that instead they were stroking and squeezing and surveying her body.

The whole thing was amazing. It was outrageous. Nothing even remotely similar had ever happened to her. It was madness! Here she was, with a god barely past his childhood, lying on the ground outside the home of her sister-with her sister no more than twenty paces away. Young Cheiron was nearby too, perhaps even within sight of them. They could be discovered at any moment, and yet when she remembered that she should tear herself away from him, that she should cry out for help-something within her suggested other, less proper responses. Instead of struggling, she acquiesced to his kisses and began to consider outright surrender.

But then Zeus was gone. She opened her eyes and looked up to see Cheiron standing over them, his powerful equine legs planted firmly apart and an angry scowl on his face. He had taken hold of Zeus by one arm and yanked him back from Dione, then thrown him against the rocky side of the mountain. Now, as she watched, Zeus came to his feet. He pulled up around him his long cloak, which had slipped from his shoulders while scuffling with the Okeanid, and prepared to defend himself. The two youths stood glaring at one another belligerently.

Dione rose quickly too. Her instinct was to protect Zeus and to try to explain away the outrageous scene Cheiron had witnessed; but as she stood there watching them glower and size up one another, she was overwhelmed by a full realization of what had just happened-or almost happened-and her embarrassment became acute.

Cheiron had returned with an armful of firewood-long, stout pieces, some of them actually full-grown trees from which the god had stripped branches and leaves. He had tossed them aside as he neared the couple on the ground, but now he reached down and hefted a heavy bough, holding it back above his head, ready to strike.

"You are a guest here," Cheiron told Zeus, and Dione was surprised at the forcefulness of his tone; usually the boy was extremely soft-spoken and seemed shy if not timid. He looked anything but timid now; his face was black with restrained fury. "How dare you repay our hospitality in this way?"

Dione noticed that Philyra had just returned and was standing near the mouth of the cave,

"What's happened, Cheiron?" she demanded. "What has this boy done?"

"He attacked Dione while we were gone. I found him holding her down on the ground."

Philyra looked quickly at Dione, whose dusty and rumpled clothing verified Cheiron's accusation. A moment before Philyra had looked bone-weary, almost lifeless; now she was galvanized into action. "You vile creature!" she cried. "You beast!" Her eyes darted about, and she swooped up a water pail from near the entrance of the cave and flung it at Zeus.

The boy dodged to one side, so that the pail struck the ground a short distance behind him and then rolled off the ledge and bounced down a steep incline. But by now Philyra had found other missiles among the wood Cheiron had brought, and set herself to hurling them one after the other toward him.

"Leave us. Go back wherever you came from. We want no rutting animals here. We won't stand for it. Do you understand? We won't stand for it!" To punctuate each thought she threw another missile.

Zeus could not dodge them all, and to escape he had to flee between Cheiron and Philyra. As he darted forward, Cheiron swung at him—a heavy blow that struck his shoulder and almost sent him to his knees; but he managed to keep running and a few moments later was heading down the path that led from the cave.

Dione watched him go. Though she realized that none of what had happened was really her fault, she found herself feeling sad and somehow guilty. For that matter, she reasoned, it probably wasn't the boy's fault either, really. He had grown up far from divine society and was ignorant of the conventions of proper conduct. Unless he were careful, he might easily find himself in even worse trouble elsewhere. He was such a handsome, charming boy, she thought wistfully; she couldn't help liking him, and was sorry to see him leave... despite everything.

Philyra and Cheiron stood together near the edge of the high ledge before their home. When Zeus finally disappeared within the forest below, Philyra laid a hand on her son's arm and patted him gently. "You did well, Cheiron," she said, and when he leaned down to her, she hugged him briefly.

Dione watched them. As far as she could remember, it was the first time she had ever heard Philyra praise her son, or seen her show him affection of any sort.

Once out of range of Philyra's wrath, Zeus slowed his pace. This part of the mountain was thickly clad in tall pine trees.

He did not recognize the trail he was following and could not see very far in any direction; therefore he could only hope he was traveling back toward the area where he had last seen Pan. As he walked, he became more and more dejected. With the exception of a few brief rests, he had been walking all day. He was hungry, too, not having eaten since breakfast, and wished Dione had offered to feed him before things got out of hand. Pan was carrying their supply of ambrosia, and for this reason alone he was anxious to rejoin his brother. It might take hours to locate Pan; for that matter, he might not be able to find him at all. Still, there was nothing else he could do but keep looking. Tired, hungry, and frustrated, he went on sullenly, feeling sorry for himself.

While he walked he began to run over in his mind the events of the day. Eventually he remembered the manner in which Metis and Prometheus had departed from Mount Pelion and his earlier resolve to learn to fly. Just having something else to think about improved his spirits, and he began looking for a large clearing where he might attempt a similar feat. At last he found such a place, a number of steep, rolling hills covered with thick grass, and he paused there, wondering how to begin. They had made it look quite easy. But how did one cause his body to metamorphose in such an interesting and useful way?

He stripped off his cloak, which served as his only article of clothing, folded the long rectangular piece of cloth once- along its length-then wrapped and knotted it about his loins, so that his shoulders would not be encumbered. Closing his eyes, he focused his mind in the general vicinity of his shoulder blades and envisioned wings sprouting there. At first he was aware only of a slight ticklish sensation and thought he had failed, but an instant later he started to topple backwards and had to throw back a foot to recover his balance. Something struck against his thigh and he twisted around to see what it was.

The wings were huge, with enormous golden plumes that glistened like bronze even in the long rays of the evening sun. He moved them tentatively, first stretching them out to their widest breadth then folding them forward, around him, so that he could more easily examine the tips. Controlling them proved to be easy, requiring no more mental effort than moving his arms, but the pattern of movements was unfamiliar. With a joyous cry, he turned and started to run down the steep hill, stretching the wings and making them begin to beat.

But if growing wings and moving them was easy, actually flying was not, as he discovered within moments. No sooner did his feet leave the ground than his knees and elbows found it again-painfully. He had raised one wing when he should have lowered it; still, he was having a great deal of fun and would not be put off by a few scrapes and scratches. Jumping back up, he tried again . . . and again . . . and again. When he finally careened into the trees at the bottom of the hills, he ran back up so that he could start over. It was exciting and exhilarating, and it made him forget his hunger.

Within half an hour he was able to rise above the treetops and circle there, scanning the lower hills and more distant mountains for Pan. Then, growing more daring, he flew off in the direction he thought most promising, his great eagle wings gliding on the wind. He found that by traveling higher he could see to greater distances, and should he fumble, there was more time to right his mistake. Twice he miscalculated, plunging downward toward the spikelike treetops; but each time he managed to undo his error and swoop back upward just before striking. Zeus learned quickly, and seldom made the same mistake twice.

Nowhere could he detect any sign of Pan, and so he turned toward Mount Othrys, which he could see clearly in the distance. He very much wanted to visit the home of the Titans. If Dione and Metis were any indication, the goddesses he would find there would make the journey amply worthwhile.

Five

"Do you really think he'll come?" Pallas asked. He stood beside a wide window within the palace of the Titan Hyperion, looking out into the growing darkness.

"Oh, yes," a rich, bemused voice said from behind him. "If not tonight,

then tomorrow, or the night after."

"He may not be able to come tonight," a third voice commented, adding an unpleasant laugh.

Pallas, the son of the Titan Crios and the sea goddess Eurybie, turned and looked across the room toward Perses, his elder brother. "Do you really think we hurt him that badly?"

"Oh, we did him damage, all right. I have no doubt of that. Don't you agree, Helios?"

Helios, whom they had come to visit, was still dressing. Surrounded by a half dozen flaming braziers that he had arranged for this purpose, he stood before a large mirror of polished bronze, slowly turning to view himself from one angle and then from another. Perses hovered nearby, openly admiring the sartorial splendor of the son of Hyperion.

"True," Helios agreed at last, after the younger gods had decided that their magnificent host must be too preoccupied to hear them, or that their remarks were not worthy of his consideration. "True indeed. We may have disabled him more severely than we intended. But in time his wounds will heal, and then he'll come searching for us. We need only wait." As he spoke he leaned his head to the left, to observe the effect of the movement upon his straight, shoulder-length blond hair, which glistened like silver in the firelight.

"I hope he brings his brothers with him," Pallas said enthusiastically. "I know you said he'll come alone, but I hope not."

Helios bestowed an indulgent look upon the youth. "I, too, would like nothing better than to speed things along, but however much we may wish to permanently settle our affairs with Iapetos's sons, we must be patient. Epimetheus may have the intelligence of an ox, but Prometheus certainly isn't stupid. If anything, he'll try to prevent his brother from facing us. He knows what a fuss it all will lead to in front of the Council, with Hyperion and Crios vigorously defending us and nobody willing to do anything."

He turned toward Perses, spreading his arms and displaying his apparel. "What do you think? Am I not the height of elegance?"

His long chiton fell in graceful, carefully arranged folds, sporting an elaborate border of golden fringe. Around his shoulders he wore a similarly fringed cloak, which was fastened about his neck with a large golden clasp that bore the likeness of a falcon.

"It's wonderful," Perses said. "The little golden tufts at the edges are spectacular. Are they your idea?"

Helios nodded, making no attempt to conceal the intense pleasure he derived from such admiration. He had spent many long hours mastering the most interesting and rakish ways to attire himself and knew that Perses was only expressing the plain truth.

"Who made it for you? Can we have similar ones made for us?" Pallas asked.

"Of course, my friends. I'll see to it. We three will be the envy of all the younger gods of Mount Othrys."

"We already are," Pallas observed.

"Then we'll make them still more envious with our tasseled finery."

Perses dropped into a large, cushioned chair. They were silent for nearly a minute; then he said, "The more I think about it, the more convinced I am that you're right, Helios. What a feeble age we live in! How different it must have been when Kronos ruled the world. No petty bickering, no weak and ineffectual Council of Titans." He sneered the final words, eliciting an appreciative laugh from his brother across the room. "Instead we had an all-powerful king-one mind and guiding hand, a single will, ready and able to crush all discord and dissent. I don't know how we've endured this long with such fumbling, inept leadership."

Helios had turned back to his mirror and was putting the final touches on his appearance. "But we haven't actually endured it, Perses. It's taken its toll. The evidence is all around us. Look at the Titans today. They've lost all initiative. They live their lives from day to day, and I suppose they consider themselves happy, but they're merely drifting. They have no direction, no ambition. Of course that's not true of all of them-of my father, for instance-but Hyperion is the rare exception. It's sad, when you consider all the grand achievements of the past and how drab everything is today."

"But will anything change if we succeed in discrediting Iapetos? I'm not sure that any other leader of the Council could do much better," Perses said thoughtfully. "It's so difficult for them to change things. If anyone makes a suggestion, the Council simply talks it to death. Certainly Iapetos is inept, but even your father would be hard pressed to move that pack of sluggards."

Helios at last swung away from the mirror. "It's safe enough to think such things, Perses, but it would be wise to speak them softly, even among the most trusted of friends. If nothing more, it could prove inconvenient to be overheard."

"What do you mean?" Pallas asked. He still stood beside the window, glancing out every few seconds while listening to them. "Are you two talking about what I think you're talking about?"

"Probably," Helios said. "Does the notion distress you?"

"It's treason," the youth said softly. "It's the one crime above all others that the Titans have sworn not to tolerate."

Helios laughed. "What do you think they would do if they somehow learned of our conversation? Or, for that matter, if we even made such an attempt and failed?"

"They'd talk about it!" Perses cried, and the three of them collapsed in laughter.

"But can it be done?" Pallas went on. "To bring back the monarchy-it's unthinkably daring. ..."

Helios drew a heavy armchair out from the wall and sat down too.

"Daring, yes. But not unthinkable. I've been thinking about it for a very long time now. What we've been up to recently, working in whatever way we can to embarrass and discredit Iapetos-through his sons now and more directly later-is only a first step toward a solution. Iapetos must be replaced as leader of the Council of Titans, but the Council itself must also be replaced. We must have a king again. All these endless debates and timid vote-castings sap us of the very spirit that once made us great, and we'll never be free of them until we're free of the

Council."

"But who'll be our new king?" Perses asked hesitantly, already knowing the answer.

Helios looked carefully at him. "Who is most suited of all the Titans?"

"Hyperion? We've been discussing him as the new leader of the Council."

"What do you think, Pallas?" Helios asked.

"I can think of no better choice."

Helios nodded. "It's difficult for me to view him objectively, of course, since he's my father, but everything I know about the Titans leads me to believe that no one could do a better job."

"No other god could do even half as well," Perses observed, "...except, of course, for Kronos himself." The last few words slipped out without adequate forethought, and as soon as he said them, Perses wished he had not. He greatly admired Helios--almost worshipped him in his boyish way--and did not want to offend him.

The thought seemed to stun Helios, and he took a long time before answering. "No," he said slowly, "the Titans would never accept Kronos. They'd sooner wallow in mediocrity than submit again to his rule. If we're to have a king again, it must be a new king, and Hyperion is our only choice."

Both Pallas and Perses nodded their agreement.

Pallas looked back out the window. It was night now. After a moment he said, "I think I see someone down there." He leaned farther out, and both Perses and Helios left their chairs and crossed the room to join him.

"Where?" Helios demanded. "Point to him."

Pallas pointed across a narrow path toward a grove of towering cypress trees that grew on the slopes above the Palace of Hyperion. "I saw something move in there, near the rocks. I don't know how he got so near without my seeing him sooner."

"Step back a little, you two. We don't want to be seen ourselves."

Pallas and Perses complied. They squatted down beside the window with their eyes just above the sill. Helios stood beside them, peering out from one side of the opening.

"There--do you see?" Pallas demanded, pointing again.

"Yes," Helios said. "He's just within the grove, standing between two trees."

"Do you think it's Epimetheus?" Perses asked.

"Who else would be skulking about in the dark like that, in front of this palace? Who else would have reason?"

The sons of Crios nodded slowly. "So you were right," Perses continued. "The fool has come by himself." He laughed. "Well, why are we waiting? Let's go down and meet him."

Helios continued to stare down at the barely discernable figure. He had

been certain Epimetheus would not appear tonight, but managed to conceal his surprise from his companions. "What a dolt he is! Anyone with the smallest modicum of sense would have waited. He can't have recovered from his wounds yet. Look, he's moving across the grove, hoping to find a better place to stand, I guess. Do you see how he moves? He's limping. There, he stumbled!"

He left the window and began to pace the room. "This isn't good. If we attack him, we could undo ourselves. He's already injured and isn't properly able to defend himself. The oaf! The simpleton!" He stamped his foot in anger and frustration.

"I don't understand," Pallas said. "If he wants to take such a risk, why shouldn't we take advantage of his misjudgment?"

"It's very simple. However pleasant it might be to poke him full of holes, we must keep our goal in mind. If we can goad Iapetos's sons into acting impetuously, we discredit Iapetos. If we can sow dissension between Iapetos and the other Titans, that too advances our goal. What happened last night was anything but clear-cut. He'll say we attacked him, but we'll claim he attacked us first. Who's to know what the truth is? But if we fight Epimetheus tonight, we'll be branded villains. He can barely walk! There'll be no doubt that we took advantage of him."

"Then what shall we do?" Perses asked.

"Let me think. There must be some way to twist this to our advantage."

"It may already be too late," Pallas announced. He alone was still staring out into the night, and now the others came back beside him.

"What is it? What do you see?" Helios demanded.

"Look down the path, toward the Palace of Mnemosyne. Do you see who's coming this way?"

Helios and Perses peered in that direction.

"It looks like Prometheus," Helios said with annoyance. "I can't tell who's with him, though."

"It's a goddess," Perses said. "Metis, probably. They're often together. They must be looking for Epimetheus. And I think he sees them now.'"

There was movement in the grove, and for a moment they clearly glimpsed a lurching figure that made its way awkwardly away from the path and deeper among the trees.

As Helios and his companions watched from above, Metis and Prometheus approached rapidly. They paused outside the palace, peering into the shadows near the walls of the building. Then they crossed the path and searched briefly near the outside of the grove. Finally, unable to find the god they sought, they continued on, following the path toward the Palace of Crios.

Just as they were leaving, Helios became aware of another figure; it was farther away, hidden from Metis and Prometheus by intervening trees but clearly visible to the watchers high within the Palace of Hyperion.

"Who is that?" Pallas asked. "I don't recognize him."

Helios did not recognize the newcomer either. He watched as the figure of a youth, probably no older than Perses, stood briefly in the bright

torchlight that flooded from a nearby building, then proceeded slowly toward them upon the same path that Prometheus and Metis were following. More than once the boy paused, evidently to study the huge structures he was passing.

Helios glanced toward the grove where Epimetheus was hiding, then back toward the approaching youth, who was still a fair distance away. "Do you think you could reach this stranger before Metis and Prometheus get within sight of him?" he asked Pallas.

"I could circle around to the rear, behind the bluff. I'd have to leave immediately, though, and fly most of the way."

"Then do it. Talk to this new god, make friends with him, and bring him back here by a route that will keep Epimetheus from seeing him."

Pallas nodded his understanding, crossed the room, and left without another word.

"What are you planning?" Perses asked excitedly.

"Have you no idea?"

Perses shook his head.

Helios grinned. "Neither do I, really-not yet. But certainly there must be some way to utilize this newcomer to Mount Othrys. If, for instance, Epimetheus were to attack him suddenly, without provocation-certainly that would be an embarrassment to Iapetos. Don't you think so?"

Six

As Zeus approached Mount Othrys, the mountain loomed ahead of him, not a single peak but a broad range that stretched more than sixty miles from east to west. He flew higher now, over thick forests that grew among the hills and clung to the high mountain slopes, across wide valleys and narrow canyons teeming with animal life. He had traveled quite far and was deep within the range when at last he came upon a peak that rose more than a mile into the sky, and as the last rays of sunlight faded, he glided down toward the home of the Titans.

What he found took his breath away. All his life he had heard stories of the Titans and Mount Othrys, but those stories utterly failed to suggest the magnitude of the divine community. Alighting near the edge of the settlement, he moved forward slowly, marveling at the vista that stretched before him-up, down, and around the summit of the mountain. Towering edifices of many designs rose from amid lush orchards and gardens. There were smaller, no less imposing structures as well, and meandering brooks and pools of clear spring water that glistened in the distance.

Coming upon a winding walkway paved with huge flat stones of many colors, he followed it slowly past building after building, some with wide-open entrances that looked in upon vast, brightly lit chambers crowded with talking, laughing deities. The temptation to seek admittance was great, but he went on instead, following the stone path around the mountaintop.

He had been walking for some time when a young god appeared just ahead of him with his right hand raised in greeting.

"Hail! My friends and I saw you over here and thought you might be a stranger, in need of guidance." Pallas smiled at him pleasantly. "Am I

right? Are you a traveler, newly come to Mount Othrys?"

Zeus smiled back. "Yes. I've come to see the home of the Titans for myself. That's all right, isn't it? I probably should have arrived earlier, before dark, but--"

"Certainly it's all right. Your late arrival has inconvenienced no one but yourself. All the gods of the broad earth are welcome guests on Mount Othrys--save only the few who've been barred for one reason or another," Pallas added with a laugh. "I trust you're not one of those."

Zeus shook his head quickly.

"I thought not. You look as though you've traveled quite some distance. You must be tired. Perhaps hungry and thirsty as well. If you'd like to come with me, I'll take you to the home of a friend. He's always interested in meeting newcomers, and I'm sure you'll enjoy yourself and learn a great deal. Will you come with me?"

"Yes, thank you," Zeus said, quite pleased and a little surprised; since leaving his island home he had encountered a remarkable degree of kindness and courtesy among the great gods. "I am hungry and thirsty, and I'd be delighted to talk with your friend. Please lead the way."

"It would be a good bit faster-easier, too-if we flew. Do you mind?"

Actually Zeus felt he had done quite enough flying for one day, but would have been embarrassed to admit that. He glanced over his shoulder and was surprised to discover that the wings that had brought him to Mount Othrys were no longer present; evidently his body had returned to its natural shape as soon as he stopped thinking about them-which was something he would need to remember in the future. Again he concentrated upon his back, then stretched out his wings and followed his new companion. They flew down along the side of the nearby building, then swung out over a wide grove and across a narrow gorge. The route seemed curiously circuitous, but since he was unfamiliar with the area, Zeus did not question it. He traveled slowly, still uncertain of his newly acquired skill, and the other god adjusted his speed accordingly.

Pallas led him to the Palace of Hyperion, and the two alighted upon a high balcony. Zeus stumbled as he landed, but was pleased to realize that the other god seemed not to have noticed. He paused to arrange his cloak in what he considered a more suitable fashion, then followed the youth into the palace.

Pallas walked ahead of him, glancing back occasionally. Zeus proceeded more slowly, looking at everything they passed. The wide corridor was lit by many torches, each sitting in a golden sconce shaped like the hand and arm of a god. The high walls were brightly colored, and many bore startling likenesses of gods and animals. Zeus even marveled at the smoothness of the marble flagstones beneath his bare feet.

"Here we are," Pallas announced at last, swinging open a tall door to reveal the enormous chamber beyond. He stood to one side and allowed the newcomer to precede him. As Zeus entered, a tall, handsome god with long blond hair strode toward him.

"Come in! We've been hoping you'd pay us a visit. I am Helios, the son of Hyperion, and you are welcome in the home of my father."

Zeus nodded his appreciation and Helios introduced Perses, who was standing near the broad window at the other side of the chamber. While his host went to bring a chair and a small, three-legged table from near

the wall, Zeus stood dazzled, gazing about the lavishly furnished chamber, which was prodigally decked in gold and ivory.

Pallas came up beside him and Zeus whispered, "Is this god a Titan?"

Pallas laughed. "Yes, Helios is indeed a Titan-a Titan of the second generation. So are my brother and I." His voice did not fail to communicate a sense of pride.

From across the room Helios laughed too. "But Pallas neglects to tell you one significant fact-he's actually only half a Titan, since his mother is a sea goddess. An understandable oversight, but one I'm determined not to let him forget. I, on the other hand, am the son of a Titan father and a Titan mother."

Pallas grimaced, but did not seem to take serious offense.

"Here," Helios continued, positioning the chair and table almost in the center of the room. "Sit. Make yourself comfortable, please. Pallas will bring refreshments, and then we can talk in comfort. I'm always interested in learning about the gods who live below. Tell me, my new friend-who are you? What is your name? Where do you come from?"

Zeus sat and answered the Titan willingly. Helios pulled up another chair and table for himself, and Pallas returned a few moments later with large goblets of glistening red nectar and a bowl nearly overflowing with golden stalks of ambrosia. Zeus ate hungrily.

"How interesting everything must be, back in the land from which you come. You called it Crete, didn't you? I'm not sure I've ever heard of that island," Helios continued after Zeus had answered most of his questions. "Here-you need more nectar. Pallas, please attend to it. You see, son of Amaltheia, all gods are welcome among us."

Zeus was enjoying himself greatly. He had not realized the great hunger that had built up inside him for new sights and experiences such as those he had found today-for companionship, too. He had never known such good fellowship before today. Pan had been his constant companion since infancy, but Pan could be quite a disagreeable fellow at times and they often argued over trivial things. To be among such amiable deities as these was truly delightful, and he congratulated himself on his decision to seek out Mount Othrys.

Helios was enjoying the evening too. As they talked, he studied the youthful newcomer and decided that this backward lout would suit his purposes well. With almost every other word he uttered, Zeus betrayed his total ignorance not only of Othrys and the Titans, but of divine society in general. He seemed to know virtually nothing, and Helios was very glad indeed that he had sent Pallas to fetch him. He could hardly have found a more promising dupe with which to harass and befuddle Epimetheus-and thereby Iapetos.

Just then Perses left his post at the window and came up behind the Titan. He leaned down and whispered in his ear. "Epimetheus has left the grove. He must have grown tired of waiting."

"Keep watching him," Helios whispered back fiercely. "See where he goes."

Zeus had been talking to Pallas and seemed not to notice. Annoyed now that his little endeavor might be thwarted, Helios sat in silence while the two young gods continued their conversation. After a few minutes

though, he left his chair and went to join Perses. They stood close together, whispering back and forth.

"Can you still see him?" he asked.

"Yes, though he's trying to avoid being seen. He's staying in the shadows, off the path. Look across from the Palace of Koios."

"Yes, I see him. Good. He hasn't given up. He must have decided I'd already left for the evening, and so he's gone instead to wait in front of Asterie's home-thinking I'd probably be there. Very good-perhaps even better!"

He returned to Zeus, who was now watching him. "Please forgive me, my new friend," the Titan said as he resumed his seat. "I'm afraid I'm involved tonight in a little ... unpleasantness. I hate even to mention it. There really isn't any reason to trouble a guest about it...."

Zeus gestured in a way that indicated he would not mind listening.

"The reason Perses hasn't joined us, but instead remains over at the window, is that he's keeping watch for me. There is a Titan-his name is Epimetheus-who has sworn to do me harm, and earlier this evening we thought we saw him. skulking about outside. But really, I don't want to impose my trouble on you. This is your first visit to Mount Othrys. It should be a time for pleasantries, not--"

"No, no, please," Zeus said-just as Helios hoped he would. "I'm very interested in hearing about it. I know so little of the great gods that all their doings hold my attention. Please tell me."

Helios settled back into his chair and took a sip from his own goblet before continuing. "There's really nothing very complicated or particularly interesting about it. I'm sure similar things must happen where you live. Epimetheus is in love with Asterie, the daughter of Lord Koios, but Asterie is in love with me. Since he can't fathom any goddess not loving him, Epimetheus calculates that the whole thing must be my fault. He's convinced himself that if it weren't for me, beautiful Asterie would be his, and so he hates me beyond reason. It's most annoying, and very inconvenient at times."

"This goddess," Zeus asked, "is she a Titaness? What does she look like?"

Helios smiled indulgently. "Yes, she is a second-generation Titan, as I am. Anyway, we thought we noticed Epimetheus outside earlier this evening, hoping to catch me with a surprise attack, but we weren't certain. Just now Perses came over to tell me that he's now sure, and that Epimetheus has departed-to hide instead near the entrance to the Palace of Koios, Asterie's father. And to make matters worse, my father has forbidden me to fight him."

"How odd," Zeus observed, taking another handful of ambrosia from the large golden bowl. "Why did he do that?"

"To please his brother Iapetos, who is Epimetheus's father. My father knows I could best the lout easily. I've done it more than once, but it would cause a terrible row among the Titans just now. Of course he really doesn't understand the situation, or what an affront Epimetheus's protestations of love are to Asterie. She's tried to discourage him kindly, but still he persists. It really makes me very angry. And, of course, I need to find some way to warn Asterie, so that she won't venture out tonight. I hate to think about the possibilities, after what

happened the last time Epimetheus saw her. ..."

"What happened?" Zeus asked with great interest.

Helios ignored his question. "I can't send Pallas or Perses to her. Epimetheus knows they're my friends, and he's scuffled with them in the past over me. Besides, he'd probably guess they bore a message from me, and that might well enrage him. He can be very violent when enraged. I really don't know what to do, and so I'm not the attentive host I should be tonight. My mind is far too concerned with Asterie's safety."

"Asterie must be very beautiful," Zeus said.

"Oh, yes-gorgeous. She's the most beautiful of all the Titanesses of the second generation, at least as far as I'm concerned. As you can see, I'm very much in love with her."

Zeus was looking toward the window, watching Perses. Nearly a minute passed in silence while Helios waited expectantly.

When the young god made no move to continue the conversation, Helios said, "An idea has just occurred to me. Would it be possible that you could deliver such a message forme?"

Zeus looked back at him. "Why, of course. Someone would have to show me how to find Asterie's home, though, since I have no idea where it is."

"Nothing could be easier. You can see it from the window. Come, I'll show you," Taking Zeus by the arm, he led him across the room. "Of course, I'll have to loan you some of my clothing before you go. You really can't go dressed like that-pardon my candor for saying so. You won't mind wearing some of my things, will you? I'm sure I can fit you out in style."

The Cretan god shook his head quickly. "No, I won't mind at all. I'll do whatever you think necessary. Do you know, I don't believe I've ever seen anyone who was gorgeous before."

Seven

"What do you plan, Helios" Perses whispered a few minutes later, after they had pointed out the Palace of Koios to the youth. Helios had pulled out to the middle of the room a large chest filled with clothing and Pallas was helping the newcomer sort through it.

"Can't you guess?" the older god asked. "What could be more damaging to Iapetos than to have one of his sons assault an innocent visitor to Othrys, with no provocation at all?"

"But why should he do that? Do you think he'll mistake Zeus for you just because he's in your clothes? Is that the idea? Won't he notice the difference in size? You're taller than this boy and good bit heavier."

Helios shrugged. "It's night. Besides, Epimetheus has never been noted for his keen observation, and he's already had time to grow impatient. Do you think he's in any mood to carefully scrutinize someone who's wearing my clothes and headed toward Asterie's home?"

"But he may notice. You can't be certain he won't-and then what?"

"Certainty in anything is a rare luxury," the Titan replied sententiously. "But don't fret. I think we can tip the balance more in our favor. And if I should be wrong, what have I lost?"

"Well, that's true," Perses agreed uncertainly. "If your plan fails, we're none the worse, I suppose, and if you succeed, Iapetos will have much to explain and live down."

Helios nodded. "But not enough. All this is amusing play, but only a very small step on a long path. Still, a most amusing and enjoyable step."

He strolled back toward the middle of the room, where Zeus and Pallas stood together. "How are we progressing?"

"This is most nice," Zeus said, holding up a long, thick cloak. "May I wear it?"

Helios shook his head. "No, I think not-it might do for a jaunt about the countryside, but not for a mission such as yours tonight. You may well meet Asterie's parents, Lord Koios and Lady Phoibe. Don't you want to appear at your most presentable? Let me select for you."

"Would you?" Zeus asked, quite pleased. "I'd like that. I know I have very much to learn and would greatly appreciate your instruction."

Helios sorted quickly through the garments, hesitated over a brightly colored chiton, then tossed it aside. Instead he went to other chests that still sat together against the wall and rummaged among them. At last he returned with a more suitable selection.

"Here. Slip this on," he told the boy.

A dull brown cloak was loosely wrapped about the boy's body, one end tossed over his shoulder. The Titan took hold of the garment with two fingers, as if he preferred not to soil his hands any more than necessary. He pulled it free, then held it at arm's length and let it drop to the floor. Then he handed him the chiton he had selected and watched in amusement as Zeus slipped into it and attempted to adjust the unfamiliar garment.

Next Helios selected an appropriate mantle-one of his own favorites, which he had worn just the night before. He hated to sacrifice it-it might well be destroyed this evening-but was well satisfied when he saw the youth in it. He led Zeus over to the tall bronze mirror and showed him his own reflection.

"Well, what do you think? Do you not look as if you've lived all your life among the Titans?"

"It's wonderful," Zeus said, staring at his image in fascination. He reached down and adjusted the cloak so that it exposed more of the chiton, then paused to examine the delicate gold- and silver-threaded border. "And you have many such garments! It's amazing. How generous you are to allow me to-"

"Really, it's nothing. But we haven't finished yet. Your wardrobe is still incomplete. Don't move." Helios handed the youth a pair of sandals that were certain to fit poorly, then went to yet another chest, this time returning with a light-colored bonnet. He was not fond of such contrivances himself, preferring to display his long silver hair in all its glory; but he owned a number of hats nevertheless and wore them reluctantly when the occasion demanded.

He set in on Zeus's head, pulled it down tight and then walked around the youth, tucking his dark locks up beneath the fabric. When he had

finished, he stepped back two paces to admire the result. He had to stop himself from laughing aloud. The boy looked preposterous in the bonnet; but in the dark, at least from a distance, the light-colored material might well pass for blond hair.

"Do you like it?" he asked at last.

"Oh, yes, I think it's wonderful. It's much more attractive than the hoods or fur caps we occasionally use when it's unusually cold at night. But tell me, just what does Asterie look like? If I'm to deliver a message to her, it would be good if I could recognize her easily. What color is her hair? Is she tall or short, thin or full? Does she have sisters with whom I might confuse her? Are they beautiful too?"

"You'll know her easily enough. You need only mention her name at the door. Someone will take you to her, I'm sure. We have one last thing to add." Helios crossed the room and returned with a long bronze sword, which rested in an ornamental sheath and hung from a stout belt.

Zeus's eyes lit up when he saw it. "Am I to wear that?"

"Of course. It's essential. All the younger Titans wear swords when they go out. It's only an ornament, usually-an emblem of our prowess-but you wouldn't be fully dressed without it."

As Helios continued talking, he slipped the belt over the youth's head and guided his arm through it, so that the belt fell across his chest from shoulder to hip and the heavy sword hung suspended against his left side. Zeus touched the hilt tentatively, then wrapped his fingers about it and slowly drew the weapon, thrilled by the feel of it.

"Now, there's one more thing I should warn you about. I should have told you before, in case it makes a difference to you. You mustn't let Epimetheus get close to you. He's a very surly fellow. Probably he won't bother you at all. He's waiting for me-or Perses or Pallas-not for some stranger he's never seen before. The likelihood is he'll do nothing more than watch you go by. But should he come out of his hiding place as you approach, you must not hesitate. Draw this sword and strike him down before he reaches you-or you're lost. I can't emphasize this enough. Don't try to talk to him or reason with him-that's impossible. He's far beyond reason. And don't run from him! The moment you turn, he'll strike you down from behind."

Zeus was still holding the sword-almost lovingly-and examining the long blade, but his expression had turned serious. "I've never used such a weapon before. Is it very difficult?"

"It's not difficult at all. You've handled knives before. That's all this is, really, just a big knife. Defend yourself with it just as you would defend yourself with a knife, and you can't go wrong." He turned toward Perses. "Is Epimetheus still hiding where he was?"

Perses nodded. "He hasn't moved."

"Good. Then I think we're ready to send our messenger to Lady Asterie. What do you think of our new friend? Is his appearance suitable?"

Perses grinned. "Quite suitable. I'm sure Epimetheus will never suspect . . . that you've sent him."

Helios made Zeus rehearse the message he was to deliver, then said, "Pallas, will you lead our new friend down and point him in the right direction?" The Titan took Zeus's arm and guided him toward the door,

where Pallas was already waiting. "I hope you won't think me ill-mannered not to accompany you myself, but I've something I really must attend to right now. Besides, we aren't actually saying goodbye. You'll come back here, of course, as soon as you've delivered the message for me. I hadn't thought that far ahead before, but you'll need lodging for the night. My apartment is at your disposal, and I won't hear of any other solution to that problem."

Zeus thanked his host and followed Pallas out of the apartment and into the wide corridor. Helios watched them go, then closed the door and hurried back to the window.

"What do you think now?" he demanded of Perses. "Will it work? Will Epimetheus mistake him for me?"

"We'll be able to tell better when we see how he looks down there, in the darkness. Really, though, I could barely contain myself. Use the sword just as you would a knife! And he believed you!" The youth laughed heartily.

Before long Zeus came into sight below. Pallas soon rejoined them, and the three Titans stood watching together from the window as the Cretan god walked briskly along the path that led to the Palace of Koios, where Epimetheus still waited among the trees near the entrance.

"You chose his outfit well," Perses exclaimed. "He does look like you!"

Despite his best intentions, Zeus found himself dallying along the way to study the fascinating buildings that rose around him and to wonder about the marvelous deities who inhabited those formidable structures. The cool night air of the mountaintop invigorated him and made him curiously aware of many things, including the exquisite softness of his borrowed doming, which seemed to caress his skin with each movement. It would have been a perfect evening, except that the long, heavy sword kept bouncing against his side and threatening to trip him.

As he drew near his destination, he saw the figure of a god stir among the foliage a short distance beyond the entrance to the Palace of Koios. He had already decided that his best hope of avoiding unpleasantness would be to ignore Epimetheus if that Titan called to him; and so as the figure came forward from among the trees, the youth hastened down the walkway that led to the entrance. There were three tall steps, and he mounted them almost at a run, crossed a wide portico and pounded on the enormous outer doors.

Behind him, the figure changed course, following at a slower pace than Zeus expected. The boy struck the door again with his fist, then let his right hand settle upon Helios's sword.

"Wait, you coward," the god cried as he neared the steps. "I have a score to settle with you. Come and face me!"

By now Epimetheus was too close to ignore, and so Zeus swung around to meet his assailant. At the same moment two other figures emerged from the darkness and rushed to intercept the Titan. Before they reached Epimetheus, the great double doors behind Zeus opened partway, and the god from Crete found himself looking down at a small child.

She smiled up prettily at him. "Whom do you wish to see?"

"I've come with a message for Lady Asterie," he said quickly, glancing back again toward the gods behind him. He realized now that one of the new arrivals was a goddess; she stood beside Epimetheus, with a hand

upon his forearm. Her companion had taken up a position on the other side of the Titan, and both were addressing him in an energetic fashion.

"Come in, please," the child said pleasantly. "I'll tell my sister you're here. Will your friends enter too?"

"No," Zeus answered rapidly. "Those aren't my friends, and I'm sure they have no interest in seeing your sister."

He followed her inside and the child pushed the heavy door closed behind them. Turning, he found himself in a spacious entrance hall.

"You may wait there," she continued, indicating a number of ornate, thickly cushioned chairs that lined the wall.

The young goddess left him, and he sat quietly, looking about the great chamber. It was attractively decorated in a manner similar to what he had seen in the Palace of Hyperion, though not as lavishly. A few minutes passed while he wondered what was taking place outside, and then from across the atrium a full-figured maiden with flaxen hair approached.

For a moment he was disappointed. If this was Asterie, then Helios and Epimetheus must be blinded by love. Oh, she was pretty enough, he thought, with a sweet, pouty mouth and large doe eyes, but certainly not gorgeous.

She swept across the room, stopping directly in front of him. "You've made quite an impression on Leto, my little sister. She says you have the most interesting face she's ever seen. You know, I think she may be right." The barest of smiles touched her full lips. "She also says you have a message for me."

Asterie might not be gorgeous, Zeus thought, but she was attractive-quite attractive indeed, with smooth, gently sloping thighs and lush, full breasts, all clearly outlined beneath her clothing. He rose and gave her his most charming smile.

Eight

"It must be Prometheus and Metis," Helios cried in disgust as he watched from the high window of his apartment. "But how did they return without our seeing them? They should still be over toward the other side of the mountain, at the palace of your father."

Perses shrugged. "I've been watching the whole time, since you sent Pallas out to get the boy. They must have doubled back along some other route. I've never looked away for more than a few moments."

"My plan should have worked. It would have worked!" The Titan knotted his fingers into a fist and struck the stone wall beside the window. "You saw, didn't you? Epimetheus was almost upon him. An instant more and he'd have drawn his sword-oh, what foul luck."

"It was an amusing idea nonetheless," Pallas said, "even if it didn't succeed."

But Helios was unwilling to admit defeat so quickly. "Wait a little. There must be something more we can do-some way to salvage our effort." He spun around and stalked across the room. From a wall peg he lifted down another sword, complete with belt and ornate sheath, and slipped it on. Then he took down his companions' swords, which they had hung there upon entering the room earlier in the day. "Come put these on. Perhaps

it isn't too late yet. There may still be a way.'

Grinning with excitement, Perses and Pallas took their weapons and hurried after him down the long corridor. He led them to the exterior balcony that Pallas had used before. They commanded wings to grow from their backs, then flew in a wide semicircle that took them first partway down the mountainside and then back up, so that they alighted behind a low bluff. Advancing cautiously, they concealed themselves behind tall trees as they drew near the Palace of Koios.

Metis and Prometheus still stood before the entrance of the building, remonstrating with Epimetheus. When Helios found he could not hear them satisfactorily, he signaled to his companions to remain where they were, then started to creep forward. Perses leaned toward him.

"Wait," the youth whispered. "Why not just strike them down now, both Prometheus and Epimetheus, while we have the chance-before they go back home or into this palace? It doesn't matter what they say afterward. We can always invent an excuse when we have more time to think."

Pallas nodded vigorously. "We don't need to invent anything. They're together-Epimetheus and his brother. They've come looking for us. If we confront them, an argument will surely result. Besides, we may never have a better chance to cut them down."

"Perhaps," Helios whispered back, "but not yet. Let me listen to them first, and think a bit. There may still be a better way."

"But-"

The Titan held up an imperious hand, and his companions fell silent. He left them and made his way cautiously forward, finally reaching a point no more than a dozen paces from the quarreling gods.

"Let me go," he heard Epimetheus say heatedly. "This isn't your affair, Metis-nor yours, brother. It's easy for you two to speak of prudence and restraint. You haven't been insulted and beaten. You haven't been disgraced in the eyes of someone you care about. Imagine what he's telling Asterie about me this very moment. I've got to tell her what really happened. You've no right to interfere like this."

"We may not have a right," Metis said sharply, "but we certainly do have an obligation-the obligation of those who care about you. Listen to us, Epimetheus. You're acting rashly. No one will think ill of you for allowing your wounds to heal before you settle this."

Within his nearby hiding place, Helios squirmed anxiously and gritted his teeth. Again and again his gaze darted back and forth between the gods he was watching and the broad portico that led to the entrance of the palace. He kept expecting to see the great door open and Zeus come back out. As he waited, he racked his mind for some way to turn the situation to his advantage. Clearly they had all mistaken Zeus for Helios, so that part of his plan had been successful. If they dallied here until the youth returned, there was at least a possibility of a confrontation between Epimetheus and the boy. Then he and his companions could leap out and rush to Zeus's defense.

"We know how you feel, Epimetheus," Metis was saying. "Certainly you've suffered an unforgivable outrage, but the wise always choose carefully the time and manner of their retaliation. If it's Asterie that concerns you most, I'll go and speak with her. I'll make certain she understands what happened-the cowardly way you were attacked. Think well. If you go

in now, what's likely to happen when you confront Helios? Will you attempt to strike him down in front of Asterie? What will she and her family think of you if you barge into their home and commit violence there?"

But Epimetheus seemed not even to hear her. "Let me be, both of you. I know what I must--"

Just then another voice became audible, a female voice, sharp and shrill. "How dare you?" it cried. "Release me!" There were other noises, too, scuffling and running sounds from within the palace.

Now all of the gods--those standing before the portico as well as those hiding nearby--turned to search for the source of the sound.

"You must stop--really you must!" the voice cried. "Stop or I'll call for help!" Things crashed and banged, as if knocked to the floor in a great commotion.

"That's Asterie!" Epimetheus broke free of Metis and Prometheus. "What's that beast Helios doing to her?"

On the ground floor of the palace, toward the far side, a broad window looked in upon a brightly lit chamber. Two figures appeared there briefly. The first was an attractive young goddess, who held her hands out in front of her as she backed across the opening; the second, a handsome, well-dressed god who seemed to be speaking softly and trying to mollify the maiden. But then the god lunged after her, and the maiden struck at him, knocking off his hat and revealing the thick black curls that had been concealed beneath it. She ducked under his arms, then disappeared from sight, with the god right behind her.

"That's not Helios," Epimetheus shouted. "Who can it be?"

Helios cursed, a terrible scowl darkening his face. How dare that ignorant bumpkin lay his hands on Asterie!

Now a shriek came from the window, followed by a shrill cry for help.

Epimetheus lumbered toward the palace, struggling to make his wounded leg propel him up the stone steps. Prometheus rushed ahead so that he could open the door for his injured brother.

Behind them, Helios stepped from his hiding place, his hand gripping his sword. He called to Pallas and Perses, then followed the sons of Iapetos, drawing his sword as he ran. His scheme against Epimetheus was forgotten now that his malice had found a more immediate object.

Only Metis hung back. She watched in surprise as Helios and his companions appeared from the nearby trees and charged up the steps, across the portico, and into the palace. Then she looked back at the now empty window. For nearly half a minute she stood quite still, thinking.

Finally the figure on her shoulder stirred. "Aren't we going inside, too, mistress?" Alalkomeneus asked. "Undoubtedly they will require the benefit of your wisdom."

Metis smiled despite herself. "It's difficult to refuse a request couched in such flattery. I presume you don't want to miss the excitement yourself. Yes, we'll go." She climbed the stairs at an almost leisurely pace.

Alalkomeneus looked up into her face. "Mistress, wasn't the god in the

window the same god we met on Mount Pelion?"

"Yes, Alalkomeneus, I believe he was. How do you suppose he came to be here?"

"I can't imagine, mistress. I hoped you might know."

By the time she reached the great entrance hall of the palace, it was unoccupied. She crossed it, drawn by loud noises, and looked up a stairway. Above her, disappearing from sight, was Epimetheus. Evidently the other gods had rushed ahead of him, following Zeus and Asterie.

As Metis climbed the stairs, two floors above Asterie darted across a large room and through a doorway, the handsome young messenger just behind her. Once within the chamber, she spun around and frantically threw her weight against the heavy door in an attempt to close and lock it before the youth could follow her inside; but he was too close, and before she could secure the barrier in place, he succeeded in inserting his knee in the breach and began to slide through the narrow opening.

"Oh-oh!" she cried, looking again into his handsome, boyish face. She realized she could not hold him back, and so she turned and fled, out through a door on the other side of the room. In an instant Zeus was after her.

She was a lovely creature-far prettier than the few nymphs he had seen and pursued back home, among the high hills and verdant valleys of Crete. Her flowing peplos clung to her as she ran, occasionally revealing her trim ankles and calves. He was not quite sure what had gone wrong below, in the little room oif the atrium to which the goddess had conducted him. Certainly he had not intended to pursue her through her father's home. His earlier experience with Dione had taught him that soft words and pleasant smiles were more likely to yield success than swiftness and raw strength.

At first the newly discovered charm seemed to work quite well. The goddess smiled a great deal and fussed with her hair and clothing as she listened to his recital of the message he had brought from Helios. When he finished, she drew up a small stool and sat beside him, questioning him closely-not merely about the Titan who was waiting outside, but also about the young god himself; she inquired about his life before coming to Mount Othrys and thanked him lavishly for assisting Helios.

But as she thanked him, she leaned far forward, so that the wide neck of her peplos hung open, revealing much of the firm, rounded splendor she kept hidden there. The tenuous aroma of her body reached out and caressed his nostrils, and at the same moment her soft hand came to rest on his knee in an innocently flirtatious gesture. The combined effect of these three separate provocations proved more than the boy could resist, and before he realized what he was doing he lurched from his chair and threw his arms about her.

The goddess recoiled at his unexpected advance, throwing up an elbow. He struck his chin against it, then discovered to his surprise that she had already slipped from his grip. How wiry and nimble they were, despite all their softly rounded contours! Their speed and agility never failed to surprise him. He leaped after her, instinctively following as she retreated. When his sword tripped him, he stripped it off and tossed it aside. He chased her around and around the room, then out into the atrium. She eluded him easily there, in the wide open area of the spacious chamber-as long as she kept running. The atrium offered no refuge, and when she realized she would have to keep running until

someone arrived to help her if she remained there, she darted up a wide stairway instead, screaming still more loudly for help.

Zeus had so lost himself in the excitement of the chase that he failed to hear the heavy footfalls and loud shouts behind them as Prometheus, Epimetheus, Helios, Pallas, and Perses caught sight of him and charged up the broad, winding stairway in pursuit. By this time more than one sword had been drawn from its scabbard.

Even now as Asterie and Zeus darted across another wide chamber, with the swiftest of the Titans only a dozen paces behind, the youth remained oblivious to the danger that threatened him. All his energy and concentration were directed instead at the lovely, fleet-footed temptress who somehow managed always to remain just beyond the reach of his outstretched fingers.

And then Asterie miscalculated, leading him into a room with but a single entrance. She halted abruptly near the far side of the chamber and swung around to face him, her bosom rising and falling rapidly beneath the clinging fabric of her peplos. Her eyes darted from Zeus to the door behind him, then to the windows on her left. He came to a halt too, extending an open hand toward her and smiling pleasantly.

"Wait, lovely goddess. Don't run from me. I don't mean to harm you. I only wanted to kiss you and hold you for a moment. I was so overcome by your beauty that I lost control of myself. Look at me. Do I look as if I'd harm you?"

As she listened, Asterie began to waver. The boy was quite handsome, and his soft words were reassuring. She hesitated, softening visibly-and then he was upon her, encircling her waist with his arms and bruising her lips with his mouth.

A loud crash sounded from the room behind them as Helios stumbled over a chair that Asterie had thrown in the path of her pursuer in a vain effort to slow him down. Cursing, the Titan kicked it aside and rushed into the little chamber, huffing from exertion; he had his sword drawn, and at the sight of Asterie struggling in Zeus's arms rage overcame him. He bellowed a terrible oath and propelled himself across the room, swinging his sword up behind his head and then forward in a terrific blow that threatened not Zeus alone, but Asterie as well, for the blade might well shear through the youth and bury itself in the maiden behind him.

Zeus looked around just in time to see the sword begin to fall and threw himself backwards. He still held Asterie tightly clutched in his arms, so that they fell to the floor together. Helios had put all his weight and strength behind that blow and could not easily stop it. When Zeus moved out of the way, the Titan had to lurch awkwardly to one side to avoid slicing off his own leg. By the time he recovered from the maneuver, Zeus had released Asterie and scrambled to his feet.

Still bellowing madly, the Titan swung a second blow. Zeus swept up a nearby table and thrust it between himself and the gleaming blade. The tremendous force of the blow shattered the table in his hands, and for a moment he stared down at the fragments, considering for the first time the harm such a stroke would do even a deathless god if it connected. Months might be required for his divine body to repair itself properly after such devastation. A shiver ran through him, and then he tumbled out of the way as Helios's sword fell a third time.

Now the room was filled with Titans- five of them in all- and his path

of retreat completely blocked.

"Who is this youth?" Asterie demanded shrilly of Helios. "Is it true that you sent him here to me?"

"You ignorant lout," Helios cried, ignoring Asterie `s question as he directed all his outrage at the newcomer to Mount Othrys. "You backwoods oaf- how dare you lay your lowly hands on a Titaness! Did they teach you nothing where you come from? I'll cut your body into a thousand pieces and scatter them across the world. You dolt- you jackal! Is this how you repay the hospitality of the Titans? Such conduct is never tolerated among the great gods. What kind of creature are you?" As he spoke, his voice grew louder and his face darker with fury.

"Wait a moment," an unexpected voice said from behind him, and Helios glanced back to see Metis in the doorway, the mortal Alalkomeneus still riding on her shoulder. "Before you punish him, ask Asterie what happened. Make certain there's no mistake before you act."

Now everyone looked at Asterie, who was straightening her disheveled clothing. "What happened?" she said haughtily, glaring at Helios. "You know quite well what happened. You sent this animal to me with a message. As soon as we were alone, he sprang upon me and tried to assault me!"

Helios cursed again and raised his sword. At the same instant Zeus threw himself across the room, toward the window. Epimetheus stood in that direction and tried to stop him, but the boy pushed the injured god aside without difficulty. The other Titans scrambled after the youth. As his foot landed on the stone sill, Zeus struggled to imagine wings growing from his back, then lunged out into the night from the third-floor window.

Nine

As he fell, Zeus tried desperately to make his wings catch the air, but something was wrong. Perhaps he was moving them improperly, or they were not yet fully grown; in the turmoil of the moment, as he sought to avoid the consequences of a three-story fall, it was impossible for him to tell. One thing was certain, though. Unless he righted himself very quickly, escape would probably be impossible. The pain and injury resulting from such a plunge might be considerable, but surely such discomfort paled to insignificance beside what his pursuers hoped to inflict upon him.

At almost the last moment his great wings finally arrested his fall. He struck the ground feetfirst, then stumbled and fell sideward. Rolling to his feet, he turned and looked back toward the window, where Helios was already climbing awkwardly through the narrow opening. Zeus dared not try to escape by flight; he was too inexperienced at that art, and once in the air the Titan could easily overtake him. Turning, he fled on foot, his body reabsorbing his eagle wings as he ran.

Behind him, Helios at last succeeded in positioning himself on the narrow window ledge. Balancing himself precariously, he caused wings to grow, then soared downward after the fleeing youth. Perses immediately took his place in the opening, while Pallas urged his brother to hurry.

Behind Pallas waited Epimetheus, equally impatient to defend the honor of Asterie. Prometheus touched his arm to get his attention.

"It's probably not a good idea for you to try to fly tonight, with your

injuries. Even if you can fly without difficulty, you'll still have to land-which could be quite painful. Besides, as long as it's taking them, we can probably get outside nearly as swiftly by way of the stairs."

Epimetheus looked about uncertainly, then nodded his reluctant agreement. Metis joined them, and together they descended the great winding stairway as rapidly as Epimetheus's injured leg would allow.

Metis walked in silence, trying to sort out her thoughts and emotions. The conduct of the young god was intolerable, of course. She should be as outraged as the Titans, but somehow she found it difficult to entertain harsh feelings toward him. It was a curious reaction-very much unlike her. She grew particularly chagrined when she realized that she had already invented a whole series of possible extenuating circumstances that might exonerate the boy or lessen his guilt.

When they reached the portico, Pallas and Perses had already joined Helios. Finding it too difficult to search from the air at night, the older Titan had alighted a short distance away and the three were now scouring a dark area near the palace. Soon Pallas cried out and pointed across the path, and then they ran in that direction, toward a farther cluster of trees. Metis and her companions followed at a distance.

"This is profiting us nothing," Helios said at last, snarling the words. "We must separate and go in different directions to have a better chance of capturing him. You, Pallas, climb to the top of the bluff and watch from there. He may show himself in one of the open areas. Perses and I will look for him along either side of this path."

While they searched, Zeus continued running. He had cut across the main walkway in front of the Palace of Koios, then zigzagged among the trees and shadows until he reached another building. He crept along the rear of it, then crossed through a grove of towering cypress, only to come upon yet another looming edifice a few minutes later. Pausing, he listened for his pursuers.

Even though he had traveled what seemed like a good distance, he could still hear them-muffled talking and an occasional loud shout. He was not sure, but they sounded closer than he would have expected. Again he considered trying to escape by flight, but quickly gave up the idea. The moon was rising now, almost guaranteeing that he would be seen once he rose into the sky. No, he reasoned, it would be far less risky to remain hidden until they grew tired of searching for him. Then he could depart in a more leisurely manner.

But where could he hide until then? He could stay where he was, but that certainly was not an appealing prospect. The nearby palace presented a far more attractive option; if it was like either of those he had already visited tonight, it undoubtedly offered many fine rooms where he could comfortably wait out his pursuers without much chance of being discovered. He might even find a place where he could sleep until early morning. He was quite tired, and that possibility was very appealing indeed.

Before thinking any further-he feared he might talk himself out of the notion-he slipped from among the trees and went to the rear of the building. Here he found a window that led to a wide, empty corridor. Vaulting through the opening, he followed the corridor until he came upon a stairway, then ascended a number of floors, expecting to find fewer inhabitants wandering about on the higher levels. At last he ventured into another corridor and crept along it, a strange sense of familiarity beginning to trouble him.

Meanwhile the Titan Pallas abandoned his sentry post atop the bluff and flew to where Helios was searching. Settling beside him, he grinned broadly.

"What is it?" Helios demanded. "Have you seen him?"

The youth nodded. "You'll never guess where he's gone."

"Where? Tell me quickly. This isn't a game. The scoundrel must be punished!"

"He's in the palace of your father."

Helios cursed. "What audacity! Such brashness is an added insult to me. Wait until I get hold of that banding!" He knotted his hand into a fist. "Go to Perses and tell him what you've seen.'"

Pallas nodded.

"Wait a moment more. We mustn't let him escape while we're searching the palace for him. Someone will have to remain outside to watch—two gods, and they might as well be you and Perses. I want you to take up a position at the front right corner. From there you'll be able to see both the front and the right side of the building. From the left rear corner Perses can similarly observe the other two sides. Hurry. Tell Perses what to do and take up your positions. We mustn't let him escape again!"

Pallas hastened to do as he was bid.

As Helios strode off, Alalkomeneus turned to his mistress. "I think they've found the boy, my lady. Shall we assist them in capturing him, or shall we only watch?"

"I think we'll watch."

Alalkomeneus stared up at her in puzzlement. There was an odd something in her voice that he did not recognize and which left him uneasy.

As Metis followed Helios toward his home, Zeus continued down the long hall, growing more and more uncertain with each step. The two other palaces he had visited today had seemed quite similar to one another; but the sense of familiarity he experienced now was nothing short of uncanny—unless....

And then, as the end of the hallway came into sight, his doubts were replaced by a conviction; he realized that he had unwittingly returned to the Palace of Hyperion. He looked back down the corridor; a number of doors opened upon it, any of which might lead to an adequate hiding place should he suddenly need to conceal himself.

He pondered briefly, then made up his mind. Perhaps chance had led him to the safest place he might find tonight. After all, who would expect him to return here? Any place but this would seem an eminently more appropriate retreat with the son of Hyperion madly searching for him. He would stay here, he decided, if he could find a suitable chamber.

The thought of a few hours' sleep appealed to him greatly, and the irony of such a sanctuary had its charm too.

Just ahead lay the door he recognized as the entrance to the apartment of Helios. He had reason to think it empty, and so he entered without

hesitation. He crossed to the middle of the room, where his faded cloak lay upon the floor. Stripping off the clothing Helios had provided, he rolled it all up together and stufed it back in one of the chests, which still stood open with clothing bulging out.

His old cloak was much more comfortable, he decided, even if the fabric was coarser in every way. It was what he was accustomed to, and it didn't make him feel stiff and unnatural. He adjusted it about his shoulders and was peering at himself in Helios's large mirror when someone tapped at the outer door.

Before he could conceal himself, the door swung open and a tall maiden stood in the doorway. She saw Zeus immediately, nodded and smiled at him, then glanced expectantly about the room. Puzzled now, she looked back toward the youth.

"Where is my brother?" Her voice was musical, almost lilting.

That she was Helios's sister came as no surprise; she looked very much like a slender, more delicately featured version of the Titan. She was nearly as tall as her brother, with silver blonde hair that fell nearly to her waist. Her lean, athletic body was displayed to great advantage within the simple knee-length chiton she wore. She strolled easily toward him, still smiling, while Zeus tried to concoct a convincing reply.

"Has he gone out?" she asked.

The youth nodded.

"Oh? Will he be back soon?"

"I suppose so," Zeus said awkwardly, still struggling to devise some explanation of his presence here. At the same time he kept glancing behind her, toward the door to the corridor; she had left it open and he was calculating how swiftly he could make his escape. "I'm not sure how long he'll be gone."

The goddess tilted her head fetchingly to one side. "Do you know where he is?"

"He's gone to search for an intruder upon Mount Othrys," Zeus said suddenly, not really sure why he said it.

"An intruder? Why, what do you mean? What intruder?"

He hesitated uncertainly, then threw caution to the wind. "Me," he answered simply, looking at her in his most charming and ingenuous fashion.

"You!" She stared at him closely now, noting the dilapidated condition of his cloak and his generally dusty appearance. "Who are you-and why is he searching for you?"

"I am Zeus, the son of Amaltheia," he said with a slight bow, "a newcomer to Mount Othrys who arrived here only a short while ago. I was born and grew up far away on an island called Crete, far from the Titans and other great gods. At first your brother and his friends were very kind to me. They invited me to join them here, in this room, where they fed me-for I was very hungry and tired from my long journey. But I'm afraid I must somehow have . . . offended them. I'm so ignorant of the ways of the great gods! Whatever I did or said, I did or said in ignorance. It must have constituted a terrible affront, my lady.

Otherwise I can't account for the violence of your brother's reaction. He took up his sword and chased me out into the night."

A pretty pout touched the divine maiden's lips. "He did, did he-my noble brother. Isn't that just like him! Always ready to fly into a rage at the slightest thing. Well, my friend, you've nothing more to fear. I am Selene, eldest daughter of the Titan Hyperion, and I've just made it my business to see that no harm befalls you. But I still don't quite understand. If Helios is outside the palace, looking for you, how do you come to still be here, in his room?"

"I managed to elude him as I ran, and hid myself not far from here. He thought I'd left the palace, and so pursued me outside. After a bit I came out of my hiding place and wandered about, trying to decide what to do. I somehow found my way back here."

"Well, I'm glad you did, for now I can help you. You say you're hungry. Come with me to my room and I'll give you food and drink. My father hasn't returned yet, so I can't take up your case with him immediately, but as soon as he returns I'll straighten everything out."

"That really isn't necessary, my lady," Zeus continued, pleased at the general result of his deceit but not anxious to have Selene talk about him with anyone. "If you'd only help me find a secure place where I can sleep for a short while- until dawn, perhaps-that would be more than satisfactory. Your brother fed me, but I'm very tired after my long journey. Truthfully, I've seen more than enough of Mount Othrys for one visit, and am anxious to return home."

The goddess visibly drew herself up. "That's not at all the way to handle such matters," she insisted vigorously. "When there's a misunderstanding, it's always best to deal with it immediately. It must never be left to fester. But if you're tired, then certainly you must rest. Come, I'll take you to my rooms. No one will disturb you there, I can assure you."

The goddess wore an expression that brooked no disagreement, and Zeus followed Selene down a series of corridors.

As the Cretan god found sanctuary within the apartment of Selene, Helios entered the palace. He immediately sought out an attendant, one of the many lesser gods of the earth and sea who served as functionaries to the Titans.

"Has Lord Hyperion returned yet?"

The god shook his head. "No, my lord."

Helios frowned. "So be it, then. You must go and gather all the gods who serve my father. Make no noise doing this. There's a strange god hiding among us, and we must find and restrain him." He stopped abruptly, a sudden thought troubling him. "I must see to the safety of my mother and sisters before anything else. Go quickly, be silent, and when they're all gathered, begin the search here on the ground floor. I'll rejoin you as soon as I can."

He ran to the great central stairway and rushed upward, two steps at a time. On the fifth floor he found the chambers of the Titaness Thea, wife of Hyperion.

"Are you safe, mother? Have you seen a strange god about the palace?"

"Of course I'm safe," the goddess answered, startled at his sudden

appearance and frantic manner. "Who would dare harm me?"

He quickly told her about Asterie and the youthful visitor from Crete. As they spoke he searched her room to assure himself that no one was hidden there. "You must lock your door behind me," he told her when he was finally satisfied that she was alone and safe. "Don't open it again until I return to tell you that we've captured him."

Thea stared after him in amazement as he left her, but did as he requested.

Next he went to find his young sister Eos. She was a pretty child, barely touched by the first blush of maidenhood, and he was greatly relieved to find her safely in her own room. When he had searched there too, and given her similar instructions, he returned to the corridor feeling considerably calmer. Only a single apartment remained to be checked, and then he could devote himself with an untroubled mind to hunting down the villain.

Outside Selene's door he waited impatiently, calling to her repeatedly to hurry. At last the door opened, but his sister stood firmly in the opening, preventing him from entering.

"Lock myself in?" Selene said when he had finished his hectic speech. "What good would such a measure do? My windows stand wide open. Anyone who dares may fly in through them."

Helios fretted at the time he was losing in explanation. "That's true, of course, but I've posted Pallas and Perses outside. Should this god attempt such a thing, they would see him. Please let me in, sister. I have to hurry."

"Indeed, not. My rooms are my own. I'll not have you or anyone else rummaging about them. Besides, there's no one here but me. I haven't left this apartment since afternoon. But tell me, brother, why are you so intent upon finding this god? What's he done?"

Selene played her part well, not once glancing back toward the inner doorway through which she had sent the boy. She had known Zeus for only a few minutes, but those few minutes were enough to convince her that her brother had seriously misjudged the charming youth.

"He tried to violate Asterie. Had we not come to her rescue . . ."

Selene was quick-witted and strong-willed, with a mind of her own. Concealing her surprise, she peered searchingly into her brother's face. She knew that it was well within the range of possibility that Helios was fabricating this story for some purpose of his own. Moreover, she found it impossible to believe that the smiling, handsome youth in the next room could commit such an offense. No, she decided; there had to be some mistake. Things could not be as her brother represented them.

"I see," she said. "Well, thank you for your warning, brother. I'll lock my door and keep it locked, as you suggest. Don't concern yourself further about me. I'll be perfectly safe here."

Helios found himself staring at her closed door. He heard the bolt engage on the other side, then turned slowly and started back toward the stairs. Selene's conduct was curious, but he reassured himself with the thought that such was usually the case.

By the time he rejoined the gods downstairs, they had almost finished searching the first floor of the palace. He took charge immediately.

Some of them were unarmed. He sent for weapons, then posted a guard at the foot of each stairway. Soon he led the remaining gods upstairs, extending the search to the second floor. Helios was becoming more and more angry. To have such a rustic fool foil him-the son of Hyperion-was unthinkable. The upstart must be taught a lesson that all the world would note.

The search of the second floor was nearly completed when a loud commotion drew Helios's attention toward one of the stairways. He heard muffled shouting, and after a few moments he thought he recognized the voice of Selene. As he rushed upward toward her apartment, he heard what seemed to be crashing sounds, too, and still more shouting. Even climbing as fast as he could, it took him more than a minute to reach the corridor that housed his sister's apartment, and all that time the noises did not abate. Instead they grew louder.

As he came within sight of her apartment, its outer door flew open and a god stumbled into the corridor. It was Zeus, and no sooner had he exited the room than a shower of missiles followed-small boxes and vases, handfuls of jewelry, even small pieces of furniture. The boy had his arms raised to protect his face and head, but twist and dodge as he might, he could not escape unscathed.

Now Selene came through the doorway, continuing to pelt him with ever increasing accuracy.

"Who do you think I am?" she demanded. "Do I look like some nameless frolic of the hills or streams? How dare you! How dare you, you contemptible creature! You've no more sense than a rutting goat, and that's how you must be treated."

Zeus dodged again, let out a yelp as something hard struck his cheek, then bolted down the long corridor, away from both Selene and her brother. He disappeared around a turn.

Helios rushed to his sister. "Are you hurt?" he demanded. "I thought-"

"Oh, leave me alone!" she cried furiously, throwing the last of her missiles at him. She stepped back into her room, slammed the door, and shot the bolt closed again.

Helios ran after the boy. When he rounded the corner he caught a glimpse of movement from a balcony at the far end of the corridor. He hurried there, but by the time he stepped through the opening and stood on the balcony, Zeus was gone.

"Where is he?" the Titan called down at Pallas, who was in plain sight at the corner of the building. "Where did he go?"

"Somewhere over there," the god answered, pointing back in the general direction of the Palace of Koios, "but I can't see him now. He landed out of sight, beyond the trees."

"Follow him!" Helios commanded, preparing to fly after the youth himself.

Meanwhile Metis had grown tired of standing about outside the Palace of Hyperion and decided to return home. Strolling away leisurely, she had traveled a fair distance and begun to whistle a reflective air when an awkward, winged figure alighted unexpectedly a dozen paces ahead of her. A second goddess had been following the same path, coming from the other direction toward Metis. The boy ran past the approaching figure, then disappeared toward a nearby building.

"It looks as though they'll never catch him," Metis told Alalkomeneus, and the man riding on her shoulder nodded gravely.

As she drew nearer, Metis could see the other goddess more clearly. She was of medium height and mature figure, wearing a dark veil that only partly concealed her rich chestnut hair. She had stopped to stare after the boy, and Metis now recognized her as the Titaness Rhea. From her better vantage point Rhea had undoubtedly been able to judge more accurately than Metis where Zeus had gone, and so Metis followed her gaze as she came up beside her. The Titaness was looking down the side of the Palace of Mnemosyne, where a number of wide windows offered convenient egress to the fugitive.

Helios landed nearby, and at the heavy sound of approaching footsteps, Metis turned to see Pallas and Perses coming toward them around a thicket of trees.

"Did you see him?" Helios demanded of both Metis and Rhea. "Which way did he go?"

Metis glanced at Rhea and was surprised to find the Titaness staring intently at her. She was surprised, too, by how drawn and pale Rhea looked—as though she had just experienced an extreme shock or surprise... something far more startling than the sudden appearance and abrupt departure of an ungainly youth.

"Didn't either of you see him?" Helios asked frantically, turning to peer up and down the path as he awaited their reply.

"He ran up there," Rhea said calmly, in a voice that seemed too level, too controlled. Still watching Metis, she pointed in the opposite direction from that in which Zeus had disappeared, upward toward a dense growth of cypress and the summit of the mountain. "If you rush you may still catch him."

"Over here," Helios shouted to his companions, who had run on ahead of him down the stone-paved path. Without waiting for them, he drew his sword and charged toward the grove.

When Metis looked back, Rhea had already begun to walk away.

"Now that was certainly peculiar," Alalkomeneus observed as Metis resumed her interrupted journey.

Ten

Earlier that day, Pan, the son of Amaltheia, slumped down upon a convenient hillock. Behind him lay the high, rolling hills over which he had ranged for most of the afternoon. Ahead a low, ragged coast led down to a broad sea.

For a few minutes he brooded upon the unfairness of his lot. What a terrible torture it was, time and time again to come within a hairsbreadth of such exquisite loveliness, only to have it inevitably slip away! A second day was nearly gone now, since he and Zeus had ventured from their island home, and all his efforts had yielded only the same questionable rewards—humiliation and fatigue. To add to his burden, he would now have to devote some of his energy to locating his brother, for he dared not return home alone. Amaltheia, though normally the most gentle of goddesses, could be a stern parent indeed when roused to anger.

But searching for Zeus tomorrow would undoubtedly provide interesting new opportunities, new beauties to be pursued and, perhaps, conquered; and so he resigned himself to his situation. He was constitutionally incapable of sustained worry, and his attention soon turned to his surroundings.

He rose and stretched, then went down toward the shore.

Farther out, near the left bank of the little cove, a herd of seals frolicked in the rocks and frothy surf. They presented an amusing sight, and he watched them as he strolled along the opposite side of the cove, letting the waves bathe his feet.

His foot soon struck something, and he stooped to examine a smooth, brightly colored patch of shell that protruded from the sand. First he dug at it with a toe, then squatted down and used his fingers. An enormous conch shell emerged, larger than any he had ever seen before. It was fully as big as his fist, with many interesting twists and turns and delicate shades of color. He peered inside to be sure it no longer housed a living creature, then waded out into the water and washed the sand from it in the waves.

When he put it to his ear and listened, he was disappointed. The sound it held was more like a gentle breeze than like sea waves. He began walking again, contenting himself with a more detailed examination of the shell's pretty convolutions. Thoroughly absorbed, he neglected to watch his footing, and before he had proceeded a dozen paces he stumbled. The shell flew from his fingers and struck a rock.

Retrieving it quickly, he turned it over and over in his hands. The thing had given him pleasure, and he was distressed to find that through his own carelessness it was now damaged; a small hole had been neatly punched in its narrow end. The shaggy god fingered it sadly, about to consign it back to the sea; but instead he held it to his ear again and continued walking.

Eventually he turned the shell around, put the newly formed hole to his mouth, and blew softly. A curious, almost plaintive sound issued from it, with a haunting, uncomfortable quality. Pan had been traveling along one arm of the cove and was now exactly opposite the still-cavorting seals. He found a suitable place to sit and settled down to watch as they repeatedly scrambled out of the water and up onto a number of flat, slippery rocks, then dived back again. All the while he continued to blow gently through the shell.

Finally he took a deep breath and blew harder.

The result was a long, piercing wail that made him shiver. Far more marked, though, was the reaction of the animals across from him. Now all playfulness was gone, replaced by frantic activity. Where before they had leaped and scampered, now they fled blindly in every direction, trampling one another. They seemed oblivious to everything but the need to escape, and dived madly upon each other and even into the rocks.

Pan held the conch shell at arm's length, examining it with renewed interest.

Sometime later he began walking back toward the hills, where he hoped to find some sign of Zeus. As he left the beach, he passed near a tree where many birds had gathered—thirty or more of them. Pausing, he glanced at the trinket in his hand and then back at the birds. Unable to overcome his curiosity, he brought the shell to his lips and blew again—

not loudly, because he was already dreading the sound it would make, but loud enough for the birds to hear.

The effect was immediate, and created a scene like none he had ever witnessed. The creatures seemed to go mad with fear, flying in every direction at once. They collided with each other again and again, or flew blindly into tree branches and fell to the earth, stunned if not seriously injured.

Pan shook himself, trying to overcome the effect the sound had had on him. Again he considered ridding himself of the object, and again he decided not to. Instead he went on walking. Later still, with night approaching, he found himself near a wide, clear river and stopped to rest and eat. A pouch hung from a cord about his neck, and he shook from it a few pieces of ambrosia. Breaking them into fragments, he scattered them upon a bare, patch of ground and commanded them to grow. Then he sat nearby and watched as the golden stalks sprouted upward. Lying upon his back, he snapped them off one by one and nibbled upon them while he daydreamed.

When his hunger was satisfied, he harvested the remaining ambrosia and stored it carefully within his pouch. He was about to go to the river to drink when he heard low voices and distant laughter. Turning instantly, he scrambled for concealment.

He hid himself behind tall, thick bushes, lying prone upon the ground to avoid being seen as three lovely nymphs came into sight and approached the opposite side of the river. As he waited and watched, he calculated the distance that

separated him from the lovely creatures. One knelt to drink, then a second beside her. They were no more than thirty paces away-but thirty paces could be quite a distance, he thought glumly. They would see him the instant he stirred, long before he managed to reach even this side of the river.

Then he noticed the conch shell, which was in his hand; he must have instinctively scooped it up before retreating to his hiding place. Why not? he thought suddenly. If they reacted with the same confusion as the seals and the birds, he might gain the extra moments he needed. And even if his efforts failed, it would at least be interesting to observe the effect of that terrible sound upon these lesser goddesses.

First, though, he had to protect himself. He had heard the song of the conch twice already today and considered that quite sufficient. Snatching up a number of tufts of green, pliant grass, he twisted them together and pushed the resulting plugs into his ears. Then he took a deep breath and brought the shell to his lips.

He blew harder than ever before, and the response of the nymphs was instantaneous. They slipped and slid in the soft, wet earth beside the stream. They grasped each other for support, then floundered in the water.

Pan rose and rushed toward them. They were hopelessly ensnared, and two of them had begun to scream in terror. He charged into the river-disbelieving. He was so close they could not possibly escape now. Within moments he would have his arms about one of the enticing creatures!

But the bottom of the river was now very slippery, and he had to be careful of his footing. In their efforts to extricate themselves from

the mud, one took hold of his arms, another of his leg. His feet slid from under him and he went down with them, muddy water covering his face. He tried to rise, but a foot settled on his chest, pushing him back down.

At last he came to the surface, spewing out water. It took him a few moments to blink his eyes clear, and then he saw that all but a single nymph had already escaped, and the remaining one had just succeeded in regaining the bank. He pulled himself out of the water, but she was already a dozen paces away.

He followed her along a trail that led higher and higher up the side of a mountain. At first he thought he would easily overtake her, but as the chase continued she began to outdistance him. He had managed all this time to cling to the conch shell, and now he blew fiercely upon it again. The nymph shrieked in fear-and ran faster.

The way became even steeper, and he fought not to lose sight of her among its many curves. Each time he blew upon the shell she shrieked again, and spurted forward, propelled by mad panic. At last she disappeared beyond a dip in the trail.

He reached the same place a moment later, and stopped suddenly. He could still see her below him-twisting and turning as she fell. Her terrified screams ended abruptly when she struck the bottom of the ravine.

Shaken, Pan stepped back from the edge of the cliff. He stared down at the shell, then drew back his arm to fling the terrible thing after the nymph. But again he hesitated. He turned it over and over in his hands, then finally opened the pouch that hung from his neck, in which was stored his supply of ambrosia, and slipped the shell inside for safekeeping.

As Pan began to search for a suitable place to sleep, far to the south, among the green mountains of his island home, the goat goddess Amaltheia paced nervously before the entrance of a great cavern. Shaped like a goat of gigantic proportion, she was part goddess, part divine beast. Her slow, brutish mind reasoned only with difficulty, but she felt as acutely as any deity. This evening she felt loneliness and great anxiety. Occasionally something approaching a plaintive whine escaped her mouth.

Behind her, within the cavern, the nymph Ida drew near the entrance to look out. She was soon joined by her sister Adrastia.

"Poor thing," Ida whispered softly. "I don't think she's eaten a bite since yesterday. She's so unhappy. I do hope Zeus and Aigipan come home soon. It's terribly thoughtless of them to stay away so long and worry us all like this."

"Indeed it is," Adrastia agreed, nodding her head energetically. "It's wicked of them-very wicked indeed!"

As they looked on, the divine beast lifted high her great spiraled horns and stared intently toward a narrow path that led down a mountainside. Some sound or movement had attracted her attention, and she stood completely rigid, watching expectantly. Eventually, when no one appeared there, she moved back toward the cavern and lay down just outside the entrance, curling her legs beneath her and resting her shaggy jaw on her forelegs.

"She's going to rest," Adrastia said. "I'm so glad. She certainly needs

it. She has such a good heart, sister, such a good, good heart. Why, sometimes I think she's fonder of Zeus than of her own-

"Quiet! You know we've been warned not to speak of it."

"But the children aren't here. Ida, you know I'd never say such a thing if they might overhear. I'm not so foolish as that-really, I'm not!"

"We shouldn't speak of it at all," Ida whispered back softly. "I don't think she even remembers anymore. I think she considers herself Zeus's mother every bit as much as he does. But sometimes a dead fire will awaken to flame when the ashes are stirred. We mustn't rekindle those old memories. It's really much better if she has forgotten. Were she to remember, she might someday reveal it to the boy-without intending to do so, of course."

"You're right, sister, she might indeed. I'm so sorry. I hadn't thought of that. Certainly she's done her best to be a mother to them both, in her poor, simple fashion."

"I do wish they'd return," Ida continued after a few moments of silence. "It makes me uneasy, having them away so long. There are so many perils they could encounter out there, in the wide world-perils even for a great god like ..." She stopped herself before uttering the divine boy's name.

"Indeed," Adrastia agreed, "and they're both given to such mischief. It makes me shudder to think of it. Why, if anyone should learn that Zeus is-

"Quiet!" Ida admonished again. "You know we mustn't talk about rftaf!"

"Oh, yes-I really must be more careful. I keep starting to say things that I know I shouldn't. But listen, sister, do you know what Amaltheia told me this morning?"

"She told you something? You must mean those curious goat noises she makes. Zeus and Pan seem to understand them well enough, but I'm never sure what she means. I haven't heard her actually talk in years and years. She didn't do that, did she?"

"Indeed, she did. It was dreadful to watch, the terrible contortions she had to put her face through to make her poor mouth form the words. And such words! It was all I could do to unscramble them. She said she wanted to go search for Zeus and Aigipan-that they might be in trouble and need her! Now I ask you, if they were in some kind of difficulty, what possible help could Amaltheia be?'"

The nymphs laughed together, loudly enough that they had to quell their merriment when the goat goddess raised her head and looked back toward them.

"Oh, you're right, Adrastia. She does have such a good heart, the poor dear creature! I do hope you didn't laugh out loud when she told you that. She's very sensitive, you know."

"No, of course I didn't. I'm sure she had no idea what I was thinking. But some of her notions are so foolish, it's difficult not to laugh. It was terribly amusing, though, don't you think?"

Eventually Ida and Adrastia grew bored and left Amaltheia to her solitary vigil. Night fell, but still she waited outside the cavern for the return of her sons. Much of the time she paced, and occasionally she

whined softly to herself. The nymphs sought their beds, but still she waited.

At last, when the moon was nearly overhead, Amaltheia reentered the cavern. She approached each of the nymphs and squinted at them in the dim light of the single lamp they had left burning. When she was certain both were asleep, she returned to the entrance and stood there uncertainly.

How familiar her surroundings were; sometimes it seemed as if she had lived her entire life here. Only occasionally did dim memories surface of another home, of different hills and meadows where once she had roamed; memories, too, of loneliness and hurt-of cruel nymphs who never tired of taunting and tormenting her, of reminding her that she was not like them, that she was some kind of freak of the divine order, not fully a goddess at all.

But none of that mattered anymore, since she had come here. In her children she had found all the love and fulfillment she required. How wonderful her boys were! How bright and spirited! A warm glow came over her from just thinking about them.

It seemed like only the day before yesterday when they had suckled at her milk-swollen udders; like only yesterday when they rushed to climb onto her broad back at every opportunity, begging her to ride them up and down the steep mountain slopes. Every time they fell and hurt themselves, she would lick their cuts and bruises, receiving in return their enthusiastic kisses and hugs.

No mother was ever prouder of her offspring. Even as a small child Zeus had been superbly formed-tall for his age, straight and perfectly proportioned. He was easily the most handsome child she or Ida or Adrastia had ever seen. Pan was another matter, but Amaltheia loved him too, despite all his awkwardness and mischief. She was never happier than when they were both near her....

As she thought of them now, a great ache throbbed within her. At last she reached a decision and headed down a narrow path that led into a forest. When she had descended a short distance, she stopped and made a low bleating sound, then raised her head expectantly.

From among the dark trees a figure of divine form and stature stepped toward her. She bleated again, sharply this time, and motioned to the north with her head. The figure clapped his hands together.

From the foliage all about them other Kouretes appeared- tall, with shaven heads, their naked bodies streaked white with chalk-until Amaltheia stood surrounded by a hundred savage warriors. The goat goddess motioned a second time, and the divine bodyguard of Zeus sprang forward at her command, the bronze points of their spears glistening in the moonlight as she led them northward, in search of her children.

Eleven

Metis's parents, Lord Okeanos and Lady Tethys, seldom stirred from the vast, watery domain that they ruled from their palace at the edge of the world; but their exalted position among the gods led them to maintain a second residence, of appropriate splendor, on Mount Othrys, that the King of the Ocean and his queen might be suitably housed when they visited among their Titan brothers and sisters. During their prolonged absences this imposing edifice was placed at the disposal of those of their children who wished to inhabit it. Metis had lived there for many

years, occupying a large suite on the third floor.

"Will you now retire for the night, mistress?" Alalkomeneus asked as they neared her apartment. The Okeanid had traveled in silence since leaving the scene of Zeus's frantic escape, and the true purpose of his question was to engage her in conversation.

She started at his unexpected interruption of her thoughts. "Perhaps so," she told the mortal upon her shoulder. "I really haven't stopped to think about it. Are you tired, my friend? I'm under the impression that all you've done today is let me carry you about."

She took down a flaming torch from just outside the entrance to her apartment and brought it inside with her.

"Yes, I think I could sleep," he answered pleasantly, finding no offense in her words. He never took offense at anything Metis told him. "On the other hand, so many unusual things have happened today that it might be interesting and worthwhile to discuss them. I have several suggestions concerning ways that Lord Epimetheus might deal with Lord Helios, and if you like--"

Metis smiled wanly. "Your insights are always welcome, Alalkomeneus. But perhaps we could talk of this later, or tomorrow. I find I'm more tired than I realized."

Once inside, she located a small oil lamp, lit it, then quickly returned the torch to its sconce in the outer corridor. When they reached her bedroom, she lifted the man down and set him upon the bed.

Alalkomeneus studied the enormous face of the goddess. Usually Metis beamed with life and energy. Tonight, however, she seemed... dimmed. The mortal could find no better way to express her uncharacteristic appearance and demeanor.

"Mistress," he said at last, "is something troubling you?"

She had turned away to position the lamp on a nearby table. "Do I look troubled?" She faced him again, then laughed. "I suppose I am. Is it so easy to see inside me, Alalkomeneus?"

"I doubt that others could tell, my lady, but I can."

"That, at least, is some comfort."

"Do you wish to discuss this thing that troubles you? Perhaps by..."

She shook her head, perhaps a trifle too quickly. "No, my friend, at least not tonight. For one thing, I'm not at all sure exactly what is bothering me, and so I wouldn't know where to begin our discussion."

"Is it the youth-Zeus?" he asked, persisting.

Metis frowned and seemed unwilling to answer. At last she said, "All in all, I think it might be wisest for us both to go to sleep early. Are you hungry? In all the rush to prevent Epimetheus from destroying himself, I forgot about supper completely."

She brought nectar and ambrosia from another room and pulled a small table over next to her bed. They ate together in silence, Alalkomeneus sitting cross-legged on the table top.

As she ate, Metis brooded. Ever since leaving her sisters on Mount

Pelion, she had been unable to rid her thoughts of Zeus. Normally she was able to focus her considerable mental powers with remarkable efficiency, instantly bringing them to bear on any problem that confronted her. Extraneous concerns never distracted her. But this evening the handsome face and winning smile of the Cretan god had popped into her mind repeatedly, with annoying and distracting frequency. The whole time she and Prometheus had been searching for Epimetheus, her mind had kept wandering back to Mount Pelion and the oddly appealing youth.

Now, as she continued eating, she began to examine her thoughts and feelings in detail.

She was puzzled. Nearly everything about him was a mystery. Why had he left Mount Pelion so soon after her own departure? He had planned to visit with Cheiron and Metis's sisters, then continue his search for his brother. How had he come instead to be here on Mount Othrys, involved with Helios-and with Asterie? Why had Lady Rhea grown pale at the sight of him and purposely misdirected his pursuers? And there was something else about the young god that puzzled her, something about him that she sensed but could not identify. . . .

But none of that, she realized, had anything to do with what was troubling her.

He was just another foolish youth, like so many others she had known. How had he managed in the few minutes they had spent together to make such an impression on her that she was still thinking of him hours later? He should have been completely forgotten as soon as she left Mount Pelion; and after his unexpected appearance among the Titans, she should have nearly forgotten him again by the time she entered her apartment. No other god had ever intruded on her thoughts so persistently.

She wondered where he was now. If he had continued to elude Helios, then probably he already would have left Mount Othrys to return to his distant home. She would probably never see him again.

The Okeanid stiffened in consternation. That thought had brought her pain. To her dismay she now saw clearly that it was that thought-that fear-that had been gnawing away at her all evening: She might never see him again! The realization left her even more distressed, and a little frightened. She remembered the silly thing that had flitted through her head earlier. A rude, foolish boy like that-her future husband, indeed! How preposterous! And yet....

Alalkomeneus had finished his meal and was lying upon the table with his eyes closed and his hands tucked behind his head; he seemed to be asleep. Metis rose and gathered up the remaining food, even though she had eaten very little, and carried it back to the atrium. When she returned, she went to one of the many oak chests that lined the walls of the chamber and removed a blanket. Leaving it folded, she placed it on the floor beside her bed, where it would form a thick mat on which the mortal could sleep. When she was satisfied with its arrangement, she lifted the man gently and deposited him on his new bed, still sleeping.

Now she sat down again. She no longer felt the least bit weary, and was sure she would only toss restlessly if she tried to sleep. Soon she noticed that she was tapping one foot against the floor in nervous agitation, a habit she found annoying in others but particularly distasteful in herself. For years she had prided herself on possessing a nearly unflappable nature. Here was one more illustration of how

thoroughly that boy had unsettled her.

She rose, pressing her lips together tightly. From one of the many wall pegs she took down a cloak and draped it about her shoulders, then hurriedly left the apartment. The only way to deal with her nervous energy was to walk, and she had no intention of pacing about her own rooms.

A cool breeze was blowing. At first she walked briskly, but then she realized that the route she had chosen was taking her back along the way she had gone earlier this evening, and she slowed her pace while she considered if she really wanted to revisit those places tonight. Surely she did not intend to search for Zeus, even though she was reasonably certain where he had taken refuge. More than an hour had passed since she had seen him dart past Lady Rhea and disappear. By now he should have found a way to leave Mount Othrys, if Helios and the others had not discovered him.

Well, what did it matter? She had come out for a walk and might as well continue in that direction. If the boy had been captured, she might learn the details.

Already the Palace of Mnemosyne was dimly visible ahead of her in the moonlight, a dark, looming structure with only a few lights visible inside. The path lay deserted, with no sign of the fugitive or those who sought him. If anything, the night seemed more quiet than usual for this hour.

Helios and his friends must have given up, she thought as she continued walking past the Palace of Mnemosyne. Farther on she reached a point from which she could look ahead and see the Palace of Hyperion in the distance. No one was visible anywhere along the stone-covered walk, nor were there any signs of unusual activity. If Helios had succeeded in capturing the boy, he would probably have dragged him back there, to his father's home . . . or she turned suddenly and looked up, toward the highest point of the mountain-to the Hall of the Titans, to be tried and punished. Above her, beyond the groves of trees, she could barely discern the outline of the great, many-columned pavilion where the Titans met in council to pass judgment upon the affairs of the gods. She sighed softly, relieved to see that none of the hall's great lamps had been lit. No, her intuition was undoubtedly right. Zeus had not been captured. He was free, probably flying home at this very moment.

As she was about to turn back, she noticed someone coming toward her from beyond the Palace of Hyperion. The figure moved furtively, hugging the shadows beside the walkway, and Metis instinctively stepped out of sight around the curve in the path. Peeking out through the trees from her new position, she continued to watch as the female figure drew closer; then she retreated still farther to the far side of the Palace of Mnemosyne and concealed herself there. Still the other goddess advanced, walking briskly and casting numerous glances behind her as she came into sight again.

The goddess left the walkway and crossed quickly toward the entrance to the Palace of Mnemosyne. She went directly to the great door and knocked gently-so gently that the nearby Okeanid could barely hear the sound. When there was no immediate answer, she knocked a second time, more insistently. As she waited, the goddess turned again and again to look back in the direction from which she had come, as if she feared someone might have followed her. At last the door opened and the Muse Melpomene stood in the opening, holding a torch.

The bright glare of the torch verified what Metis had already guessed-it was Rhea. The Titaness spoke a few words to the Muse, stepped quickly inside, and helped push the heavy door closed.

Now Metis's curiosity was indeed stirred. She could imagine but a single reason that the great goddess would return here tonight-Zeus. She was certain the Titaness had indeed seen the boy conceal himself in or near this palace; from where she had stood, Rhea would have had an unobstructed view of the entire side of the building, and probably saw him climb through one of the ground-floor windows.

For some minutes the Okeanid remained hidden, debating with herself. She very much wanted to know what was taking place within the dark building, but could not simply go to the door and request entry. Even if she presented herself with an excellent pretense for admission, she might be conducted to some other area of the palace, away from Rhea and Zeus- who probably was no longer there anyway.

Metis was quite familiar with the huge limestone structure. For many years she had been a frequent guest of the Muses, who dwelt there with the Titaness Mnemosyne. At last her curiosity conquered her sense of propriety and she went directly to the entrance and tried to push open the door. Normally the outer doors were seldom locked on Mount Othrys, but Rhea must have imposed on Melpomene to secure it behind them. Now Metis ran to the side of the building and edged along the outer wall. Most of the windows were tall and broad, but set high up so that she could not easily see in, or be seen. Finally, near the rear of the palace, she heard the distant hum of voices.

Wishing she were differently dressed, she pulled up her peplos and re-belted it in a way that gave her legs greater freedom. Then she scaled the lower wall, pulled herself through the window, and slid into a dark room. Through an open doorway she could see light. As she crept forward, the sound of voices grew louder, and at last she reached a position from which she could hear quite well, though she could not look into the neighboring room without risking discovery. A quick glance showed her Euterpe and Terpsichore, but from the flurry of voices she judged that most, if not all, of the Muses were gathered there.

"But why must she question him in private?" one voice demanded. "After all, we offered him shelter of our own free will, when we might have turned him out and let Helios and the others have him. We've treated him as a friend. Why should we have to stand out here, wondering-in our own home? It's all quite rude, if you ask me."

Another goddess laughed. Metis recognized the voice as Euterpe's. "Can't you just imagine such a scene? All of us crowding around, inserting our own questions as well. Lady Rhea's clearly too intelligent to expose herself to such a commotion."

A third voice, probably that of Thalia, began to sing. "When many voices join in chorus-" It must have been a familiar verse; the sisters broke into appreciative laughter, and Metis was unable to hear the rest of it.

"He's a handsome youth," Melpomene said, "and whatever difficulty he may have gotten into, I can't believe it's all that terrible-or completely his fault. He was perfectly behaved here, with us?"

"Yes," Erato said, "with all of us! Even the rudest youth might behave himself when surrounded by nine maidens at once."

"But that's unfair to him," another insisted, and then Metis was unable

to follow the torrent of elaboration and disagreement that followed.

Metis stood with her back to the wall near the doorway. Before long a sudden silence overcame the Muses and she heard a door close. She wanted to look into the room, but dared not.

"Thank you all," someone said. Metis was almost certain it was Rhea. "I'm now satisfied that this is indeed the son of my friend Amaltheia, whom I knew quite well many years ago. I knew his mother and his father both, and I feel that I know him, too. I've questioned him at length and I'm satisfied with his answers. I'm certain he didn't intend to harm Asterie or anyone else."

Metis could restrain herself no longer. She leaned outward and glanced toward the speaker, who stood with her back toward a door on the opposite side of the room and with Zeus beside her. The Muses were crowded close around them. Metis had intended to look quickly, then conceal herself, but her eyes were drawn back to the boy and remained on him far longer than was prudent. He was standing there, grinning at the maidens who fluttered about him and looking like the most foolish of foolish youths; but as she watched she began to sense something else-something very different. She had glimpsed it earlier today, a fleeting impression, nothing more. Now she saw it clearly for a moment-in his eyes, perhaps, or in the way he held his head and shoulders-and then it was gone. But in that instant she recognized what it was, and a chill ran through her. She knew, too, who Zeus was and why Rhea had come here tonight looking for him.

Metis drew away from the doorway and pressed her back to the stone wall. She had been in the presence of greatness before-in her childhood, while she had lived on Mount Olympos. But what she had seen just now in that raw, awkward boy was more than greatness. It was something . . . grander, vaster . . . magnificent!

Rhea was still speaking. "I'm very glad I chanced by earlier this evening and saw him. I'm quite fond of his mother and would gladly do her a good turn by helping her son. In her name, I thank all of you for aiding him. Zeus, you must remember these maidens and what they've done for you tonight. If it's ever in your power to repay them, you must do so."

"We're being very inconsiderate, sisters," one of the Muses announced. "Please, Lady Rhea, you both must come and sit with us. We'll bring refreshments and-"

"In a moment, perhaps," the Titaness said. "There's one more thing I must first attend to. Zeus is still in danger. He's made many powerful enemies tonight-enemies who may still be searching for him, though I didn't see them on my way here. We must do what we can to insure his safety while he remains among the Titans, and then I'll gladly join you in a cup of nectar before I go. Would one of you be kind enough to carry a message for me tonight-to one of the other palaces here on Mount Othrys?"

"I'll go," a soft voice answered.

"Thank you, Ourania. Please seek out Metis, the Okeanid, who's probably in her apartment in the palace of her father, and bring her here. While we wait for the two of you to return, this youth and I will enjoy the hospitality of your sisters."

In the next room, Metis listened in astonishment-and inexplicable joy.

Why would Lady Rhea send for her? It couldn't be merely because she might have guessed where Zeus had hidden himself while escaping Helios and the other gods. If she had intended to betray him, she would have done so then, not after everyone had given up looking for him. The Titaness had to have some other reason.

Nearly stumbling in her anxiousness, the Okeanid hurried back to the window through which she had entered the Palace of Mnemosyne and awkwardly lowered herself to the ground outside. She was determined to reach her home ahead of Rhea's messenger.

Twelve

Metis walked quickly, fighting down the urge to run as a curve in the path concealed her from view from the palace she had just departed. Untoward haste might call attention to her, and she certainly did not want Rhea's messenger to find her out of breath.

She was pleased—almost irrationally pleased—that Rhea was summoning her. But what could the Titaness want? She had spoken of Zeus's safety, but certainly there were many others on Mount Othrys who could more effectively assure the youth's welfare. Rhea had to have some other purpose. What that might be, though, Metis could not guess, and so she pushed the question out of her mind; after all, she would learn soon enough from Rhea herself.

It was growing late now, and she reached her destination without encountering anyone. Once inside the palace of her father, she proceeded more cautiously, to avoid being seen. She crossed the broad atrium and went quickly toward the rear of the building, where she ascended one of the smaller, less frequented staircases. Were she discovered, she could reasonably claim to be returning from some other, unrelated outing; but she preferred to conserve her lies for occasions when less direct subterfuges would not suffice.

Luck was with her and she regained her apartment without being observed. Once inside, she immediately began lighting lamps, to give a more convincing appearance of occupancy. As she moved from table to table around the large entrance hall, she glimpsed her image in a golden bowl. She stopped abruptly and looked a second time, then rushed to her bedroom. There she lit still more lamps.

She glanced at Alalkomeneus; he was still sleeping soundly, which pleased her. He tended at times to be presumptuous in their relationship, and she did not want to have to explain her activities to him. A large mirror sat upon one of the tables. She positioned a number of small oil lamps near the polished bronze so that they cast a strong if uneven light upon her face, then bent forward to examine her reflection. Quickly she began to arrange her hair, which hung in wild ringlets all about her face.

She leaned closer now to better see her face, then drew back in disgust. After her long day of travel, she had not had time to bathe. How could she forget such a thing? She stood up and almost ripped off her clothing, then rushed to another room. There she poured a bowl of water, washed her face and neck, arms and hands. Certainly she would have preferred the luxury of a full bath, but this would have to do for the moment. She was amazed that Ourania was not already knocking at the door.

Back in her bedroom, she began to search through the great oaken chests that held her wardrobe, pulling out first one peplos, then another, only

to toss them aside and continue her now frantic search in a neighboring chest. Finally she located a garment that might do. She wrapped it about herself, pulled and tucked the material, fastened a wide golden girdle about her waist, then stood far enough back from her mirror that she could judge its overall appearance. It was long and delicate, a pink affair that actually looked quite fetching on her.

A soft rapping sounded at the outer door. Metis scrutinized herself once more, made a final small adjustment of her peplos, brushed a curl to one side, then hurried out to greet her caller.

She listened attentively as Ourania relayed her message, then did her best to feign surprise. "Why, of course I'll come. I was just wishing I had somewhere interesting to go tonight or someone to talk with. I was about to see if any of my sisters wanted company. Let me get a cloak."

She left the Muse waiting near the doorway while she returned to her bedroom and rummaged hectically for an appropriate garment. She found a dark mantle, draped it about her shoulders, then rejoined her visitor. They left the apartment together, traveling more leisurely than Metis would have liked.

When they reached their destination, the Muse led her through a number of dark rooms until at last they reached a fair-sized chamber near the rear of the building—the same one into which Metis had peeked a short time earlier. By now the Titaness Mnemosyne had joined the assemblage. Nectar and ambrosia had been distributed, and everyone seemed to be involved in pleasant conversation. Metis greeted each of them.

When she finished, Rhea rose to speak to her. "Thank you for coming, my dear. As I've already explained to the others here, I must speak privately with you. Will you accompany me? What I have to say will take only a few moments, and then we can rejoin our friends. They understand the odd circumstances involved, and I'm sure they'll take no offense." The Titaness started toward an adjoining room, motioning Metis and Zeus ahead of her.

Rhea closed the door behind them, then moved beside Zeus, so that she and the boy stood close together across from Metis.

"Metis, daughter of my brother Okeanos and my sister Tethys, what I am about to tell you could not be said in front of the others." A small, proud smile tugged at her mouth and her eyes looked suddenly moist. "I wish to introduce to you someone. This is Zeus—my son. This is the child I kept from Kronos, the boy who is destined to become King of the Gods!" Rhea's voice broke with emotion as she spoke, and her face radiated a fierce pride.

Even though Metis had guessed the identity of the boy before rushing back to her apartment, something close to awe crept through her at Rhea's words.

"Long ago," the Titaness continued, "at the time of his birth, I was forced to hide him away, that his evil father might not discover him and do with him as he had done with my other children—all to avoid the fulfillment of a vile prophecy. Do you know it?"

"The prophecy of Ouranos?"

"Yes, uttered when Kronos struck down his own father. Child, beware thy child. As you have overthrown your father, so shall you be overthrown! All the long years of our marriage, those words haunted him, and as each

of my children was bom, he took it from me, to-" She passed a hand across her face, as if to clear away the too-vivid memories.

"But I deceived him and hid the boy away," Rhea continued. "From that day until this I've seen my son but twice, when I surrendered to my terrible longings and went secretly to watch him at his play. It was a dangerous and foolish thing to do, but those secret observations nourished me through all these long years. And now, at last, he's here. Look at him, Metis! Look how tall and straight he's grown-how handsome and fine he is. Has he not grown into the most magnificent of gods?" As she spoke, the Titaness's hands moved again and again to touch the boy, caressing his shoulders and arms, his face and chest.

Metis drew herself up and bowed toward the youth. Then she said softly, "We've already met, my lady."

Rhea looked at Zeus for confirmation. "But how?" she demanded. "Where?"

Metis briefly related the details of their encounter on Mount Pelion.

When she had finished, Rhea said, "So, in a sense at least, you're responsible for bringing him here. Then it's all the more fitting that I call upon you tonight."

"How do you mean, my lady?"

The Titaness ignored her question. "Until this day he believed himself the son of the goddess Amaltheia, who was his wet nurse. In my absence she cared for him as if he were her own son. Oh, Metis," she exclaimed suddenly, "you can't possibly imagine how I've longed for this day, when at last I could have him beside me-when I could look upon him at length, and kiss and caress him, and listen to the sweet song of his wonderful voice! You can't imagine, either, how frightened I am. He's in great danger here. That he is Kronos's son, only the three of us may know in safety. The time isn't right yet. Were Kronos to learn of him-even now, though he's almost fully grown-all that I've suffered for might yet be undone."

"I understand, Lady Rhea. Your secret is certainly safe with me," Metis assured her.

"I do so wish I could keep him with me, but I must be strong-a little longer. I must not risk disaster merely to satisfy myself. I may not take him home with me, as I so dearly wish to do. If I were to openly concern myself with him, someone might guess the truth, and I dare not risk that. Yet I'd prefer not to send him away again so soon, either. That's why I've sent for you. Will you take him to the house of your father and watch over him there, for me? Then I could come secretly, without much fear of detection, and visit with him- a few times, at least, before he must leave. If you became his protectress, no one would have reason to associate him with me. Will you do this for me, Metis?"

The Titaness's usual haughty manner had vanished completely, and she seemed to be pleading with the Okeanid. Metis had not anticipated such a request and hesitated before answering.

"It would present problems, I know," Rhea continued. "He's made enemies here. It would be necessary to calm Helios and the others. I've already explained to Mnemosyne and the Muses that I know the boy's mother, but I dare not call attention to myself by defending him too vigorously. You'd have to take the lead. If you agree, I can tell them that I sent for you because I thought you knew Amaltheia even better than I, and might be

particularly concerned about the welfare of her son. Once that's established-with you as Zeus's protectress and I only as a helpful friend, someone ready to stand witness to Amaltheia's good character and that of her son, but nothing more-we should be able to intercede successfully on his behalf. Oh," she cried suddenly, pressing her eyes tightly closed, "I wish I were certain I'm doing the right thing. I need time to think-to remember. ..."

Metis stepped forward and laid a comforting hand upon the Titaness's arm. "I'll be pleased to assist you in any way I can," she said firmly.

Rhea looked up, wiping her eyes. "Thank you, dear. I thought you'd say that. Your destinies-yours and my son's- are linked somehow, I think . . . more fully than I really understand. Of all the younger Titans, you are by far the most intelligent-no, don't pretend modesty, Metis, for you know it as well as I. Anyone with eyes can see it. Some say you are wiser than all the other Titans together. You can protect him more readily than I. I'm too distraught, too haunted by fears."

Metis allowed a small smile to touch her lips. Outwardly she appeared very calm; inside, though, she was thrilled, filled with a joy that she chose not to question or attempt to understand.

Rhea turned to look again at her son. It was a loving look, filled with maternal pride. She touched his thick black curls and ran admiring fingers along his cheek and shoulder. "I've waited so very long, but his day grows ever nearer...."

"Zeus," she continued, addressing the youth, "I'll send you off in a few moments with this kind maiden. There is no one here among the Titans more suited to watch over and guide you, but you're very young yet, lacking knowledge of the ways of the gods. You must behave yourself. There must be no repetition of tonight's escapades. Goddesses are not taken by force among the great gods. They must be won by charm and courtesy. They must be courted. Do I make myself clear? The consequences could be very serious indeed if you don't abide my warning. Metis will teach you what you need to know, and you must obey her. Will you promise me that?"

"Yes, Mother," the boy answered, and Rhea kissed him.

They returned to the room where Mnemosyne and the Muses waited. As soon as it could be tactfully accomplished, though, Metis and Zeus left their hosts and walked back toward the Palace of Okeanos. On the way Metis questioned the youth.

"Why did you leave Mount Pelion? You must have departed very soon after I did."

The youth hesitated, and the expression on his face made her grow suspicious.

"Did something happen to speed your departure?"

Now the boy looked absolutely guilty. "There was a misunderstanding," he managed to say at last.

"With whom?" she demanded.

"Cheiron ... and Philyra ... and Dione."

Metis frowned, but asked no more questions.

When they reached her apartment, she gave Zeus a quick tour of her home. Zeus questioned her concerning the numerous plants that crowded the wide windowsills and covered much of the nearby floors, wherever sunlight reached. It was often necessary to step over or around them as they toured the various rooms. The Okeanid took great pride in her herb collection and pointed out the more interesting varieties as they came to them.

At last they reached the chamber that would serve as his bedroom. She stopped in the doorway, not following him inside. "And here," she announced, "I'll leave you for the night. You should be able to find everything you need.... except blankets! I'll get some and bring them to you."

Zeus had been watching the slender Okeanid with growing interest since they had been alone together. He stepped close to her as she started to leave.

"Must you go?" he asked, bestowing upon her one of his most winning smiles and letting a hand settle against her waist. He stepped still closer. "Can't we sit together and talk a while longer? There's so much I want to learn about Mount Othrys, and the Titans, and you...."

Metis started to laugh at his naive lack of subtlety, but when he touched her, she drew away with a start, an electric shiver shooting through her. She backed away from him in confusion. He started to follow her out into the narrow hallway, but by now she had recovered from her surprise.

"Have you already forgotten your promise to your mother?" she made herself ask. "You'll behave yourself with me-perfectly-or you'll leave Mount Othrys tonight!"

Zeus shrugged, then crossed the room and threw himself onto the bed. He watched through the door as she walked away. What a peculiar creature she was-quite beautiful, with her dark curls, high cheekbones, and startling green eyes- but distinctly odd. Everything about her bespoke a fine, quick intellect beneath her delicate exterior; whenever he was around her, he had the uncomfortable feeling that she knew exactly what he was thinking, and disapproved. Her firm refusal neither surprised nor distressed him; it was exactly what he had expected. In a way, he was relieved.

When Metis returned a few minutes later, Zeus was already-asleep. She called to him twice from the doorway, then went to the bed and gently spread the blanket over him. He was extraordinarily handsome, she decided as she looked down on him. It would be very easy to fall in love with such a god. She would have to guard her emotions very carefully indeed.

She looked back again from the doorway. It was a long, lingering look, and the sight of the boy made her wonder if she were not already too late.

Thirteen

Early the next morning, over breakfast, Metis sat Zeus down opposite her in the atrium of her apartment and interrogated him at length concerning his activities of the previous day. He was at his charming best-smiling ruefully and joking about his own ineptitudes, looking regretful at times and appropriately chastened. She found it very difficult to maintain a suitably stern demeanor throughout his recital. When at last

she was satisfied that she had learned-or guessed-everything she needed to know, she warned him not to venture out during her absence, then set out for the Palace of Koios, where she hoped to begin the rehabilitation of the youth's reputation.

For some time after her departure, Zeus remained in his chair, leaning back and contemplating the great chamber in which he found himself. For the moment, at least, his enforced inactivity was not a hardship. To a boy who had never known a home more elaborate than a mountain cave, who until the previous evening had never seen a habitation more sophisticated than a crude hut, the room constituted a fascinating panorama. He let his eyes move slowly along the smooth limestone walls, studying the intricate red and black friezes he found there, which depicted forest and field, mountain and valley, all in lifelike detail. When he eventually grew tired of those marvels, he turned his attention to the ornate furnishings that surrounded him, tables and chairs of wondrous craftsmanship, fitted in gold and silver, cushioned with plump, brightly colored pillows.

But Metis's errands kept her away a very long time, and eventually he rose and stretched, then began to walk about the apartment. He found Alalkomeneus in Metis's bedroom, where the man was occupied tending her herbs.

"Good morning," the youth said pleasantly, standing over the tiny creature. "I didn't realize you were here. What are you doing?"

The man stared coldly up at the god. He seemed to look him over carefully before answering. "I'm trimming Lady Metis's plants-cutting off dead leaves and branches, and watering them. It is a service I perform for her whenever I visit Mount Othrys."

Zeus smiled back despite the man's unfriendly demeanor. "I see. Well, may I assist you? She has many plants, and-"

"No, thank you, my lord," Alalkomeneus answered, his voice even colder than before. "Lady Metis never entrusts her herbs to anyone but herself and me." And then the mortal turned away and busied himself again, as if Zeus were no longer present.

The boy hesitated, puzzled by the man's attitude. He had never before seen a creature such as this-mortal, like an animal, but shaped like a miniature god. He was quite curious about it, but if this one was a valid representation of the race of men, he decided, it might be just as well not to encounter any others. Finally he returned to the atrium. The broad windows attracted him, and he picked his way through Metis's herbs to stand beside the opening.

The vista was even more impressive in the full light of the day than it had been the night before. From his vantage point he could look up toward the peak of the mountain and the great Hall of the Titans, with its enormous marble columns. To his left and right he could see many of the other palaces and lesser buildings of the Titans and other gods, and he found himself following in fascination the numerous pathways that crisscrossed the mountaintop to connect the massive structures. They stretched across wide fields of flowers, through thick forests and parklike groves of lofty cypress, birch, fir, and oak trees, which rose high above the heads of even the tallest gods. Along those paths strolled an astonishing number of deities-more divinity than he had met in his entire life! In the sparkling morning light, they seemed remarkably graceful and energetic as they went about their daily activities. He sighed softly as he watched them. He had never even

imagined that so many desirable females existed, yet here they were--all congregated in a single place, like a patch of freshly sprouted ambrosia.

All he had to do was discover the correct way to harvest them. One thing was certain. His former methods had not worked at home or anywhere else, and he would have to abandon them. Females were simply too fast and slippery to be acquired by speed and strength alone. Even his brother Pan, who claimed success in catching nymphs that way, admitted that his failures outnumbered his successes. But if violence was not the answer, what was?

Lady Rhea--he found it difficult to think of her as his mother--had spoken of charm and courtesy. Goddesses must be "courted," she had said. He had only the vaguest idea what that meant, but suspected that it must be somewhat similar to what he had first attempted with Dione, then again with Asterie and Selene--before he lost control of himself and tried to grab them. Judging from the early reactions of each of those goddesses, he suspected he might even have a talent for it. They certainly had seemed very friendly and pleased with his company. He had actually succeeded quite well, and in a very brief time, in lulling them into a false sense of security--and all he had done was smile, talk a little, and act as if he were interested in all the things they told him. Perhaps if he had only bided his time and been very patient--extraordinarily patient, expending a whole evening or perhaps even two or three evenings in the endeavor--their resistance would have slowly weakened until eventually . . .

Yes, he thought. It was certainly worth a try. Violence clearly did not work, but perhaps such treachery might.

And so Zeus passed his first morning on Mount Othrys. Occasionally he left the window to stroll about the apartment, studying the many intriguing things he found there, but always he returned to stare out upon the amazing world of the Titans.

It was afternoon when Metis returned. He went to meet her at the door and followed her back into the room. She threw herself down in a chair and grinned up at him.

"Well?" the boy asked, pulling up a second chair and sitting across from her. "Did you have any success?"

"My lord Zeus," she said slowly, "any other god, having committing the offenses you have committed, would almost certainly find himself banished from Mount Othrys forever; more likely, he'd have a band of pursuers hot on his heels, intent upon none too gently bringing him back to face the justice of the Titans. But you, it seems, are not such a god. I'm beginning to suspect that you're impervious to misfortune. . . ."

"They aren't angry with me anymore? How did you accomplish it?"

"That's more or less correct. But it wasn't I who soothed their wrath."

"Lady Rhea? Did she have to intercede? I had hoped--"

Metis shook her head. "No, my lord. You were represented by a greater champion than either of us--yourself!"

"Me? I don't understand."

"I went first to visit Asterie. She was still quite upset and unwilling to listen, but as I explained that you were a newcomer among us, that

you had been raised in the wild hills of a distant island, far from divine society, she began to soften toward you. I blamed your impertinence and impetuosity upon your ignorance, and the more I spoke, the more sympathetic she became. When I was ready to leave her and go to speak with her parents on your behalf, she insisted on coming with me. My lord, she became more your defender than I! And since no real harm had been done, both Koios and Phoibe soon surrendered to the pleading of their daughter.''

"Then she and her family have all forgiven me? I have nothing to fear from them?"

Metis nodded. "Then I went to the Palace of Hyperion and spoke with Selene. I expected her to be a good deal more difficult to win over than Asterie, but I was wrong. She wanted to forgive you-even before I arrived-but her pride made that impossible. As soon as I supplied the justifications she required, she leaped to your defense even more strongly than Asterie. Hyperion, her father, was adamantly against you, though, and we only swayed him when I told him that I would be personally responsible for your conduct while you remained among us."

Zeus stared at her in open admiration. "I see that my mother judged you correctly."

She bowed her head slightly in his direction in acknowledgment of the compliment. "What I said before is true, though. This success isn't mine, but yours. Those goddesses wanted to forgive you. I only helped them find a way to do it. It seems you have a natural talent for eliciting the sympathy of maidens. Even Helios couldn't very well continue to openly condemn you after both Asterie and Selene took up your cause, but he bears you no good will. Beware of him. At the first opportunity, he'll harm you in any way he can."

She leaned back in her chair. "It was quite funny, actually, to see him squirm before his father and sister. He wants nothing more than to get his hands on you, but now they've denied him a reason to do so."

"Better one enemy than many," Zeus commented.

"I spoke, too," she continued, "with Epimetheus, the god who almost attacked you as you were entering Asterie's home. He's smitten with Asterie, as you probably know or have gathered, and he was only a tinge less ready than Helios to put his sword through you. I think I've managed to mollify him as well-at least concerning you-but it would be wisest for you to avoid him. He's still determined to revenge himself upon Helios, Pallas, and Perses, though. Do you know about that situation?"

Zeus shook his head, then listened with interest as she explained. "This morning," she concluded, "Prometheus enlisted the aid of Atlas, their eldest brother, and Atlas made Epimetheus promise to avoid any confrontation until he's recovered from his last encounter with those three."

"Everything Helios told me was a lie," Zeus said, looking shocked.

"There's something peculiar about all that-Helios sending you to Asterie as a messenger, I mean. I haven't sorted it all out yet, but it just doesn't ring true.... There will be time to think about that later. For the moment it's enough that your troubles have been successfully resolved."

"Thank you, Metis," the boy said. "And you accomplished it all without involving my mother. It's amazing."

"No one knows she has anything to do with you, except Mnemosyne and the Muses. They aren't likely to say much about it."

Later in the afternoon, Rhea arrived to visit her son. Metis left them together in the atrium while she went to attend to her own affairs, which she had been forced to neglect all morning. The Titaness remained with Zeus until shortly before dark.

After Rhea's departure, the inhabitants of the apartment ate a quiet supper. When the meal was completed, Zeus announced that he was tired and left to go to his room. Metis did not look in on him until shortly before she was ready to retire.

Finding the room empty, she immediately searched the other rooms of the apartment, without success. Finally, back in the atrium, she paused to think. He had left the apartment--sneaked out of it, probably just after supper. She had given her word that Zeus would cause no more trouble on Mount Othrys, and she felt compelled to do whatever she could to uphold that pledge. With a sigh the Okeanid went to her room, found a cloak, and bid Alalkomeneus a quick good night.

First she went to the Palace of Koios, where she was reassured to learn that neither Asterie nor anyone else there had seen the youth. Then she continued on to the Palace of Mnemosyne, where she found Thalia.

"Oh, yes," the Muse told her cheerfully. "He was here some time ago. What a charming boy he is. We sat about and chatted for quite a while. We all like him a great deal--particularly Mnemosyne, I think. I expect he'll be back to see us quite often."

Metis excused herself and hurried on. En route to the Palace of Hyperion, two figures caught her attention. They stood in the doorway of the home of the Titaness Themis, which was a modest two-story building set back from the path. Metis stepped to the side of the walkway to better conceal herself, then crept closer.

As she drew near them she recognized the tall, bearded god with aquiline features as Iapetos, the father of Prometheus and Epimetheus. He stood very close to Themis, who many years before had been his wife. Their marriage had been without issue, and after consulting an oracle Iapetos took to wife instead the Okeanid Klymene, Metis's sister. It was well known among the Titans, however, that his passion for Themis had not ended with the dissolution of their marriage.

"But why may I not enter tonight?" the god demanded. He stood just outside the entrance. "Is tonight somehow different from last night, or last week?"

"Perhaps it is," the tawny-haired goddess answered curtly.

"You're smiling! I don't think this is at all amusing," Iapetos said, starting to grow angry.

She was shaking her head. "Oh, I'm sorry. I don't mean to be cruel to you, or rude, but please go. I can't see you tonight--or any other night. Everything's changed now."

"Changed? What has changed? I still love you, and you still love me. I know you do. Just the night before last--"

"No, no!" the goddess insisted. "Go back to your wife. I've been weak, that's all. Weak and lonely. But that's over with now. There can be nothing more between us. Go back to Klymene and forget me."

"This makes no sense." Iapetos's voice and manner had become highly agitated. "You can't just send me away like this, without an explanation."

"I can-and I must! I can't talk any longer. Good-bye!" She stepped quickly forward, kissed him on the lips, then retreated inside, closing the door. Iapetos stood staring at the cold wooden surface for nearly a full minute, then turned slowly and walked away.

Metis was troubled by what she had seen and heard, but not surprised. She knew Klymene loved her husband dearly, and that his smoldering passion for Themis was a source of great sadness to her. At the same time, Metis realized that she was not completely unsympathetic toward Iapetos. After all, he had not chosen to love two goddesses at the same time. It had simply happened to him.

Finally she reached the Palace of Hyperion. Her tactful inquiries brought forth Selene.

"You're looking for Zeus?" the maiden asked. "I'm afraid he's gone now. Oh, Metis, you were so right-he really is a very nice young god. I'm so glad you helped straighten everything out for him, so that he could stay here on Mount Othrys. We had a very pleasant-and perfectly proper-conversation. I was very sorry to have to leave him. My mother called me away and-"

Metis continued her search. She was pleased to find that Zeus had managed-at least thus far-to deport himself in an acceptable fashion, but she could not help feeling a bit annoyed, too. Though she was reluctant to admit it, she realized she would far rather have had him back in her apartment, talking to her instead of all these other goddesses. Finally she abandoned her search and started back home.

She was sunk in her own unhappy thoughts when once more she drew near the home of Themis. To her surprise she saw that again two figures stood at the entrance. Probably, she decided, Iapetos had returned to plead his cause further. Nevertheless, she approached stealthily.

As she drew nearer, she found herself observing Themis and-Zeus!

"Must you go now?" the low voice of the goddess asked, sounding anguished.

"I'm afraid I must," the boy answered. "I've already been gone too long. Others may be worried about me."

"But you'll come again-tomorrow? Earlier, so you won't have to leave so soon?"

"If you like. I'll try."

As Metis watched, the goddess leaned toward him. In the moonlight the Okeanid could clearly see her face. Eyes closed, she stretched her head up and kissed him on the lips- a long, lingering kiss. Her arms encircled him and seemed reluctant to let him go. At last Zeus stepped away, waved, and strode lightly out to the path and back toward the Palace of Okeanos.

Metis waited until Themis closed the door behind her, then caught up

with the boy. "In the future," she said emotionlessly, "I'd appreciate it if you'd tell me when you're going out. I'm supposed to be responsible for you, you do recall?"

"Oh, I didn't see you there, Metis. I'm sorry. Have you been looking for me?"

"That should be obvious."

He hung his head a little and gave her his sheepish grin. "I'm sorry if I worried you. But I wanted to prove myself. I wanted to prove that I can behave properly without someone watching over me the entire time."

"I see," Metis said flatly, unconvinced.

Behind them, behind the closed door of the building the youth had just left, the Titaness Themis leaned back her head, closed her eyes, and moved slowly about a large room, as if dancing. Her face beamed.

"At last!" she cried softly. "What was it the oracle promised? A new love-far greater than I've ever known. I've waited... oh, I've waited so very long, but now he's come. I knew it the instant I saw him. He is the one-I know he is-my promised love!"

Hugging herself, she twirled across the floor.

Fourteen

And so was set the pattern of the days that followed. Each morning, after breakfast, Zeus sallied forth from the apartment of the Okeanid to mingle with the inhabitants of Mount Othrys. Each evening, at the insistence of Rhea, he returned for supper and spent an hour or two visiting with his mother before venturing out again. Metis could not be certain how late he returned at night, for she almost always fell asleep while waiting for him.

Gradually she became aware of a subtle change in him. When they sat together about her apartment, he seemed more friendly, more relaxed; he no longer gave the impression that he was anxiously awaiting the moment when he would be allowed to go out. This new, less driven Zeus pleased her very much, until she thought more deeply on the subject; and then her maiden's face flushed at the realization of what his change of character actually implied-and what it told her about the virtue of her sister goddesses of Mount Othrys.

Occasionally, by chance, she caught glimpses of him during the day as he strolled along the mountain paths with one lovely young goddess or another, or as he entered or departed one of the great palaces of Mount Othrys, usually with a smiling maiden nearby to greet him or bid him adieu. More often, though, word of his activities reached her in the form of rumors, for he was much spoken of among all the gods. His good looks, rustic charm, and good manners-now much in evidence-had quickly made him a favorite among the distaff members of the divine community, who showered him with invitations to their homes. Many of these females, Metis noted archly, seemed to have no compunction about competing openly for his attention. The male gods viewed him in a good deal less favorable light, with more than a little grumbling, and Metis came to the conclusion that Helios was not the only one of them who would be pleased to see Zeus's visit draw to an early close.

A week after the youth's arrival, Metis went to the Palace of Iapetos to visit Klymene. She often visited her sister and greatly enjoyed the time they spent together chatting about their mutual concerns and exchanging

news concerning their parents and numerous brothers and sisters. Today, though, instead of going directly to Klymene's rooms, she went first to find Prometheus, whom she had not seen in many days.

She found him in his apartment with his brother. Epimetheus looked much better than when she had last seen him; his wounds were healing nicely and, she guessed, he would soon be completely recovered.

"Well, you two certainly are glum today," the goddess said at last, when her efforts to engage them in conversation elicited brief, lukewarm responses at first and then strained silence. "I only stopped by to see how you both have been. If you're not going to say something pleasant to make all my effort worthwhile, I'll be on my way."

"Mistress," Alalkomeneus said from his perch on her shoulder as she started to leave, "if you're going on to see Lady Klymene, may I stay here with Lord Prometheus and Lord Epimetheus until you're ready to go home?"

"Certainly, Alalkomeneus, if that's what you'd prefer. Why you'd rather stay among these dull gods, though, I can't guess."

"In the past Lord Prometheus has proven himself one of my most knowledgeable instructors. It's been too long since I availed myself of his wisdom. There are a couple of woodworking techniques that I would much like to see demonstrated."

Metis looked at Prometheus. "Do you mind if he stays?"

The Titan shook his head. "He may do as he likes."

"Fine. I'll come back for you before I leave." As she spoke she lifted the mortal down from her shoulder and set him upon the floor near the Titans.

When she had left, Alalkomeneus addressed Prometheus. "My lord, I have noticed that you haven't come to visit Lady Metis recently. May I ask why not?"

Prometheus, who was nearly as tolerant of the man as Metis was, drew back a little at the impertinence of his question. Frowning slightly, he said, "I think you overstep yourself, mortal. Such a question would be presumptuous from one god to another."

"Does it then have nothing to do with the presence of the young god Zeus in her apartment?" the man persisted.

Prometheus looked away, not answering.

Epimetheus grinned at his brother. "The man sees through you very easily. I'd wondered why you've been moping about, but hadn't figured it out. That must be it. You're jealous of that boy."

Prometheus grimaced at him. "I'll thank you to keep your opinions to yourself."

"Pardon, my lord," Alalkomeneus went on, "but if my lord Epimetheus is correct, you may profit more from heeding his observation than by being cross with him."

Prometheus glared at the mortal. "What do you mean?"

"I mean, my lord, that jealousy is not an unwarranted emotion in this

situation. I think you care about my mistress. Unless you're willing to abandon her to this new god, it might be well for you to take a more active interest in her right now.'

"He thinks you care about her," Epimetheus said, grinning at his brother. "You don't care about her-you're madly in love with her!" He turned toward Alalkomeneus. "He's been in love with her since they were children."

Pulling a chair from the wall and positioning it near their visitor, Prometheus slumped into the seat. He seemed to have resigned himself to whatever embarrassment the two intended to heap upon him.

"I know that I exceed the bounds of propriety by saying such things so openly, my lord," Alalkomeneus continued, "but there are times when forthrightness is essential. I would rather risk offending you than see Lady Metis suffer.'

"Please say clearly what you mean."

"I've guessed for many years that you love Lady Metis. Unless you overcome your diffidence, however, and act upon that love, I fear you'll lose her forever."

"Then she is in love with the boy," Prometheus muttered, a look of anguish descending upon his face. "I feared as much when I saw them together, but...."

"Tell me, Lord Prometheus, have you ever told her you love her? If you don't tell her, she may not be sure."

Prometheus shrugged. "She knows how I feel."

"Perhaps, my lord, but telling her often could not hurt matters. There is still time. I'm not certain that she is completely in love with the stranger yet, though certainly she is drawn toward him. I can see that clearly, in her wistful, distracted manner, and in other things too. But if you apply yourself in time, it's possible that you can sway her and prevent their love from becoming mutual. Before long he, too, will realize how she feels, and then-

"He doesn't love her?" Prometheus demanded, looking up with renewed interest.

"No more than he loves all the other maidens of Mount Othrys-perhaps even less, since he pays less attention to her than to them."

Just then a sound from outside the room drew their attention. Prometheus rose and moved quickly to the opening. He reached out, pulling a smaller figure through the doorway and into the room. "What are you doing out there, Menoitios? It isn't nice to eavesdrop on your elders."

The slender youth brushed his long dark hair from his face and smirked at them. "You don't have to worry, brother," he told Prometheus. "I won't tell anyone you're in love. But what terrible taste you have-Metis!" He made a sound indicative of distaste. "But I suppose it serves you both right."

"I'll thank you to mind your own affairs, Menoitios. If you insist on minding mine, I'll see to it you find the result very uncomfortable indeed. Now leave us. My patience is already severely strained."

The youth turned and shot an ugly look, filled with malevolence, at

Alalkomeneus. An unpleasant smile touched his lips. "I'll go, brother. But let me take the mortal creature with me. Metis killed one of my animals—a lovely saber-tooth—and owes me a replacement."

Prometheus set both hands on his youngest brother's shoulders and forcibly escorted the boy all the way to the outer corridor, then returned to continue his conversation with Alalkomeneus.

Sometime later Metis returned for the mortal. Prometheus greeted her more pleasantly this time, but despite his smile she thought he looked uncomfortable.

"Before you go, may I speak with you—privately?" he asked.

"Certainly," she answered, wondering what he might want to talk about. He seemed oddly nervous.

While Alalkomeneus remained with Epimetheus, she followed the older Titan out of the apartment and down the stairs to a high-walled court at the rear of the palace. Alone among the flowers and trees, they walked in silence for some time before he worked up the courage to begin.

"I keep hearing about that boy Zeus," he said, starting awkwardly. "He seems to be quite popular among many of the goddesses."

Metis nodded. "Yes. So I've heard."

"How.... how do you get along with him?"

"Well enough, I suppose. I don't believe I explained to you before, when you first met him, that I know his mother quite well. She's a wonderful goddess, and I'm pleased to do whatever I can for her son."

He hesitated. "But do you really think it... wise? After all, you know the... problems... that arose when he first arrived here."

"Oh, I'm sure I'm quite safe. There's no such danger, if that's what you mean."

"Well, it isn't only that. I mean, the two of you there, alone in your apartment every night ..."

She drew back from him a little, stiffening. "Exactly what do you mean?"

"I just wondered if it was really a good idea to have him stay with you. After all, all of Othrys is talking about the boy. There seem to be foolish maidens around him all the time, they say. Why, they say that even older goddesses are not immune to his charm. Even Mnemosyne—"

"Please, Prometheus! I thought better of you than this. Do you set your trust in rumors, which more often than not are only excuses for conversation? I think perhaps we'd better find some other topic to discuss. This one borders on the offensive."

"Oh, Metis," he said, turning suddenly toward her and taking her hands in his. "I'm saying this all wrong. I find it very hard to speak of... certain things. What I want to say, though, really doesn't have anything to do with Zeus, except that I'm . . ."

She looked up at him, staring directly into his face as she waited for him to continue.

"Metis, I thought you knew how I felt about you. We've known each other a very long time, and yet I realize now that I've never actually told

you how I feel."

"I thought I knew, too." She squeezed his hands in return, as if to give him the added strength he needed to continue.

"Metis," he cried, "I'm a fool at such things. I've wanted to tell you so many times--started to tell you. But always I floundered on the words. I love you! I've always loved you! Will you marry me?"

"Oh, Prometheus," she said sadly, turning, away and walking off a few steps. She stood very still, thintang, then turned resolutely and faced him again. "I care deeply about you, too, and always will. I'm sure you know that. But I don't love you in that way--as a lover, a wife. I'm sorry--oh, I am sorry! Please, don't look like that. We've been friends--close friends--for so long, but we aren't lovers. I'm sure we'll continue to be friends. Let's not confuse our friendship with love. Besides, I'm too young to marry!"

His expression made her want to cry, and she took his hands again. "Please try to understand. I need you--as my best and truest friend. I wish I did love you in that way. If anyone deserves love, it's you. But I can't force my heart to feel differently than it feels."

He looked up at her, forcing a smile to his face. "Let's talk no more of it. But remember, if ever you change your mind, I won't have changed mine. I'll still love you and want to marry you."

They returned to Prometheus's apartment. She lifted Alalkomeneus to her shoulder, gave Prometheus a quick kiss on the cheek, then hurried away. Once outside, however, she went more slowly. Her conversation with Prometheus made her examine her feelings anew, and as she walked she came to a decision.

Actually she had known from the beginning, instinctively, but her conscious mind had struggled against the idea. She loved Zeus. It did not matter that he was still a boy, or that he was terribly ignorant; he would be fully grown soon enough, and continued exposure to the society of Mount Othrys would round off his rustic edges. Neither did it matter that he was the son of Kronos and would someday become King of the Gods; she would have loved him as the son of Amaltheia, whatever his destiny.

Yes, she was certain now. She loved Zeus and would marry him.

Fifteen

When he found himself unceremoniously deposited in the corridor outside the apartment of Prometheus, Menoitios pulled himself upright, straightened his chiton, and did his best to recover his lost dignity, even though a quick glance about had assured him that he was completely alone and no one had observed his humiliating departure. He cast a last, lingering look of hatred at the door through which his brother had just thrust him, then strode off toward his own rooms, which were situated on the floor above.

As he walked, his anger increased. He viewed Prometheus with a deep and abiding repugnance that differed only in degree from the distaste and disdain he felt toward his parents and other brothers--toward all his elders, for that matter. Their arrogance was unbearable. They thought they knew everything--merely because they were old. The truth was that age brought not wisdom but inflexibility and stagnation, ideas and attitudes mired in the stodgy past. Of course the gods his own age were little better. They were all incredibly stupid and shortsighted, and he

detested them almost as much- more, sometimes.

As he ascended a great, circular staircase, he searched for some way that he might revenge himself upon Prometheus. He yearned to inflict a terrible vengeance upon him, but knew that a satisfyingly violent response was out of the question, even if brought about by trickery and stealth. Prometheus was tall and powerfully built, and would not hesitate to retaliate; he was shrewd, too, and all too likely to trace his misfortune to its author. How unfair it was! Time after time Menoitios had been forced to swallow his pride and endure his brother's affronts; but matters would not remain thus forever. Eventually Menoitios's turn would come and he would find a way to strike back without fear of reprisal. And perhaps that day was already at hand....

The conversation he had overheard suggested intriguing possibilities. So Prometheus loved Metis! That was an interesting bit of intelligence. He was determined to repay her handsomely for the wrong she had done him, and so he might be able to exact a secondhand vengeance upon Prometheus, since any pain inflicted upon the Okeanid could reasonably be presumed also to hurt those who loved her. He would need a second scheme to encompass all that; his present one, though it promised to be richly gratifying, was not suitably severe. The insufferable Okeanid must not merely be punished; she must be crushed.

If she loved Zeus, that presented possibilities too. It should not be very difficult to engineer some harm for the newcomer, and perhaps thereby wound Metis. Menoitios had taken an instant dislike to him and relished the prospect.

Entering his apartment, he went to the terrarium and stood above it, staring down at the perfectly reconstructed landscape within the rectangular enclosure. He scanned the low hills and rolling grasslands, then reached down and plucked up something from beneath one of the small trees. The creature struggled in his hand, flailing and jerking its arms and legs as he carried it upward and held it directly in front of his face.

Menoitios scrutinized the man, who wore only a dirty loincloth of sheepskin. He was sturdily built and quite large for a member of his species, with thick chest and bulging, muscular arms. Yes, Menoitios decided, this one was definitely bigger than Alalkomeneus, the mortal in which Metis took such pride; he was both taller and heavier, but also considerably uglier, with low, thick brows and dull, furtive eyes that always sought to avoid the gaze of the god.

"Look at me, mortal," Menoitios commanded, shaking the creature. "You were sleeping just now. I didn't bring you here to sleep. Are you so stupid that you failed to understand me? You'll find no honey dripping from these trees, no goat milk and acorns free for the taking. In this land over which I rule, you'll work for your food. You'll hunt the creatures I've so graciously provided for your sustenance-or you'll starve."

The man stared at the deity in terror, trembling. "Yes, my lord, I heard you-and obeyed! I have hunted, my lord. I hunted and killed, and then I crawled beneath a tree to sleep. Have I done wrong, my lord?"

Menoitios scanned the terrarium, at last locating a bit of bloody fur not far from where he had found the man. "What did you kill? It must have been very small."

"A hare, my lord."

"A hare? Bolitos, I brought you here to make a proficient killer of you, not to have you prey upon the most harmless of creatures. You must learn to stalk your victims with skill, not wait in a tree for them to hop past. You will hunt only large game in the future-creatures that offer a challenge. You must be able to creep upon them without being seen-without even being suspected until your spear pierces their hearts. Do you understand?"

"Yes, master."

"Good. Now you must hunt again, while I watch you." He reached down and recovered the mortal's spear-little larger than a goddess's sewing needle between the enormous fingers of the god-and gave it to him. Then, moving slowly and smoothly to avoid startling the intended prey, Menoitios set the mortal down within the terrarium behind a number of trees and nudged him forward until he caught sight of the intended victim.

Perhaps a dozen yards away stood a huge tapir, its attention directed wholly toward the thick tree branch it had pulled downward and from which it was methodically stripping leaf after leaf, slowly grinding them between its great teeth. The man began to edge his way closer behind the heavy foliage, spear drawn back and ready to cast. The god smiled as he watched the man creep forward. The piglike animal was imposing-nearly as tall as the hunter who stalked it, with great powerful jaws. It was well equipped to defend itself.

At last the man rose up and stepped into the open, propelling his spear with great force. The missile pierced the creature's side behind its front shoulder. With a terrible squeal, the tapir turned to confront its attacker.

The man raced forward, leaping to one side to avoid the animal's snapping jaws, and took hold of the spear shaft. The tapir tried to reach him, but he kept moving around it, holding fast to the shaft, twisting and shoving it in an effort to force its point into the beast's heart. The creature squealed still more loudly, then stumbled and went down. Now he stood over it, probing with the spear point until the beast ceased to struggle. Drawing a knife from his belt, he knelt and slashed open its throat, letting its dark blood drench the ground.

Menoitios lifted the man out of the terrarium and again held him up close to his own face. The enormous smile of the deity sent chills of terror through the mortal.

"Very good indeed. You must have hunted before, among your own people. You didn't acquire such skill within these few days. Tell me, Bolitos-have you ever hunted another man? Have you ever killed another man?"

The mortal shook his head.

"Too bad. I thought not. But you have fought with them- wounded them, have you not?"

"Yes, my lord, a number of times. That's why King Pelasgos sent me away from the tribe."

The god nodded slowly, still smiling. "It doesn't matter, though, I don't suppose. You shed blood well. You can creep silently, attack swiftly and surely. Good! You'll do every bit as well as I hoped. Now listen to me-are you paying attention, Bolitios?"

The man nodded vigorously, his eyes grown huge with fear.

"I have a task for you. If you perform it well, I'll reward you as only a god can reward a mortal. I'll make you the envy of all the detestable creatures of blood with whom you dwell. But if you fail me. . . . Need I tell you what will happen then, Bolitos?"

"I won't fail you, master!" the man cried.

"Good. You must work very hard. Now, go back to your little world and kill more. Become as skilled at bloodshed as you possibly can-as quickly as you can. It'll soon be time for you to attend to my errand."

While Menoitios congratulated himself on how well his scheme was progressing, elsewhere on Mount Othrys the Titan Helios sat beside his friends Perses and Pallas. From their position on a hillside bench they could look down into the long court that ran beside the Palace of Atlas, the eldest son of Iapetos. Playful shouts and laughter drifted up from the court, where a half-dozen young maidens ran back and forth around a single male figure, tossing a large, leather-covered ball from sister to sister. A seventh maiden, youngest of them all, sat watching from the nearby stairs that led into the palace. Even at the distance from which Helios and his companions observed him, the lone god clearly was enjoying himself. If he was not overly enamored of the game itself, he certainly was pleased by the company of the beautiful daughters of Atlas and Pleione. And the Pleiades seemed equally delighted with him.

"I can't bear this any longer," Perses announced. "I hate him. Look at the way they bounce and flutter about for his attention. It's an embarrassment-an outrage!"

"What would you have us do?" Helios asked.

Since the night of Zeus's arrival, the son of Hyperion and his companions had lost interest in Epimetheus and his family; that was an ongoing problem that could be attended to eventually, when opportunities presented themselves. The impertinent god from Crete was a far more pressing and irritating matter, and an appealing target for their energies.

"We could slip down and wait near the front of the palace, then follow him when he leaves. We could pull him from the pathway into the trees and-

Helios shook his head. "He has too many supporters. The Titanesses like him as much as their daughters, it seems. We don't dare-yet."

"Yet?" Pallas asked.

Helios nodded gravely, letting a smile grow on his lips. "We saw what he was like the night he arrived here on Mount Othrys. That rogue was the real Zeus, not the properly behaved youth you see below us now. All we have to do is wait. Eventually he'll slip up again and reveal his true self. When he does, we'll have the excuse we need."

They were silent for a short while; then Perses asked, "What shall we do to him? Then, I mean, when he slips up. Beating isn't enough of a punishment."

"You can beat him if you like. But I think I know how to make him vividly remember his visit to Mount Othrys-and quake at the thought of ever repeating it. You know the northern cliffs? Where you can drop a

stone and watch it fall all the way to the earth below-bouncing from rock to rock? Those jagged rocks are like huge teeth. I think that might be an appropriate punishment. Before he fell half the distance, he'd be ripped a hundred times and pounded to a pulp."

"After such a fall," Perses said, smiling too now, "he'd never dare return."

"If he survived at all," Pallas said, looking slightly troubled. "Has anyone ever suffered such a fall? I've heard it said that there are things from which even an immortal god cannot recover."

Helios shrugged. "Whatever happens, it'll be his own doing. The fault will be his."

Pallas frowned. "Isn't there anything we can do to hurry him along? As you said, it's only a matter of time until he missteps, but I'm already tired of waiting."

"Perhaps," Helios said thoughtfully. He was staring down toward the laughing maidens below them.

"Tell us what you're thinking," Perses insisted.

Helios looked back at them. "What would happen if one of the lovely young goddesses he spends his time with were to ... encourage him too much?"

"Probably the same thing that happened before, with Asterie and Selene," Perses said.

"Probably," Helios continued. "And if we were to arrange things properly, we could easily position ourselves nearby, to intercede in behalf of such a young goddess when the -boy lost control of himself. And who could blame us if we overreacted a bit ourselves in subduing him?'"

"But who would tempt him in that fashion? They're all mad over him. None of them would do such a thing on purpose."

"None? I can think of one goddess who isn't overfond of Zeus. Besides, I didn't say anything about it being done on purpose."

"Who?"

"Asterie," Helios said.

"Yes, that's true," Perses said, "but that's only because she's jealous. He's spending his time with all these other goddesses, but hasn't visited her even once since that night. Of course he's probably avoiding her on purpose, so he won't offend you, Helios."

"Nevertheless, what I said is accurate. She's one goddess who isn't fond of Zeus."

"But I don't think she'd betray him. She wouldn't purposely lead him into a trap such as you-"

"Perhaps not . . . But she's a changeable creature. A few well-chosen lies might put her in the appropriate mood to face him, to taunt him a bit. . . . It's worth some thought, my friends. Let me consider the problem a while longer."

Just then laughter exploded from the court below them, and they looked

down to see Zeus stretched upon the ground, two of the Pleiades holding him down. As they watched, other maidens leaped atop the youth, until he lay completely covered by divine femininity.

Sixteen

For Metis, the days passed very slowly indeed. Having decided to make Zeus her husband, she was distressed to discover that she had very little innate aptitude for such an undertaking. Most of the time she was exceptionally clear-sighted and knew exactly what was required to resolve any problem she faced, but now she was competing in a new and unfamiliar arena. She tried to approach the problem methodically, but soon found herself in a sea of subtleties and nuances that defied neat classification and clean, insightful solutions.

She saw herself as natural and unaffected. Her dealings with others, while never tactless, were usually direct and to the point, short of the little deceits and subterfuges that so often smoothed the interpersonal relations of gods and goddesses. She clearly stated what she wanted, and expected others to do the same in return. But this was different. She had never been in love before.

Now she did her best to emulate her more successful sisters, agonizing over each choice of clothing, standing endlessly before her mirror and struggling to arrange each garment to optimum effect, so that it fell in just the right way to accentuate the graceful curves of her slender body. She sat for more than an hour at a time struggling to shape her hair into a more pleasing design—a hopeless undertaking, she finally decided, for the thick, dark ringlets resisted her every effort. Such feminine artifice made her uncomfortable and seemed like an extravagant expenditure of time; nevertheless, she persisted.

Worst of all, though, were the hour or two she and Zeus spent together each day. The Okeanid did her best to be bright and captivating, approachable but not accessible, short of marriage. She had to be lovely and desirable without encouraging improper advances that she would be compelled to rebuff. It was a delicate balance to maintain and she wondered how the other maidens managed it ... and if they actually did.

During those hours, Zeus always listened politely to her conversation, nodding at the appropriate junctures; and at times he even warmed to some tangent of her topic and followed it for a while in a direction that interested him, but she was always left with a feeling of hopeless inadequacy as she watched him rise at last and leave the apartment—to laugh and chat with other goddesses. Her continued failure was humiliating, but what could she do? She refused to stoop to the questionable tactics some goddesses employed. After all, she was determined to marry him, not merely to win his love for a night.

Since he had come to stay in the Okeanid's apartment, Zeus had carefully kept his distance from her. At times he found it painful merely to be in her presence—watching her lithe, supple form as she moved about the room, looking at her lovely face as she squatted across from him on the floor, talking animatedly. He found, her quite attractive physically and was gradually coming even to appreciate her peculiar mind, though occasionally her conversations slipped from the imaginative and insightful to the bizarre and complex, making him yearn for the less mentally taxing, idle gossip that was the mainstay of most of the other goddesses. As much as he desired her, though, he made a point of never letting down his guard in her presence. One slip, he was certain, and she would see to it that he was sent back to Crete, which did not suit his plans at all. Mount Othrys was too delightful a place to leave

prematurely.

Still, the Okeanid was most appealing, and as he descended the great steps leading from the Palace of Okeanos he found himself wishing that other circumstances prevailed, so that he could properly explore her amorous potential. He had just started down one of the stone paths when a small, dark-haired goddess stepped up to him.

"You are the boy called Zeus?" she asked.

He smiled at her. "Yes, but I don't know who you are."

"My name doesn't matter. I am an attendant of Lady Asterie. Please, may I speak with you?"

"Certainly. Has your mistress sent you?"

"No. At least, not exactly. Really, she'd be quite angry if she knew I was here. Please promise you won't repeat anything I tell you."

Zeus looked puzzled. "You may speak freely. No one will learn what you've said."

"Thank you! Please tell me, do you find Lady Asterie attractive?"

Zeus looked still more puzzled.

"Please answer honestly. I know the question is presumptuous, but I promise you I have a good reason for asking."

"Of course I do. But I don't understand. Why do you ask such a thing?"

"Because you've offended her. She knows how you've come to be a favorite among all the younger goddesses-but you've avoided seeing her."

"I was warned to avoid her," Zeus said, growing more and more intrigued by the conversation. The goddess had continued along the narrow path and Zeus followed her as they talked.

"Good. Then you don't dislike her. You aren't purposely trying to offend her."

"Not at all. Offending her is the farthest thing from my mind. I was told that she and Helios love each other, and that I would anger him if I visited her, especially after ..."

"She does see Helios regularly, that's true. But they're not promised to one another. Tell me, are you afraid of him?"

Zeus stiffened. "No, I don't fear him ... but I have no particular desire to antagonize him, either. Besides, I've had no reason to think that Asterie might want to see me."

"But she does! I know that may seem odd. Certainly she must not have seemed very friendly when last you saw her. But goddesses don't always show their feelings openly. I'll tell you something that perhaps I shouldn't. The... uh, attention you showed her on the occasion of your first meeting left her... flattered. She was startled, too-a bit frightened, I'm sure-and not at all certain what to make of you. After all, you were a stranger to all Othryns then. But your open admiration did not go unnoticed, or unappreciated. Had circumstances been different-had she known you better-she might well have succumbed willingly. Understand me well- Asterie would certainly deny what I'm

telling you, but that doesn't make it any less true. Some goddesses, you realize, find such rough advances quite... exciting. They prefer to have their lovers take the initiative-forcefully-but seldom bring themselves to openly admit their feelings even to themselves."

Zeus had stopped walking and was staring intently at her. "Why are you telling me this?"

"I hate to see my mistress so sad. I thought if you knew how things truly are, you might visit her sometime-perhaps even tonight. She's at home right now, bored and lonely."

"Are you certain of what you've said? You truly think she'd be pleased to see me again?"

"I know she would!"

"Then I'll go. We'll walk together, and when we arrive you can announce me to her."

The dark-haired goddess smiled up at him, and they continued on toward the Palace of Koios. As they drew near their destination, she raised her hand behind Zeus's back, where he could not see it, and signaled toward the grove of trees they were passing. A hand appeared from among the leaves and waved back at her. A few moments later she took Zeus's arm and led him up the broad stairs, across the portico, and into the palace.

Within the trees, Helios turned and grinned at his companions. "I told you he'd come."

"But can you trust the goddess?" Perses asked. "If she tells anyone about this-"

Helios was shaking his head. "Nara owes me too many favors to break her word. And I know too many unflattering things about her."

"Maybe," Perses continued, "but I'm not so sure this is a good idea. Something might go wrong. Aren't you putting Asterie in too much danger?"

"As soon as she escorts Zeus to Asterie, Nara will signal us. We'll slip into a nearby room and wait there until we're needed."

"I don't know," Perses said quietly. "Sometimes I wonder if you really care about Asterie at all."

"Even if Zeus believes what he's been told," Pallas said, "what makes you think he'll actually attack her? After their last encounter, he's going to be very cautious."

"Asterie will help persuade him."

"How do you mean?" Perses demanded.

"I had a long talk with her this afternoon. She's proud and headstrong. The secret to getting her to do what you want is to appeal to her vanity. I told her I'd overheard Zeus talking, and that he claimed he would never have acted so impetuously with her had he not been new to Mount Othrys. 'Oh, Asterie's attractive enough,' I told her he said, 'but now that I've seen so many other beautiful goddesses, I wouldn't find her charms so overwhelming.' "

Helios chuckled softly. "You should have seen Asterie bristle. She'll be determined to outshine the other maidens. She'll be at her most lovely and alluring now that her appeal has been challenged. I told her he was planning to visit tonight, so she's expecting him-garbed for the occasion, I'll wager."

"Some things are only desirable when others want them," Pallas observed. "And many other goddesses seem to want Zeus."

Helios frowned, but before he could reply Perses said, "Look!" They all turned toward the palace. In one of the ground-floor windows they saw Nara, who was beckoning them.

The three gods circled around to the front of the building. The goddess met them at the great door and quickly conducted them across the atrium.

"In here," she whispered, opening the door to a small chamber. "They're in the next room. The door is closed and these walls are very thick, but if you stand near the windows you should be able to hear Asterie if she cries out. Sound carries well that way, from one window to another along the outside of the palace." She gave him a wide grin, as if to emphasize her personal knowledge of such matters. "You may even be able to hear their chitchat." She hesitated before leaving them. "I hope you know what you're doing, Helios. I really hate being a part of this. He looks like such a nice boy."

Grimacing, Helios moved to stand where she had indicated. Nara left them, pulling the door closed behind her, and the Titan began to ring the hilt of his sword as he listened. Occasionally a few words reached him from the next room, and he heard Asterie laughing in the pleasant, flirtatious manner she adopted on such occasions.

As Helios waited impatiently, in the next room Zeus and Asterie sat side by side talking. If Zeus had thought the goddess merely beautiful the last time he saw her, now he would willingly have admitted that she was indeed gorgeous. She was garbed in a clinging peplos that accented every contour of her body while exposing large, beguiling patches of her graceful shoulders and well-formed bosom. She was different tonight in other ways as well-warmly solicitous as she greeted him and ushered him to his seat, attentive and congenial as she brought him nectar to sip and settled down beside him.

One thing Zeus had learned about dealing with these lovely creatures was that he seldom actually had to say very much himself. An occasional question about some minor and totally insignificant aspect of their lives was usually more than enough to keep them chattering away for fifteen or twenty minutes at a time. As they talked, Asterie leaned toward him in a maddening way, so that her breath caressed his face and her lips hovered so near that he need only stretch his neck toward her to kiss her. Time and again her hand settled on his arm as she talked, and when a few drops of nectar dribbled to his chest, she insisted on daubing them away herself with her kerchief.

Zeus wondered if the attendant who had brought him here could actually be right. While it had not occurred to him that she might be lying, he had not really believed her either-at least not completely. Asterie certainly seemed friendly and playful tonight, and.... approachable. Slowly he began to respond in kind, until at last their lips met in a kiss-a kiss the goddess not only did not seek to elude but rather pursued, leaning toward him and slipping her arms around his back.

"Oh, but you know we shouldn't," she whispered as she drew back. "We

barely know each other."

But now it was Asterie's turn to be surprised. When she sought to disengage herself from the embrace, she found that the boy would not let her go. The hands that had been so gentle upon her back and waist had taken on a more insistent and urgent quality as they foraged into new and unexplored territory. What she had intended as merely a bit of daring but essentially innocent fun-no different, she imagined, from what the other maidens of Othrys indulged in-he clearly viewed in a quite different light.

"Oh!" she cried, pulling as far away from him as she could while his left arm still held her pressed against his chest. He had come out of his chair and was bending over her, trying to kiss her again. "Please stop this instant! I see I've made a mistake. You misunderstand me. Please let me go-immediately*.'"

At last she managed to free herself. As she rose and started to move away he reached for her. His hand caught her peplos instead, becoming entangled in its folds. As she stumbled away, the garment's clasp ripped free. Asterie failed to notice, and turned to retreat across the room, so that the peplos untwisted part way, then dropped loosely about her feet. She tripped out of the garment, then discovered to her horror that she was completely undraped. Clutching her arms across her breasts, she began to scream.

By this time Zeus realized that he had totally misinterpreted the goddess's intentions; what those intentions might actually have been, given the way she had thrown herself at him, he had not the slightest idea. He also realized that no one on Mount Othrys would ever believe that Asterie's clothing had fallen off by accident. His sojourn among the Titans had just come to an abrupt end, for certainly he would have to flee the mountain. For a moment he hesitated, staring longingly at the beautiful maiden. She was a provocative sight as she vainly attempted to conceal the lushest of her charms beneath her slender arms and little hands. He shrugged, as if to disown personal responsibility for something that clearly must have been preordained, then lunged for her.

The goddess shrieked and retreated across the room, the youth at her heels. To Zeus's amazement, though, the figure of the goddess blurred for an instant as she neared the far end of the chamber, and then he found himself pursuing a small, reddish-brown bird that circled upward and darted back in the opposite direction. He leaped after it, but the quail kept swerving out of his grasp.

As he ran, he wished that he had remembered to practice metamorphosis; he had intended to learn that skill, just as he had learned to equip himself with wings. The goddess escaped him yet again, wheeling out of reach just before striking a wall, and he imagined himself as a bird of prey, his powerful wings propelling him after her with ever increasing speed. The thought became very clear for an instant-so clear that he seemed to experience the sensation of flight-and then he realized that his clothing had slipped away and he was flying.

The quail cried out in little shrill shrieks of terror and veered toward a window, a great eagle directly behind it. Just as they reached the opening, the outer door of the chamber flew open. Helios stood in the doorway with Pallas and Perses behind him. The Titan rushed across the room and peered out into the night, but he was too late. The two birds had already vanished in the darkness.

Asterie flew southeast, traveling far faster than any true bird. Small brown wings concealing Titanic power beat incessantly, sending her darting across the dark sky. Time and again her pursuer drew near and seemed upon the point of overtaking her, but each time she somehow found the strength to increase her speed still further. Soon they were above water and heading out across a great sea. There were many clouds tonight, and she sought again and again to conceal herself among them, but Zeus never lost sight of her.

At last the goddess's strength began to fail, and the eagle drew inexorably closer. She glanced back for an instant and was horrified to see it just above and behind her, its great talons already stretched out to grasp her in midair. There was nothing else to do; she folded her wings back into a position suitable for diving and plummeted downward toward the sea.

Zeus followed her down through thick clouds and watched as she struck the water, disappearing beneath the dark waves. Swooping upward at the last moment, he barely avoided plunging in after her.

For a long time he flew in a circle over the area, searching, but she never reappeared. Finally he turned and headed back toward Mount Othrys, where he would bid good-bye to his mother and Metis.

Seventeen

"Now you're ready," Menoitios said gleefully the following evening as he lifted the mortal Bolitos back out of the terrarium and held him up near his own face to scrutinize the brute more carefully. The blood of a freshly slain bear streaked the man's forearms and hairy, powerful chest.

The god carried the man to a nearby table where a shallow bowl of water waited. "Bathe yourself now, lest the odor of blood betray you later. We must act now, or possibly lose our opportunity-if we haven't lost it already. Wash your spear and knife, too."

Once the man was bathed, Menoitios gave him a fresh swatch of linen and instructed him to fashion himself a new loincloth. While he worked, the god examined the tiny weapons to assure himself that they remained undamaged. Finally, preparations completed, Menoitios slipped a cloak over his own shoulders and concealed the mortal inside it, then left his apartment and set out for the Palace of Okeanos.

It was already night and the moon had not yet risen. Menoitios took advantage of the darkness to make a slow circuit of the building. When he was confident he had located the apartment of Metis on the third floor and that no one was nearby and likely to see him, he caused wings to grow from his back, held the mortal in one hand for greater safety, and flew upward, landing on the narrow sill just outside an un-lighted room. As he entered the apartment, he nearly stumbled over the numerous plants that crowded the sill itself and the nearby floor. Once inside, he paused to let his eyes accustom themselves to the greater darkness.

He had been in the apartment of the Okeanid two or three times before, though a number of years earlier; still, he had a good memory for places and easily estimated his position within the large suite of rooms. He judged quite accurately that he was in a small storage room just off a short hall that led to the atrium. If he had calculated correctly, he should find a suitable hiding place for Bolitos in one of the other rooms that opened on the hall.

"You must say nothing, and make no noise," he warned the mortal as he repositioned him within his clothing. He paused to listen at the door, then cracked it open and listened again. Voices reached him from some slight distance away, and he felt confident enough to open the door still farther and look out. Finding no one in sight, he crept down the hall. An open doorway attracted his attention and he paused beside it to look in; it was Metis's bedroom-he had not remembered its location-and would make an ideal hiding place for Bolitos, since he had reason to believe Alalkomeneus slept there too.

Before he entered that chamber, however, the voices drew his attention more forcefully, and he hesitated in the narrow hall, listening. He recognized Metis's voice, but it took him a few moments to place the other. Eventually he decided it must be Rhea.

"No, my lady," the Okeanid was saying. "I'm afraid it's impossible. I've spent the entire day going back and forth among the Titans. Certainly there are many who favor Zeus, but Koios and Phoibe are adamant, and they've convinced Iapetos, Hyperion, and Crios. When Asterie finally returned home-that wasn't until late this morning-I thought they might calm down a trifle, but it's hopeless. After last night, they won't even consider giving him another chance. We're lucky they haven't discovered him yet, for if they do-

"I had so hoped he might remain," Rhea said, "but I suppose you're right."

"I'm certain I'm right," Metis continued. "Do you know that I had visitors here, in my apartment, three times today? They wouldn't believe I wasn't hiding him. I let them search everywhere-it was the only way to get rid of them. Otherwise they'd be skulking about now, hoping to lay hands on him."

"Where was he?" the Titaness asked.

"I told them he fled back to his island home late last night, after the debacle with Asterie. Actually I had him hidden in one of the unoccupied apartments of the palace-two floors above us. I, too, hoped that somehow we might placate them, but it's impossible. I'm afraid you have no choice but to send him away. If he's caught, his punishment will be severe indeed. After all, they don't know who he is."

Menoitios could contain his curiosity no longer. He edged toward the atrium and glanced out quickly. Metis and Rhea stood near each other; almost between them, looking glum and cowed, the boy Zeus sat in a straight-backed chair. Near his feet, squatting on the floor, Menoitios spotted the mortal Alalkomeneus. Just then Rhea started to turn in his direction and Menoitios ducked quickly back out of sight.

The Titaness began to pace nervously about the room, twisting her hands together as she walked. "Yes, you're right, Metis. He must leave Mount Othrys tonight. Perhaps he may return in time, but it's far too dangerous for him to remain now. He can't go back to Crete, though; some of the Titans probably know the general location of that island and may search there for him."

Rhea turned abruptly to face the Okeanid again. "I didn't want to tell you before, but now I must. I believe it will soon be time for my son to put into effect a train of events that will eventually lead him to his rightful place among the gods. To do that, he will need your help. Will you help him, Metis?"

"Of course, my lady!" the younger goddess said, her face clearly betraying her pleasure at such an opportunity. "But what do you mean? What must I do?"

"Zeus isn't yet ready to face his father openly-he's too young, not strong enough. For that matter, Kronos is too powerful for any one god to confront alone, even now. To wrest the kingship of the gods from him, Zeus must have the assistance of his brothers."

"But they're ..."

Rhea nodded sadly. "Yes. They're still imprisoned, and without your help they must remain so. Can you concoct an herb which, when given to Kronos-"

"Easily! I already have such an herb-or at least I used to. One way or the other, I can supply it when the time is right. At worst it might take me a day or two to fashion what's needed."

"Good. Then when you have time, prepare the herb and keep it at hand. There's a second thing. I fear to turn Zeus out on his own. As I've said, he dare not return to Crete. Will you continue as his protectress? He needs someone to keep him out of trouble.'" She cast a scornful look at her son, who immediately dropped his eyes and looked away. "You would have to take him far away, where the Titans are unlikely to find him."

"Yes!" Metis cried before she managed to control her exuberance; then she continued more staidly, "I'll do whatever I can to assist you both, my lady."

Watching again from the nearby hallway, Menoitios did not fail to note the joyful tone of Metis's response or the look of relief that suffused her face on learning that she and Zeus were to go off together. Those two things told him what he wanted to know. The suspicion of the mortal Alalkomeneus had not been mistaken; Metis loved this outlandish boy.

Rhea stood now with her eyes closed, pondering something. Finally she said, "We must not act precipitously. Two moons, I think-oh, it's so difficult to be certain! All this was shown me once, long ago, but there was too much to remember.... Take him far away and keep him safe until two moons have passed, then return here. Have your herb ready. We'll have other preparations to make then, and you may be pressed for time. We'll go together to Mount Olympus and face Kronos."

"You want me to go with you?" Metis asked, pleased to be included in anything having to do with the youth.

"Yes, I think you must come with us. I believe so...."

Menoitios was delighted at all he had heard. What a revelation it amounted to-Zeus was the son of Kronos and Rhea!

And what an opportunity it offered to revenge himself upon Metis. Satisfied that he had discovered as much as he was likely to learn here tonight, he went back to Metis's bedroom.

Just inside the doorway he removed Bolitos from within his clothing, looked meaningfully into the mortal's face, and set him down near the bed. He watched in satisfaction as the man scurried away to conceal himself. He had been thoroughly instructed and knew exactly what he must do.

After the man disappeared from sight, Menoitios made his way back to the

window through which he had entered the apartment, then flew down from the palace and returned to his home. Once there, he went to find Klymene.

"Good evening, Mother," he said pleasantly as he entered her room. "What an interesting tapestry you're making. May I help you somehow?"

Klymene, pleased at the unaccustomed interest and companionship of her youngest son, gestured for him to join her. He stayed with her for a number of hours, and left reluctantly when she finally announced that she was about to prepare for bed. If anyone were later to inquire, she would certainly remember that he had spent the evening with her.

When Menoitios left him, Bolitos waited patiently in his hiding place behind one of the many wooden chests that lined the walls of Metis's bedroom. In time the noises within the atrium became fewer, and soon he heard the approaching footsteps of the goddess.

The man shivered slightly as he peeked out at her towering form. She was talking, and now he realized that she must have brought with her the mortal Menoitios had sent him to kill. Grasping his spear more tightly, Bolitos edged forward until he could see the man, who was standing on the goddess's bed, conversing with her.

The sight reassured him. His adversary was tall, though not as tall as Bolitos, and relatively slender. Slaying him should not be difficult, he thought as he slipped back into his hiding place and continued to wait.

Eventually the goddess left the room. Still Bolitos waited, giving her time to get far enough away that she would be unlikely to hear the man's death cries. From another room he heard her voice, then the voice of a god. Good. She was engaged in conversation and probably would not return for some minutes. Grasping his spear more tightly, he crept toward his prey.

Alalkomeneus was on the floor now, beside Metis's bed. His back was toward his approaching assailant. Bolitos drew back his spear, judged the distance, and sent the missile flying toward the man's unprotected back.

To his astonishment, though, his target leaped aside at the exact moment the spear left his hand. Bolitos realized now that the man, who had seemed oblivious to his approach, must have known he was here and been waiting for him to strike. Drawing his dagger, he rushed forward and sought to plunge the blade into the man's chest, but again he miscalculated. Alalkomeneus was fast and supple, easily dodging to one side so that instead of striking him, Bolitos found himself charging headlong into a wall. He turned, knife still ready, and lunged again, but the man had drawn his own dagger by now and somehow kept managing to stay just out of reach. Panting for breath, Bolitos paused; that was when he noticed the blood on his intended victim's knife. Glancing down, he saw blood gushing from his own side—from a wound he had not even felt. He stared down in astonishment, then tried to cover the wound with one hand. All the while Alalkomeneus watched him, his own dagger ready. Bolitos started forward, but the strength went out of his legs and he stumbled, falling on his face. He lay still, less than a pace from the other man.

But he was not unconscious. He was completely alert, knife clutched tightly in his hand, ready to send it into his adversary's heart. Eyes closed, he waited for Alalkomeneus to bend over him and reach down to see if he was alive or dead; then he would strike. But the other man did

not approach; instead he heard the sound of departing footsteps and realized that his opponent was leaving the room, presumably to return with his goddess. Bolitos pushed himself to his knees and stood erect with difficulty. Pulling off his loincloth, he used it to staunch the flow of blood from his wound, then staggered out to the hall. He stumbled back along the route by which Menoitios had brought him here. Menoitios had left open the door to the rear room through which they had entered the apartment; the opening was barely wide enough for him to fit through, and once inside Bolitos threw his weight against the door and pushed it completely closed, as he had been instructed to do. Below the window he found the thin rope ladder Menoitios had left for him, and managed with great difficulty to ascend it. He was very weak by now and had to stop often to rest. Once on the great stone sill, he pulled the ladder up after him, so that it would not reveal his route of escape, then found a place of concealment beneath one of Metis's plants. He lay down there and promptly lost consciousness.

When he awakened many hours afterward, he was back in Menoitios's room. As promised, the god had returned later that night to the Palace of Okeanos to retrieve him.

"Is Alalkomeneus dead?" the god demanded.

Bolitos shook his head weakly. "No, my lord. I attacked him with spear and knife, but he was too fast. ..."

The god's face turned livid. "You've failed me, miserable creature. You worthless animal, you failed me--and she's going away. I won't get another chance!"

Menoitios dropped the mortal to the floor, placed his sandaled foot on the man's body, and slowly ground it against the marble floor, until nothing recognizable remained.

Furious, Menoitios paced the room for a few minutes, then sat down suddenly.

He would have to be patient. Two months, after all, was not that long. It gave him time to plan and prepare. He could wait, knowing that she and Zeus would be going to Mount Olympos together. Kronos was not likely to let Zeus's accomplice escape; but if he did, Menoitios would at least have the satisfaction of knowing that he was responsible for the destruction of the god she loved.

There was something exquisite in the simplicity of it. All he had to do was feed Zeus to Kronos.

Eighteen

Early the following morning Metis went first to visit those of her sisters and brothers who resided within the Palace of Okeanos, and then to see Klymene and Prometheus. She told each of them that she had decided to return home to the Kingdom of Okeanos for a while. Prometheus tried to dissuade her, but eventually decided that a visit with her parents might indeed be the best thing for her now, after the abrupt disappearance of Zeus. The implication that she was a heartsick maiden rushing home to her parents mortified her, but she did nothing to indicate otherwise. It was better to sacrifice her pride than to have him think she was going off to meet the boy.

Shortly before noon she slipped away from Mount Othrys and flew toward the west, carrying Alalkomeneus safely in her basket. However

inconvenient her hasty departure might be in other respects, she was pleased at the opportunity it presented to remove her favorite mortal from danger. The unexpected attack upon him-carried out in the sanctuary of her own bedroom-had undermined her confidence in her ability to protect him and made her all the more determined to return him to the greater safety of his own people, an action which she had been considering since Menoitios first threatened the man. Of course she had no proof that Menoitios was behind the unprovoked assault, but proof was only necessary if she sought to bring the crime before the Council of Titans, and she had no intention of undertaking such a thankless task. For the time being she was content to insure Alalkomeneus's safety; later, when she had fulfilled her commitments to Rhea, she would devote herself to the punishment of Menoitios.

She flew until she could no longer see the mountain behind her, then circled first north and then east. Finally she arrived at the narrow gorge where Zeus and Rhea awaited her. They had left Mount Othrys late the night before to lessen the likelihood of detection, and had spent the morning talking quietly. With Metis's arrival, Rhea rose to leave. She embraced her son, then turned toward Metis.

"Thank you again, my dear," she said quietly. "I know you'll do everything you can to keep him safe."

The Titaness returned to Mount Othrys while Metis and Zeus flew toward Mount Pelion. The Okeanid had considered all the places she might take him. They dared not go to the kingdom of her father or of Nereus. Together they would attract far more attention than she would alone, and the large number of gods there made it too likely that word of their presence would reach back to Mount Othrys. Neither did she trust herself alone with him in some remote corner of the world. Few of the Titans knew how to find the cave of Philyra and Cheiron, and so Metis considered her sister's home a reasonably safe place to hide the boy until it was time for them to return to Mount Othrys.

If Metis looked forward to returning to the peaceful surroundings of Mount Pelion, Zeus did not. He had little more than hinted at the cause of the hasty departure that had concluded his last visit there, and could well imagine the reception that awaited his return. Metis glanced at her companion a number of times during their flight. He was exceptionally quiet, his usually cheerful disposition turned glum.

They traveled slowly, flying low above the treetops at a leisurely pace. Metis timed their journey so that they reached their destination just before sunset.

Philyra was on the ledge outside the cave as they alighted. At the sight of Zeus her features grew stiff with outrage. "Why have you brought this boy back here, Metis?" she demanded, eyes blazing. "I won't have him here! Send him away this instant, or I'll drive him away myself."

Metis tried to quiet her, but the older goddess's loud protestations had already attracted the attention of the other occupants of the cave, and Cheiron and Dione soon appeared. Cheiron moved immediately to arm himself with a stout club, then went to stand beside his mother.

"If you really want us to go, we will," Metis said. "But I'll have to go with him, and I'd really prefer to stay here and visit my favorite sisters and nephew. Can't we discuss this calmly? I know you have complaints against this youth, but I've come to know him quite well and think highly of him. Whatever offenses he may have committed when he was last here, I'm sure they were committed out of ignorance."

Philyra was adamant in her refusal to allow the boy to stay, but Dione came forward as they continued to discuss the matter. At last she spoke too.

"Philyra, this is your home, not mine. But if my thoughts have any weight with you, I think everyone deserves a second chance. We know what Metis says is true. The boy himself told us from the very first that he was a stranger to divine society. Is it fair to expect such a youth to abide by laws he neither knows nor understands?'"

Philyra resisted at first, but eventually gave in to the importunities of her sisters. Once she relented, Cheiron grudgingly acquiesced as well, and an uneasy truce was forged. It was agreed that Zeus could remain on Mount Pelion and enjoy the hospitality of Philyra and her son as long as Metis remained there too, to oversee him, and as long as he adhered to strict standards of good conduct.

It was dusk now, and Metis took Zeus with her as she hastened to return Alalkomeneus to his people. They dwelt near the base of the mountain, where food was plentiful. The tribe was small, consisting of no more than thirty men, all of whom seemed delighted at the return of their king. They had no permanent shelters and lived for the most part in the open air, feasting on the honey and acorns that nature provided bountifully for them. On those rare occasions when inclement weather made it necessary, they retreated to small nearby caves, but were always anxious to abandon such dank quarters as soon as possible. A number of disputes had arisen during Alalkomeneus's absence and he immediately set about settling them.

Neither Metis nor Zeus had slept the night before, and so they soon returned to the cave of Philyra. There Metis asked her sister to show them where they might rest. Still scowling at the boy, Philyra conducted them through a narrow opening and into the series of caverns that lay beyond.

Zeus had not been inside before. He was amazed to see how well furnished the dwelling was, with many chairs, tripod tables, and stools, all somewhat homely perhaps, but sturdily built and charmingly rustic. His home on Crete, where he had lived in similar circumstances, seemed sparse in the extreme beside these generously furnished quarters. Philyra and her son had provided for themselves and their guests virtually all the amenities that one would have expected on Mount Othrys.

"You may sleep here," Philyra told him when they drew near the rear of the innermost cavern. She pointed toward a natural alcove in one wall where a cot had been placed. As he sat down upon it, marveling at the softness of the mattress, Philyra led Metis away and the boy slowly realized that he had been banished to the most distant point within the cavern. A curve in the great wall effectively blocked his view of the rest of the dwelling and cut him off from everyone else.

The strained relations that were the hallmark of Zeus's first day back on Mount Pelion could not last indefinitely. Even Philyra grew less antagonistic toward the newcomer, and by the third day he and Cheiron were well on their way to becoming friends. Watching them, Metis was struck by how much alike they actually looked, especially in their facial features. The bittersweet realization left her amazed that she had not noticed the similarity before.

Everything seemed to be progressing nicely, and Metis was left with only

one problem-the troubling reaction of Dione toward the boy. From the moment her sister had stepped forward to defend him, Metis had sensed something unspoken in her attitude. At first Dione carefully kept her distance and never sought out an opportunity to speak with him, but Metis occasionally noticed the way her eyes lingered on the youth, then darted away in embarrassment when she realized Metis was observing her. Zeus was aware of it too, and more than once Metis caught him watching Dione silently. Whenever she looked up, they smiled at each other.

Metis considered jealousy one of the most distasteful of emotions, but the rigorous honesty she practiced upon herself forced her to admit that she was jealous. Incomprehensible longings filled her at times, so that she wanted to throw herself at Zeus-even though she knew that would be counterproductive in the long run. She wanted to somehow make him forget everyone and everything but her, but always her pride and firm self-control prevented her from indulging in such unbecoming conduct. Again and again she attempted to attract his attention, even flirting with him in her halfhearted, awkward fashion, but such efforts were always futile. She simply did not know how to win his love, she decided sadly.

They were often alone together. Metis considered it unwise to allow him to remain at the cavern without her and therefore insisted that he accompany her on her daily rambles through the nearby forests. Zeus found the excursions dull and tiring, and began to enliven them with jokes and games. Metis resisted his frivolity at first, but his insistent good humor eventually won her over. She was soon throwing rocks with him at distant targets, running races and playing tag.

The formality that had existed between them began to slip away, and toward the end of their third such outing, Zeus leaned toward her unexpectedly and kissed her quickly on the mouth. The kiss took her by surprise, and she stood staring at him as he ran away. A number of moments passed before she remembered that it was her turn to chase him. When she caught him, she kissed him back. It was a discreet, almost modest kiss-a peck at most-but immediately she regretted it. She was afraid he would think it meant more than she intended. Turning, she darted away, disappearing among the tall pines that surrounded them.

Zeus grinned as he watched her run. Her kiss had told him what he wanted to know; in it she had revealed herself more fully than in all her words and looks. He had been waiting- hoping-for some indication that she found him attractive, that genuine passion lay beneath her too proper exterior.

He caught her again, then fled down a narrow path and disappeared around a turn. Metis followed and found herself unexpectedly in a small glade. She was about to cross it and continue along the trail on the opposite side when her attention was captivated by a flower of overwhelming beauty, like none she had ever seen before. It grew alone amid a patch of clover. She scanned the trees across from her in search of the boy, then decided to rest here for a few minutes and admire her discovery. Sitting beside the flower, she leaned over it to examine its garish beauty more closely and to inhale its fragrance.

As her nose drew near the petals, however, she found before her not a flower, but the handsome, smiling face of the boy Zeus. Before she could draw back, his lips pressed against hers and his arms closed around her, pulling her down with him to the ground. Her limbs went weak, seemed to lose all their strength. Strange thrills shot through her at the contact, so that she felt submerged in a sea of sensation. He drew away for a moment, and though she certainly did not intend it, her lips

sought out his and fastened on them hungrily.

All the love that had been building inside her, and which she had been struggling for so long to keep under control, found expression in that kiss. Her arms encircled his neck and she pressed her body so tightly against his that for an instant she had the odd impression that their forms were fusing, that she could no longer distinguish where her own body ended and his began.

Now she felt him fumbling with her clothing. The contact of his warm hand against her bare flesh brought her back to her senses and to a sudden realization of her situation. No!

She must not surrender to him-not here-not like this! Gasping, she pulled her mouth from his and struggled to wriggle free from his grasp. He tried to restrain her, but at last she managed to sit up, then got quickly to her feet and started to back away from him.

"Please-you mustn't!" she cried. "We mustn't!"

But the expression in his eyes told her that words were useless now. As he rose and moved toward her, she turned and fled, her open peplos fluttering around her. Zeus followed at full speed this time, not at the playful trot to which she had become accustomed in their games. Ahead lay a thicket of underbrush over which the towering maiden could easily have leaped, but she was certain that Zeus would overtake her on the other side. As she approached the thicket, she stripped off her clothing so that it would not trip her, then transformed herself into a hare. She glanced back at her pursuer, then plunged into the underbrush.

Behind her, without hesitation, Zeus too cast off his natural form, becoming instead a small red fox. The thicket presented no obstacle to such a creature, and Metis soon found small, sharp teeth nipping playfully at her rear legs.

A high tree loomed just ahead, and she became a squirrel, scrambling up the perpendicular trunk and then out across a narrow limb. But to the goddess's amazement, Zeus was every bit as adept at shape-changing as was she. Behind her followed a larger, male version of herself, every bit as nimble.

The foliage around her was too thick to risk flying, and the goddess now had little doubt that her pursuer could overtake her in the air. She sprang to the branches of a neighboring tree, then scampered back down. She became a slender, fleet doe, leaping easily over the underbrush that blocked her path. Just behind her came a handsome white wolf. At every change of form, Zeus followed effortlessly, matching or surpassing each metamorphosis.

At last she could flee no more, and he overtook her at the edge of a small stream. As she lay there, exhausted, her natural form returned. He took her in his arms. She tried to resist, tried vainly to push him away, but it was useless. His arms closed around her, his lips descended upon hers, and her will to resist melted away. Her mind told her that she had lost, that once he had possessed her she would be no different from all the other goddesses who had succumbed or would succumb to his charms-that he would never marry her now. But her heart did not care about such things. It surrendered without terms or conditions. She gasped and closed her eyes tightly. She threw her arms around the god she loved and pressed herself against him with all her strength.

Beneath the towering pines of Mount Pelion, Metis, daughter of Okeanos,

who in matters other than those of the heart was wiser than all the other Titans, mingled in sweet love with the raw young god from Crete, who would one day become King of the Gods.

Nineteen

The Nymph was returning home from the vicinity of Mount Lykaion, where she had spent the morning. Toward the bottom of one of the cool mountain slopes she paused abruptly and called out.

"Who's there? I know you're there. I saw you a moment ago, for an instant. Why are you hiding?"

The nymph waited tensely. When no reply was forthcoming, she called out again. "You won't fool me by pretending not to be there. I saw you. If you don't show yourself, I'll just go the other way."

Now something stirred behind the tall trees. "I was afraid I might frighten you," the voice of a god called back, and then someone stepped into the path ahead of her.

She drew back despite herself. The god's concern was well founded; she almost turned and fled at the sight of him. Instead she took a firm grip on herself and stared in amazement at the ungainly figure, her eyes flitting from his ugly face and large, hooked nose to the small horns and shaggy goat ears that protruded from his head. As he came forward a little, she realized that he had the legs and hooves of a goat as well. He wore only a long, dirty rectangle of cloth, which was loosely wrapped about him and actually concealed little of his misshapen body. In his hands he carried many sprigs of green pine needles and what seemed to be a wreath. As they spoke, his fingers continued braiding the sprigs together.

She forced herself to smile at him. "Well, you are an imposing sight, I must admit. I've never seen you before. Are you new to Arkadia?"

The god nodded, glancing up from his work. She was very beautiful, but he was uncomfortable talking to her. He had never spoken directly to such a being before.

"I am Syrinx, daughter of the river god Ladon. Who are you?"

The god applied two final twists to the wreath upon which he had been working, held it up for a final inspection, then placed it on his head with a wide, toothy smile. "I am Pan, son of Amaltheia," he said, advancing a little closer to her.

The nymph noticed his movement and edged back up the trail.

"Yes," he continued, "I'm new to this area. I've been roving the fields and forests, looking for my brother. You haven't seen him, have you? His name is Zeus."

She shook her head quickly. "No, I'm sure I haven't seen anyone who looks like you!"

The god hung his head. "Actually he doesn't look much like me. He's quite handsome."

"Still, I haven't seen any strangers today. I haven't seen any strangers in a long time actually, other than you, I mean," she added ingenuously.

"You're very beautiful," Pan said. "You must have many lovers."

The nymph gasped. "Most certainly not! I have no lovers-but I do have many suitors, if that's what you mean."

"None at all?" Pan inquired incredulously, advancing another step toward her.

"Certainly not. I'm not at all like the foolish nymphs you probably know. I'm quite modest, and completely chaste. I pride myself upon that and intend to remain so until I'm married ... if I get married, that is. Actually, I've been considering not marrying at all, though I'm really too young to reach a firm decision in such a significant matter. All my suitors know and understand how I feel. I don't really care what all the other nymphs do. You'll notice, by the way, that very few of them ever find husbands, though they have lovers aplenty!"

"It seems a waste, though, to let such beauty go unappreciated," he said, still not looking directly at her but continuing to edge closer, so that now he judged that a sudden lunge would carry him to her side before she could flee.

"Your conversation is rather forward, you know," Syrinx told him, then let out a startled cry as he rushed toward her. The god's outstretched arms, however, closed on empty air. She had stepped neatly aside, then circled behind him. The maneuver was so perfectly executed and seemed so effortless that Pan was certain she must have practiced it many times; undoubtedly she had had many opportunities to practice it.

He followed her down the sloping path, then out across a broad meadow. Twice he nearly had her in his grasp, only to have her slip away again. Twice he lost sight of her completely, but eventually routed her from her hiding place and recommenced the chase. They ran on and on, until the god's greater stamina began to wear her down.

Ahead lay a great river-Ladon, the home of her father- and as she ran toward it Syrinx cried aloud. "Help me! Father-sisters-anyone who can hear, please help!"

Pan was only a few dozen yards behind and her legs were beginning to fail. They would soon be so weak that she would be unable to run any farther. At the river's edge she hesitated, looking in every direction, then turned and threw herself into a bed of tall reeds, hoping to conceal herself. As she lay there, she concentrated all her mental energy and tried to change her form, something her father and a few of her sisters did easily and often. It should have been a hopeless effort, for all her previous attempts at metamorphosis had failed utterly; but today was different.

Pan had seen her enter the marshy area near the river's edge and charged in after her. Thinking that she might somehow be hidden beneath or among the plants, he ripped out great handfuls and tossed them behind him. Suddenly a low cry, like a moan of pain, made him stare down at the bundle in his hand.

He stopped searching for the nymph, sat on the dry grass nearby, and examined the reeds, which were among the largest he had ever seen. As he held them, a gust of wind whistled through some of the hollow tubes, emitting a soft sigh that reminded him very much of the voice of the nymph. He raised one to his mouth and blew through it. Delicate, charming music resulted. He discovered that he could make the sounds light and airy if he liked, or clear and shrill, or deep and solemn. For hours he remained there, on a little hillock above the river where the

nymph had disappeared, amusing himself in this fashion.

The most pleasing notes resulted when he held reeds of different lengths close together and blew into them alternately, and so he selected and bound together the seven most pleasing with long, tough strands of grass. When he was satisfied with their arrangement, he began to play the instrument in earnest, drawing from it first a long and mournful strain that made him think of the exquisite cruelty of nymphs, who were so miserly in bestowing their affections; and then a wild and passionate tune, as if imploring the lovely creatures to be merciful to him.

Later, when he came upon a beehive, he stole wax and pressed it between and around the reeds as a sort of mortar to hold them stiff and straight, then bound them together again, still more tightly. All the long afternoon he played, and well into the evening, as he wandered northward, back toward the high mountains where he had last seen Zeus. As he walked he blew upon the syrinx, drawing from it all the rich beauty and delicate emotion of the unlucky nymph whose name the instrument would henceforth bear.

Though Pan had claimed he was searching for his brother, that was only partly true. He so thoroughly enjoyed the quiet, solitary beauty of the hills and valleys that he would have been perfectly content to continue on indefinitely even if he never found Zeus—pausing occasionally to eat, rest, or play upon his pipes, roving across forest and glen, pursuing the occasional nymphs that crossed his path. He was in no hurry to do anything else or to go anywhere in particular.

Toward evening of the following day he paused near the edge of a wide clearing, listening intently. From ahead of him, on the other side of the clearing, came the sounds of movement among the trees. He drew back and concealed himself. At first he thought one or more nymphs might be approaching rapidly, but as he continued to listen he became convinced that the sounds indicated instead many gods progressing at a steady pace.

If he were right, something very unusual was afoot. In all the stories Ida and Adrastia had told him, he had never heard of more than three or four gods traveling together, at least out in a wilderness such as this. He could not imagine a contingency that would bring together a large number of deities in such a place, and so he drew back still farther and crouched down to better conceal himself.

Soon a figure appeared across the clearing from him, then a second and a third. Tall and powerfully built, with shaven heads and chalk-streaked bodies, naked except for the bronze ornaments that adorned their wrists and ankles, they surged out of the forest and into the open, their fierce eyes scanning the landscape for any sign of an enemy, their long, bronze-pointed spears held ready for thrusting.

Pan watched in astonishment. He recognized them immediately. They were the Kouretes, the divine savages who lived on the same distant mountain where he and Zeus had grown up. He had known them all his life—distantly, it was true, since they were not a friendly people—and in all that time he had never heard of them venturing from their island home.

The sight of them always made him feel uneasy. They had always seemed to be lurking nearby, just out of sight. He remembered an occasion when he and Zeus had ventured too far up a precarious slope and found themselves clinging to a sheer rock wall, unable to move without risking a disastrous fall. At their first childish cries for help, a half-dozen of

the savages appeared out of nowhere and quickly carried them down to safety.

But what were they doing here? He could see more than twenty of the warriors now, with still more issuing from the forest. As he watched, another sort of creature followed them into the clearing. Pan gasped and began to look behind himself for some route by which he might escape. His knees were shaking. A goat of divine proportion came forward purposefully, halted near the middle of the clearing, and lifted its great horned head to survey the area.

Pan held his breath, his eyes grown large with fear. Whatever happened, his mother must not find him here! Normally Amaltheia was the most gentle and loving of creatures, but she could display a terrible temper at times, too-especially when her children had misbehaved. To make matters worse, she was sure to blame him; whenever he and Zeus got into trouble, Amaltheia was always certain that Pan was the primary instigator-and dealt with him accordingly. He dared not even think of the punishment she might inflict upon him this time.

The wind, as best he could tell, was blowing in his direction, and so she probably would not be able to sense his presence by smell. But if she found the trail that had led him here, she would almost certainly detect his spoor-and then all the pleading and excuses he could muster would not avail him. Great drops of sweat began to roll down his forehead as he edged backward into the thick forest behind him.

As he retreated, the goat goddess made a slow circuit of the clearing, her nose held close to the ground, but since Pan had not actually entered that area she found no indication of his presence. It was dusk now and she went to one of the warriors and bleated softly. He seemed to understand and immediately signaled to the others. Within moments skin tents sprang up around her as the Kouretes prepared to camp for the night.

Amaltheia bleated again, in a shriller, more demanding tone, and from one of the nearby trees a tiny sparrow fluttered down to land on the grass near her front hooves. She spoke to the bird in hushed animal sounds, and then the creature darted off, flying southward toward distant Crete. Each evening she sent it there to discover if Zeus and Pan had returned, and each morning it flew back to inform her that they had not.

Now the divine beast went to a thick patch of grass nearby and trampled it until it appeared quite comfortable. Lying down, she watched the warriors as they completed their nightly chores.

She was very sad. The impenetrable pelt with which she was endowed protected her from the pointed branches and brambles of the forest, but nothing could shield her from the loneliness and despair she felt. For weeks now she had searched the mainland, without any sign of her sons. She yearned to rub her shoulder and side against their legs, to feel their fingers in her thick pelt, to lavish upon them again all the love that welled up within her at the thought of their bright, grinning faces. And she would.

It was inconceivable that they would purposely stay away from her so long; only by presupposing some outside force could she explain their prolonged absence. Her dull animal mind was incapable of understanding many things, but once she grasped an idea she never let it go. The Kouretes obeyed her every command without hesitation, extending to her the unquestioning devotion they had pledged long ago to the infant Zeus.

However long it might take, she was determined to find her children and extricate them from whoever or whatever was keeping them from her. With the Kouretes beside her, she had no doubt that she could accomplish just that.

While Amaltheia and her entourage settled down for the night in their comfortable bivouac, Pan sank deeper and deeper into the pathless forest. When at last he thought himself far enough away that he could not easily be heard, he increased his pace and did not rest until late that night.

If he returned home on his own, he reasoned, Amaltheia's wrath would be somewhat placated. But he could not return without Zeus. They must go back to Crete together, or not at all. He had traveled so widely and in such a desultory manner that he was not completely sure where they had become separated. Somewhere to the northwest seemed most probable, and so he set his course in that direction, even though it was quite likely that Zeus had long ago moved on to more interesting surroundings.

As usual, Pan found many things to distract him along the way, and it was not until many days later that he again found himself in the vicinity of Mount Pelion.

Though he tramped up and down the lofty hills and steep valleys until nightfall without sign of the youth, he was not overly discouraged. He occasionally found nymphs to chase; there were cool mountain streams to drink from and high, thick trees to lie beneath in the warm afternoons while he played upon his syrinx. It really did not concern him overmuch if he searched here for weeks, since these hills and forests were very nearly as fine as any others.

On the third day he finally found Zeus-or, rather, Zeus found him. He was lying with his back against the bole of a great tree, playing upon his pipes, when he looked up to see a tall, handsome youth approaching. Nearly two months had passed since they had been together, and Pan was surprised at the difference those months had made in his companion. The changes were subtle and he had difficulty deciding exactly what they were, but he knew that Zeus looked older somehow, more mature. Perhaps he had even grown taller in that brief interim.

"I looked all over for you," Zeus said, dropping down beside him next to the tree.

"And I, for you, brother," Pan answered, grinning back at him. "Have you been here-nearby, I mean-all this time? I've traveled very far, and seen many things."

"You must tell me about all your adventures. But no, I left here for a while and went to visit the Titans on Mount Othrys-that's a place you must see, if you haven't been there already. Aigipan," he continued, his voice dropping to a more confidential tone, "the goddesses there are unbelievable! Once you see them, you'll never want to bother with a dryad or naiad again-not even an auloniad. And you don't have to exhaust yourself chasing them through wood and dell. They invite you to their houses and sit right down next to you. Of course it's very frustrating, too, since you have to spend so much time just talking to them, but if you do it right-"

Pan listened with marked interest, but when Zeus finished narrating the marvels of Mount Othrys, he felt compelled to relate in detail the exquisite beauty of the many nymphs he had pursued. That he had caught none of them he neglected to point out, instead letting Zeus draw his

own conclusions.

Their visit lasted for more than an hour, interrupted at last when Zeus heard Metis calling from a nearby hill.

"I must go now," Zeus said, somewhat awkwardly. He had spoken little of his present life on Mount Pelion with Metis and her family, since he did not feel free to invite Pan to join him there. He was certain Philyra would not tolerate another guest, especially one so outlandish. He laid an affectionate hand on Pan's shoulder. "Soon I'll return to Mount Othrys, I think-at least I hope so. If you wish to find me again, that would be the most likely place to look."

"Then you're not ready to return home?" Pan asked in surprise.

Zeus only shook his head.

"Mother is here on the mainland looking for us."

"Amaltheia? Are you joking?"

"No, I'm not. She's here and she has the Kouretes with her-many, perhaps all of them, for all I know."

Zeus hung his head. "I haven't even given a moment's thought to her, or to Ida and Adrastia. How inconsiderate I am. But it doesn't matter. I can't return now."

Metis called again, and Zeus rose quickly to his feet, using the growing impatience of her voice as an excuse to depart before Pan asked why he could not return now.

"I'm sure we'll meet again soon," Pan said. "Good-bye, brother."

Zeus stared into the ugly, smiling face of his companion. He had not thought of it before, but if Amaltheia was not really his mother, then this shaggy, ill-formed god was not really his brother, either. The thought made him very sad and he stepped suddenly forward to embrace him, then turned and sprinted off before Pan could see the tears in his eyes.

Twenty

Perhaps, Metis thought sometimes, the divine boy did indeed love her, at least in his own fashion. He sought out her company each and every day, and they spent long hours together talking, exploring the neighboring woods and fields, and lying together in one another's arms.

He was really quite pleasant to be with. He had a ready wit and displayed keen interest in many things, though his interest was usually quickly satisfied. Where she would have happily devoted days to studying some new problem, he spent no more than a few minutes before moving on to some fresh amusement. At times she suspected that he actually required no more time than that to plumb the matter in question, seeing in a glance what it took her hours to discern. At other times she was convinced he was merely shallow and told herself that he would eventually grow out of his youthful impatience, that time would deepen and perfect him. There were fleeting instants, too, when she sensed other aspects of him. Those glimpses always left her feeling uneasy afterward . . . inadequate and apprehensive.

He was fond of her; she had no doubt of that. She had never been in love before, had never felt the need for love.

Now she yearned to see him mirror her own overwhelming emotions, to see reciprocated in his face and eyes all the incomprehensible longing she felt.

The handsome young god had awakened within her an unsuspected torrent of needs and desires—a churning, emotional cataract, the intensity of which terrified her and made her struggle to conceal the true depths of her emotions, lest they frighten him away. Even when she lay in his arms she dared not abandon herself completely to the intensity of her love.

Above all, she was determined not to worry about the future. Neither would she concern herself with the mistakes of the past. Instead she made up her mind to enjoy the present as fully as she could. She had Zeus to herself, or very nearly so, and if she were ever to have a chance of winning him for her own—completely for her own, as her husband—this was it. Once they returned to Mount Othrys, especially after the goddesses there discovered who he actually was, he would be forever surrounded by divine femininity.

Even here she had to contend with competition from her sister Dione. Many times she had caught the two of them looking at each other, exchanging quick glances. Through an unspoken understanding Metis and Zeus had continued to maintain a strictly proper decorum whenever in the presence of others, and it occurred to Metis that the same might very well be true of Zeus and Dione. The thought crushed her and made her disconsolate.

On a few occasions Dione and the boy had been absent from the mountaintop simultaneously, and Metis could not help suspecting the worst. She did not really blame her sister; in fact, she would have been surprised if Dione had not found Zeus attractive, but the thought of them together, perhaps in the very places she herself frequented with him, made her very sad.

When she could not be with Zeus, the Okeanid passed her time by helping Philyra, visiting Alalkomeneus and his people, or merely wandering about the nearby forests and hills in quiet contemplation. She tried, too, to spend time with Cheiron. He was a quiet, introspective boy, and she feared that Philyra's often unconcealed bitterness had left its mark on him. He and Zeus had eventually overcome their earlier antagonism and sometimes went off together to hunt food for the nearby tribe of mortals, but Cheiron's only true friend was Alalkomeneus, with whom he spent long hours whenever possible.

The weeks sped by, and far sooner than she had thought possible, it was nearly time to return to Mount Othrys. She had brought with her the special herb Rhea had mentioned, and a few days before their scheduled departure she devoted a number of hours to refining and intensifying it. Seated by herself off to one side of the cave's entrance, she held the plant in one hand and concentrated intently upon it. Small, mushroomlike bulbs sprouted from the tips of the stalks, thickening and growing black beneath her intent gaze. When she was at last satisfied, she dried a few of the bulbs in the sun, then ground them carefully in a large bowl. She placed the resulting powder in a small pouch, which she then concealed within her clothing, suspended by a cord from about her neck.

Their final day on Mount Pelion arrived all too soon. Before noon Metis went to bid Alalkomeneus good-bye. Because of the attempt upon his life she had decided he would have to remain here until she had dealt with Menoitios and could again assure his welfare on Mount Othrys.

She carried him on her shoulder for a stroll in the nearby forest, where they could speak privately. After she finished explaining what she had in mind, he was quiet for some time.

"Mistress," he said at last, "I agree that it makes good sense to leave me here among my people while you attend to your pressing affairs. But will you promise me something, my lady?"

"If I may," she said, grinning at him. He looked even more prim and proper than usual. "What is it, Alalkomeneus? "

His expression became very serious. "Beware of the boy Zeus."

"What do you mean?" she demanded. "That's a very odd thing for you to say, my friend." She set the man down atop a small hill so that she could look directly at him.

"I have a very bad feeling about him, mistress-about you and him. I fear you've fallen in love with him, and that such a love can only mean... pain and heartache for you. Forgive me for speaking bluntly. I see that my words have wounded you, and I am sorry for that. But I believe I have spoken truly...."

She turned away from him for a moment.

"Please, my lady," he went on. "Please listen, wisest of all the gods-I fear this god. He isn't like the other Titans and lesser gods I have known. I think you must be able to see that, too. Please don't laugh, mistress. I know it must sound ridiculous for a mortal such as I to say such a thing, but remember that I am your mortal. Because of you I have known the greatest of the gods. Proteus taught me to speak and Kronos held me in his hand! I may be only a mortal man, my lady, but I have eyes that see. Yours, I fear, have been blinded by this youth."

Metis's halfhearted smile died away as he continued.

"Be careful, my lady! He isn't for you, or for any one goddess. It may already be too late, for I've been delaying telling you these things since we came back from Mount Oth-rys. I am afraid, mistress. Unless you separate yourself from him, I fear I will lose you-forever!"

Metis picked him up, pressed him to her cheek, then kissed him. He looked up at her and became even more distressed when he saw her wiping her eyes; she almost never cried.

"You may be right, Alalkomeneus. But I fear things have gone too far already. Whatever must happen will happen."

"Please, my lady," he said, "you must heed my words. I can sense it with every fiber of my being-you must not marry him! You will never be happy with such a god."

"Or happy without him, Alalkomeneus! You see far too clearly for one so small. I love him more than I've ever loved anyone or anything. But you've little to worry about, since he doesn't seem to love me."

They visited for some time more, the goddess doing her best to lead their conversation in a more convivial direction.

At last she returned him to his village, kissed and bid him good-bye, then returned to the mountaintop home of her sister.

After supper she and the others gathered briefly before the entrance to

the cave. Dione, who had overstayed her intended visit by many weeks, would leave tonight too, returning to the Kingdom of Nereus. She embraced both her sisters and Cheiron, then hesitated a moment before stepping boldly forward and slipping her arms around Zeus's neck. She kissed him quickly on the mouth—a familiarity that made Philyra stiffen and bristle, though she said nothing. Dione bid them all farewell, then turned and flew off into the darkening sky. A short time later Zeus and Metis left too, flying in the opposite direction.

When they reached Mount Othrys, it was quite dark. Metis led the youth directly to the home of his mother, a relatively modest stone structure nestled back within a carefully cultivated forest of huge oak and birch trees. They found the Titaness at home and expecting them.

"You look well," she exclaimed, "both of you! You've taken good care of my son, Metis. Thank you."

The Okeanid nodded her head in acknowledgment of the compliment.

"Do you have the herb?"

Metis removed the pouch from within her peplos and displayed it.

"Very good. Then all is nearly in readiness. I still await replies from two of the gods I've petitioned, but those should come tomorrow or the day after at the latest. Then we'll be ready to act."

"What gods, Mother?" Zeus asked.

"Those who will rear your brothers and sisters. Unfortunately they, too, must grow up in secret. Kronos does not know which of his children is destined to overthrow him and so fears them all. We must not allow him to find them—or you—until it is time."

"I don't understand, Mother. Grow up? Aren't they as old as I?"

Rhea smiled sadly. "Older, in fact, for you are the last born of my children. What a monster your father is—what a despicable creature! He robbed me of every joy of motherhood.... except this...." She put her arms about the youth and hugged him vigorously, as if she feared he might be snatched from her again. "I haven't told you the full extent of the horror Kronos has perpetrated. I don't like to talk or even think about it, and I fear, too, that you might not believe me. Let it go for now. You'll soon see for yourself, and understand."

"What is the situation here on Mount Othrys?" Metis asked. "Have you managed to pacify the Titans?"

Rhea smiled wanly. "Not enough, I fear. Zeus must remain hidden until we return from Olympos—that much is certain. Any other course would be folly. Even then it's unlikely he'll be able to remain on Mount Othrys, though you and I may do what we can on his behalf. Helios in particular is anxious to locate him. He tried to find him on Crete, I understand—though it isn't at all certain that he searched the right island! And Epimetheus seems equally devoted to my son's apprehension and punishment—but he isn't likely to pose much of a threat for some time. He's managed repeatedly to get himself beaten during your absence, by quarreling with Helios and Crius's sons. Right now he's laid up with a bad chest wound. As long as no one knows he's returned, Zeus will be safe here with me, though he'll have to stay hidden at all times and must not venture outside."

She turned to look at Zeus. "Do you understand? Will you abide by these

conditions?"

The youth nodded.

A short while later Metis left them, walking slowly back to the Palace of Okeanos, her father. Her apartment seemed very empty, and after lighting lamps throughout it, she mixed herself a cup of nectar and settled upon a low divan. Already she found herself missing Zeus intensely.

Although Metis had managed to reach her apartment without being seen, her presence there did not go undetected. One god was aware of her return. He had been counting the days since her departure, and each of the last few evenings had stood outside the Palace of Okeanos and peered upward at her darkened rooms. Tonight his diligence was rewarded, first by the many lights that shone again within the suite for the first time in two months, then by a quick glimpse of the Okeanid as she passed in front of one of the many windows.

In the darkness below, Menoitios indulged his malicious glee in a cruel smile, then turned away and hurried back to his own apartment. He could not be certain when Metis and Zeus would leave for Mount Olympos, but it would certainly be soon. All he had to do was precede them to Kronos's palace and inform the dread Lord of Olympos that he might soon expect visitors of an unwelcome sort. Then Menoitios could hasten back to the safety of his father's palace and let the monstrous Titan deal with them.

The thought pleased him greatly. What revenge could be more exquisite than one that did not require him to use his own hands or endanger himself at all? He dallied for some minutes imagining the horrible things that might befall Metis, especially after Kronos heard what he intended to tell him. With only a little luck, he might never again have to bear her distasteful presence. He only regretted that he would not be able to tell anyone what had happened to her. That would be a very difficult secret to keep.

Back in his own room, he dressed quickly, donning a richly embroidered chiton and dark cloak. Then, cautiously avoiding contact with any of the other inhabitants of the palace, he made his way outside again and walked a good distance, so that none of his family might see him fly off at this time of night and ask unfortunate questions later. He grew hawklike wings and soared down from the mountain. It was a long journey and he flew for many hours without resting before he reached his destination.

At last Olympos loomed ahead of him, a range of high peaks that began near the eastern sea and stretched inland for more than twenty-five miles, its great bulk soaring upward nearly two miles into the sky. Now the journey became arduous as he flew almost perpendicularly upward, passing dark forests that clung to the sheer slopes and innumerable streams that tumbled downward through deep channels in the rock. Still higher the vegetation grew sparse, then disappeared completely. The air was cold and thin. Emerging from a thick layer of clouds, he found himself in a rocky world covered with ice and snow. The cold wind buffeted him, piercing his light clothing and making him begin to shudder.

As he approached the summit, he scanned the neighboring peaks, searching out the fabled palace of Kronos. He had never seen it before, never before visited Olympos-not, at least, since infancy. No one came here anymore; no one wanted, or dared to.

For nearly a generation, since he had lost the allegiance of the Titans and other gods, Kronos had lived alone in his magnificent palace, without so much as a single attendant to serve him—the King of the Gods in name only. Terrible stories were told of the ancient monarch, tales that defied belief in those who had not witnessed the events themselves, though the older Titans insisted most were true; and though they spoke of him with abhorrence and revulsion, they spoke softly, and the careful listener could always catch a tinge of awe in their voices. Menoitios discounted most of that as mere exaggeration; nevertheless he rehearsed again and again the quick speech he would shout out to Kronos when he came upon the Titan. Once Kronos knew why he had come, he was sure the old king would greet him as a welcome guest—perhaps even let him stay and watch what was to happen.

Unable to locate the edifice, the youth flew eastward, toward the sea. He was almost above the palace before he recognized it. It was completely covered by snow and ice and seemed a part of the mountain itself. By now morning was nearing, and in the light of the stars he spiraled downward, settling at last outside an enormous portico.

He pulled his thin cloak more tightly about his shoulders and strode forward, ice crunching beneath his feet. Beyond the portico were enormous double doors, which stood wide open and led into a huge, dark chamber. A single torch burned against a distant wall, illuminating only a small area of the room.

Now that he was no longer flying and thereby exerting himself strenuously, he felt the cold more intensely. The room seemed to be very large and completely empty except for huge columns spaced at regular intervals, but in the nearly complete darkness he could not be certain of its size. An eerie stillness hung over it and as he worked his way forward he began to grow more uncertain.

Who could live here? What kind of god could endure such bitter cold, such complete loneliness? He crept forward more slowly, more cautiously, moving toward the lone torch. The only noise was the sound of frost crunching beneath his feet, and at every step he found himself expecting someone to reach out of the darkness and grab him. His hands quivered as he pulled his cloak more tightly about himself and wished he had brought warmer clothing.

He started to tell himself that the Titans must be wrong, that Kronos must have fled this awful place long ago; but however much he might desire such an excuse to abandon his search, Menoitios forced himself to go on. All he wanted to do right now was find some warm place where he could sleep until morning. He knew he was being foolish, that he was letting his own imagination terrify him. He had come too far to turn back now.

His teeth were beginning to chatter. He told himself that it was only a response to the bone-piercing cold and struggled to overcome the stark fear that was threatening to overwhelm him. There was no reason to be afraid. He was alone in this vast chamber. . . .

He stopped abruptly, looking toward his left. He had heard something—the smallest of sounds, faint and indefinite, but certainly something. Shivering, he stood completely still, watching and listening, trying to pierce the darkness.

Now he saw it, no more than a dozen steps away—the vaguest suggestion of something light in color, something not quite as black as the

surrounding blackness; it loomed over him, reaching high up toward the ceiling. As he stared at it, realization flashed through him-it was a throne, the enormous ivory throne of Kronos, and this vast chamber must be the throne room of Olympos.

Something moved upon the throne, a darker mass against the dim gray background, and he heard a low, groaning noise. As he watched, a figure rose from the seat and began to come toward him. He tried to make himself step forward, tried to force his voice to shout out to the approaching figure. "Lord Kronos, I'm your friend," he had to tell him before it was too late; "I've come to warn you of enemies who will be here soon!"

But he was too frightened. His voice could not escape the clutching tightness of his throat and chest-and the massive figure was still coming closer out of the darkness. Menoitios stumbled away in panic, his teeth chattering so loudly he was certain the Titan must be able to hear them. His legs felt weak and watery, but he forced them to carry him toward the rear of the chamber, where he could now see a dimly lit corridor.

Just before he reached it, he turned and looked back. The figure was more visible now-huge, larger than any god he had ever seen-and still coming in his direction. Stifling a shriek of terror, Menoitios fled into the corridor.

TwentyOne

Metis was not yet thoroughly awake early the following morning when someone knocked repeatedly at the entrance of her apartment. She slipped into her clothing, smoothing and straightening it as she hurried out into the atrium. She opened the door to find Rhea waiting impatiently. The Titaness made no move to enter.

"Everything is in readiness now," Rhea whispered excitedly, her entire manner indicative of extreme excitement. "Come to my home no later than noon, and be ready to depart directly from there."

Before Metis could reply, the goddess was gone, rushing off down the wide, empty corridor toward the stairs.

Metis closed the door, then returned slowly to her bedroom. She pulled off the peplos she had donned two or three minutes before, then poured fresh water into an enormous golden bowl and began washing her face. When she had completed her ablutions, she agonized briefly over what she should wear; a number of intricate and attractive garments competed for her approval, but at last she decided upon a plain knee-length chiton. Freedom of movement, she reasoned, might be a good bit more significant today than elegance or stylishness. To this she added a long, heavy cloak of dark skins, which would serve to protect her from the elements; should the need arise, it would also allow her to more easily conceal herself among the shadows of Kronos's palace. She recovered the small bag of powdered herb from where it hung on a wall peg, then selected a long, razor-edged dagger from among the half-dozen weapons she kept in a small chest. She pulled it from its plain, unornamented sheath to examine it briefly, then attached it to her belt when she was satisfied that it would do.

Olympos! A dozen different sensations stirred at the thought. So many long years had passed since she had last looked upon the towering palace of the Lord of the Titans, and yet her memory was as fresh as if it had been yesterday. Olympos, golden emblem of a golden age-as magnificent

and overpowering as Kronos himself, the god who for vast ages had reigned from that lofty pinnacle, wresting order out of confusion by imposing the brilliance of his vision upon a benighted world. Olympos-looming and oppressive, like its master. . . .

When at last she was ready, Metis repaired to the main room of her apartment and there tried to amuse herself until it was time to go. Her efforts were in vain, however, and after enduring nearly an hour of bored discomfort, she rose, quickly inspected her appearance again, then made her way to the Palace of Rhea. The Titaness had asked her to be there no later than noon; presumably there would be no difficulty if she arrived early.

It was a beautiful morning out, with a cool wind blowing. To avoid attracting undue attention, she rolled up the heavy cloak and carried it beneath one arm. She walked briskly and was pleased that she did not encounter any of the greater gods and goddesses, who might have detained her with their conversation. She reached the dwelling of the Titaness by one of the less frequented paths. After scanning the surrounding terrain to be certain that no one observed her as she approached the entrance, she knocked and waited to be admitted.

As she hoped, Rhea had already returned from her morning errands. The goddess swung closed the large bronze door, then led her through a small antechamber and into the spacious central room of the building. As she followed, Metis glanced about expectantly, thinking she would find Zeus there. He was nowhere in sight, however. Rhea brought out a light chair from near the wall and gestured to her guest to do the same; then the two sat together in the middle of the atrium, beside a small fountain.

"I'm glad you've come, my dear," the Titaness said. "Waiting makes me very agitated, especially now that my preparations are complete and I have nothing to occupy me. Did I tell you that I received the last answer early this morning, before dawn?"

Metis shook her head.

"Well, I did. I've found homes for all of them, Metis. Search as he will, Kronos will be no more successful in discovering these children than he was in finding Zeus." She laughed. Her face was glowing, and the Okeanid found herself uncomfortable before the Titaness's unconcealed glee; there was something unpleasant about it, something vindictive.

Zeus strolled into the room, wearing only his long cloak, which was carelessly tossed across one shoulder. As he drew nearer, he gave Metis a broad smile, which she warmly reciprocated.

"Come, sit with Metis," Rhea said, rising from her chair. "How slowly the time passes!" She crossed the room and entered a deep alcove to peer out through the tall window there.

Metis half expected Zeus to hug or kiss her, or give her some sign of affection as soon as his mother turned away, but instead he settled easily into the chair Rhea had vacated and sat watching the Titaness.

"Did you sleep well?" Metis asked him; it was an inane question, she realized, but it helped her avoid blurting out, "Oh, I missed you terribly!"-which was what she really wanted to say.

"The sun is still low in the sky," Rhea said with a sigh as she came back toward them, "but I can't bear this waiting any longer. Son, go dress quickly while I get the things I must bring, and then we'll

depart."

The boy rose, paced quietly across the room and disappeared down a hallway.

"Oh, I hope I'm doing the right thing, Metis," the Titan-ess continued once he had left them. "I've tried to remember everything that Gaia showed me so long ago, when she let me peer into the future-but it's difficult. The time is right, I'm almost certain of that." She shook herself suddenly. "No, I won't allow myself to go on like this. Equal danger lies in indecision. I've considered everything carefully and thoroughly, and can do no better-so it must be time to act!" She turned abruptly and followed her son from the atrium.

Zeus reappeared a few minutes later wearing a loose chiton similar to Metis's. Over one arm he carried a heavy fur cloak, and at his waist he, too, wore a knife.

Rhea soon rejoined them, carrying a number of small, carefully folded blankets. "These are for my babies," she explained. "I've saved them all these years, and now I'll finally put them to their intended use. Do you have the herb, Metis?"

Metis nodded, touching the place where it hung concealed beneath her clothing. Rhea led them from the atrium and down a narrow passageway. She ushered them outside through a small, inconspicuous door at the rear of the palace. A narrow trail wound through a thick forest, finally bringing them to the great cliffs at the edge of the mountain top. They were well out of sight of the other Titans now, and at Rhea's direction they grew wings and followed her down from the mountain.

They arrived on Mount Olympos several hours later, and Metis marveled at the ease with which the Titaness located the palace. Everything was different now. The many terraces below the palace, where once the great orchards and gardens of Olympos had bloomed, were a uniform white, and on closer inspection the Okeanid could pick out the forms of some of the dead and frozen trees. The palace, too, was completely blanketed in snow, and Metis doubted that she could have found it by herself.

Long, narrow galleries ran along the outside of each floor of the palace, presenting a convenient means of egress. Rhea alighted upon one of these, just below the topmost floor. The others settled beside her there. They paused to reabsorb their wings, then stepped through a broad opening to find themselves in a wide corridor.

"Look," Rhea said, pointing to the frost-covered floor. "No one has trod these passages in many years, perhaps since the day the Titans left Olympos."

She advanced slowly, the others following a little behind her. Before an open door she hesitated. "Look here! This door has stood open all these years, just as I left it."

Zeus and Metis peered around her into the small chamber behind. It was empty except for a bed.

"What are you looking at, mother?" the boy asked.

"This was my bedroom once. For many years it was my sole place of retreat from the tyranny of your father. How small and inadequate it looks-and was!"

"Mother, don't you think we should go on? What are we supposed to do

here? Won't you please tell me?"

She shook her head slowly, in such a way that at first he thought she was replying negatively to his question. "How much of my life was spent here, within this dingy little chamber."

Zeus turned toward Metis and exchanged perplexed looks with her. Rhea entered the room now, and they waited impatiently as she walked slowly about it, occasionally reaching out and running her fingers along the stone walls. At the window she paused again.

"How many times I looked down from here. Below you could see the lovely green terraces, the wide garden where the gods ate each morning ~and evening~everyone babbling away and happy. There were so many of them that from here it looked like a sea of gods. And I was their queen. . . . How wonderful it was~and how terrible."

Zeus came up behind his mother and put his arms around her. "This is not the time for memories," he whispered. "We have work to do."

She turned from the window and hugged him, then wiped the tears from her eyes. "Yes. Let's go now," she said quietly.

They followed her back into the corridor, then up a wide stairway to the floor above, where Kronos's personal chambers had been located. Here and on the stairway the frost on the floors showed signs of regular passage.

"Look at the size of the footprint," Zeus said in a hushed tone, pointing to a particularly clear impression.

Rhea nodded. "Only one god could leave such a mark. Kronos still walks these halls."

"The prints seem mostly to go from that chamber to the stairway. The likelihood, men, is that he's in that room, or below us elsewhere in the palace."

"Come," the Titaness said. "I know the secrets of these rooms and can come and go with little chance of being detected. The two of you must hide while I search for the monster."

She pushed them into a neighboring chamber, then entered the suspect apartment by way of an interconnecting series of rooms. Five minutes passed, and when she reappeared she was shaking her head.

"He isn't there. We must search below."

They returned to the stairway and descended. Using the footprints to guide them, they eventually reached the main floor of the palace.

"He must be in the great hall," Rhea whispered. "We must move with great caution now."

They followed a wide corridor. As they drew near the throne room, Metis stopped abruptly, laying a restraining hand on Rhea's arm.

"Wait!" she whispered. "Do you hear that noise?"

Motionless, the three listened. It seemed to be a sort of whimpering sound, and clicking sounds too. Metis pointed ahead of them and to the right, toward a dark alcove only a few paces from the point where the corridor abutted upon the rear of the great hall. Clutching the hilt of her dagger, Metis crept toward the sounds. Zeus and Rhea followed just

behind her. The whimpering and chattering became louder.

"Can it be Kronos?" Zeus asked.

Rhea shook her head. "I don't think so."

"We must find out what it is," Metis said. "We can't leave an unknown behind us, at our backs."

Zeus nodded. Metis unsheathed her dagger and Zeus did the same. Together they stepped toward the sounds. The corridor itself was but dimly lit and they were forced to pause at the entrance to the alcove to let their eyes adjust to the greater dimness. The clicking, chattering noise increased in volume as they drew nearer, and something moved in the darkness-cowering away from them.

"Stand still," Zeus commanded, and at the same moment he reached out and grabbed the thing, pulling it into the corridor. As the form resolved itself into something resembling a god, Metis grabbed hold of its other arm.

A white face stared at them through wide blank eyes. Divine flesh shivered convulsively beneath their hands, and teeth chattered.

"Menoitios!" Metis cried. "What are you doing here?"

"He's freezing," Zeus said. "He's so cold he can barely move."

Metis shook her head. "He may be cold but he's also terrified. Look at him."

She was right. Stark terror was written across his face.

Rhea was looking toward the great hall. "Quiet," she warned. "Kronos is there. I just caught a glimpse of movement upon his throne. We must hurry."

"But what about this god?" Zeus asked. "We can't just leave him here."

"Yes, we can," Metis said. "Why do you think he's here- today? Somehow he must have learned what we planned. He came here to betray us to Kronos. There's no other possible explanation."

"But why? I don't even know him."

"Because he hates me."

Zeus stared at her in amazement. "He hates you that much? What a peculiar god. Do you think he's warned Kronos?"

She shook her head. "I doubt it. He wouldn't be hiding like this if he'd told Kronos. He'd either be Kronos's guest or his prisoner. He must have lost his courage and not been able to bring himself to face the Titan."

"Quickly!" Rhea whispered again.

"Are you certain we should leave him, Metis?" Zeus asked.

She nodded vigorously. "We can't take him with us, and he doesn't look as if he's likely to go anywhere by himself. We'll just have to be watchful."

With a shrug Zeus pushed the shivering form back into the darkness and released it. Slowly they crept toward the throne room of the King of the

Gods.

Twenty Two

The corridor ended near a rear corner of the great hall of Olympos, and they found themselves looking out across a vast white chamber. Sunlight flooded in the broad, tall windows. Where once had sparkled fittings and furnishings of silver, gold, and precious gems, now everything lay covered beneath a blanket of frost. On the other side of the broad room, enormous double doors stood open, looking out upon a wide portico.

Toward the middle of the room, looming over this white wasteland, was the towering ivory throne from which Kronos had ruled his world. The intruders had halted at the rear doorway. From their vantage point they could look across the hall at an angle, and so they saw not merely the rear of the throne, but part of its side as well. Upon it, unmoving, sat an enormous figure wrapped in heavy furs.

"Is he asleep?" Zeus asked in a whisper. His eyes remained riveted upon the throne and its occupants.

For nearly a minute the three watched the figure in silence. At last Metis said, "He certainly looks asleep. Well, we have to know. ..." Before they could try to dissuade her, she crept forward cautiously, moving from pillar to pillar along one side of the room until she reached a point from which she could see the huge form clearly, though she was reasonably certain she could not herself be seen unless the Titan turned to face her.

He was just as she remembered him, tall and broad-chested, with enormous shoulders—the largest of all the Titans, a giant among giants. She shuddered at the sight of his handsome, majestic face.

Lord of the Titans they had called him, and King of the Gods; but that was long ago, before the depths of his depravity and the full measure of his twisted cunning had been revealed, earning him another, less flattering title. Lord of the Crooked Paths they called him now, when they spoke of him at all.

His eyes were closed in slumber, and as she watched his face twitched occasionally, as if he were dreaming. Satisfied, Metis started back toward her companions, but her foot slipped in the ice, making a sharp, grinding sound, and she hid herself again. Kronos stirred even more, starting to sit up.

"No more dancing," he muttered, one of his great hands swinging sideward in a wide gesture. "Sing now—a softer song. ..." His voice trailed off.

Metis looked out from behind the pillar that concealed her. The god's great head nodded again, and once more he seemed to be asleep. Very carefully, watching her feet as she took each step, she made her way back to the rear door and rejoined her companions.

"He sleeps," she whispered, "and dreams."

"You know what must be done?" Rhea asked her.

"I can guess."

"But how?" Rhea seemed to be addressing herself as much as Metis. "If there were a goblet near his hand, Zeus might creep up to the throne and sprinkle a little of your herb into it. But mere is none."

Metis's eyes were glittering. "There's a way, I think. Zeus must do the deed? Is that not correct?"

"I believe so. Oh, I wish I could remember more exactly!"

"Then he must walk into Kronos's dream."

"Say what you mean. This is no time for puzzles."

"Kronos dreams of Olympos as it once was—in the days of its grandeur. Just now he called out to his dancers and singers. If he were to half awaken again and see a cupbearer of old beside him—proffering nectar—he might well take the cup and drink."

"Oh, that's dangerous, Metis. If he were to awaken fully—"

"But no more dangerous than any of our other options, or merely remaining here. Since we must be present when he takes the herb, we can't conceal it in some jug of nectar that he may not consume for days. And in time he will stir himself—perhaps soon. Would you rather face a fully awake Kronos then, or hope for a half-asleep one now?"

"Let me do it, Mother," Zeus interjected. "I don't understand why we must watch him drink—or, for that matter, why we must do this at all, rather than simply searching the palace for the place where he has my brothers and sisters imprisoned. But if we must, then I'd prefer to do it quickly."

"There's a storage room nearby, as I recall, where we may find the things we need," Metis said. "Come with me. I think I can find it."

She led them cautiously along the back wall of the chamber, pausing briefly at each doorway they encountered, until at last she found the entrance she sought. It was situated near the far side of the chamber. Zeus and Rhea followed her through a narrow opening into a dingy room illuminated by a single low window, but Zeus turned back almost immediately and waited just within the doorway, looking back out toward the enormous throne and the being who occupied it.

Metis and Rhea worked quickly, searching among numerous gold and silver objects. The young goddess held up a large goblet. The Titaness, who had uncovered a great golden tray, nodded her approval.

"Yes, they'll do admirably," she said.

They found small towels nearby and fell to dusting and polishing. When they finished they turned their attention to the large amphorae that stood in rows along two of the walls.

A quick inspection located both nectar and water, and with a great ladle Rhea mixed Kronos's drink in the goblet. Then she held the vessel out to Metis, who had already removed the pouch from within her peplos. The Okeanid let two small pinches of powdered herb fall into the drink.

"We're ready," the Titaness told her son at last.

Zeus stepped toward them.

"Wait," Metis said. "Let me adjust his clothing. The style is all wrong." She lifted off his cloak and laid it aside, then began to pull and tuck the fabric of his chiton. Walking slowly around him, she scrutinized the result, and at last was satisfied. "There. I think that's the way they were worn then. Don't you think so?"

Rhea nodded in agreement.

"But what of his face?" Metis asked. "Is it wise to let Kronos see his features? When he recovers, he may search for him."

"What do you suggest?" Rhea asked. "Were it possible, I would give Kronos the potion myself so that his ire would fall on me instead, but that cannot be. It must come from Zeus's hand."

Metis stood briefly in silent thought, then said, "Your son is adept at many things. While we were away from Mount Othrys, I was surprised to see how quickly he became proficient at assuming the forms of animals." Despite her best efforts to remain impassive, her face flushed hot as she spoke and she looked away from the boy. "I wonder if he's ever sought to take on the appearance of another god."

Rhea turned toward her son, who was still standing just within the doorway.

He shook his head. "Is such a thing possible? You mean to make myself look like someone else?"

"It's possible for some gods—a few gods," Metis said. "You master so many skills easily, I wouldn't be surprised if you could do it. Please try. Instead of picturing in your mind the animal you wish to become, picture the god—his face in particular, I would think. We'll soon learn if you have this talent too."

"But which god shall I try to become?"

Metis considered for a moment. A slow smile spread across her face. "It's a weighty decision. Whichever god you choose may well feel the wrath of Kronos as a result. ... Yet there is one whose treachery has amply earned him such punishment."

"Who?"

"Menoitios."

Zeus laughed, then closed his eyes. His face blurred for an instant as his body became shorter and less muscular, and the two goddesses found themselves looking into the soft, narrow, immature face of the youngest son of Iapetos.

Metis was scrutinizing his new features. "It's not exactly right. Something about the cheeks and jaw, I think—but Kronos will never notice the difference."

"Good," Rhea said, pleased and relieved that such a convenient solution had been found to the danger that was likely to follow her son after today. "But can you retain the form?"

"It seems easy enough," the boy said. He turned and walked slowly around them, as if to illustrate the completeness of his concentration. "Yes, I can maintain it without difficulty. What about my cloak, though? It's very cold here!" He rubbed his hands against his arms.

Metis shook her head. "You'll just have to suffer. An attendant would never have worn such a garment while serving the king in those days. Of course the palace was never really cold then, either. ..."

Metis handed him the golden serving tray and showed him the proper way

to hold it. When he had mastered that, she swirled the goblet a final time to be certain the powder was well distributed, then set it on the tray.

"Stand behind the throne," she advised, "and wait for him to stir in his sleep. Don't be impetuous. Wait for him to move a little and mutter to himself, for then he'll be dreaming of days gone by. Step to his side and say, 'Your drink, my lord'-very softly. You don't want to arouse him too much from his slumber. Let him take the drink, then step quickly away. You must be alert, too, for any sign of full wakefulness and any indication that he realizes something out of the ordinary is happening."

Zeus was growing impatient at what he was starting to consider the excessive concern of the two goddesses. He resented being told the obvious, as if he were so young that everything had to be laid out for him in painstaking detail. He started to step out into the great hall, but Rhea rushed forward, threw her arms about him, and kissed him. She released him only reluctantly. When she stepped away Metis took her place. Unable to restrain herself any longer, she kissed and hugged him too, though in a far less motherly way. Then she turned quickly away, unable to watch him walk into such danger.

The throne room seemed very still as he crossed it. He was surprised to realize that however softly he walked, he could still hear the frost crunch beneath his sandals. He traveled first along the rear wall, then directly up the middle of the room, so that he approached the throne from behind, shielded from view by its great bulk. He came to a stop just behind it, and waited there. So still was the great hall that had he not kept watch while Metis and his mother had prepared the goblet, he might have thought Kronos had left the chamber during their absence. His own breathing seemed impossibly loud in the total silence that surrounded him, and he sought to quiet it lest he betray himself.

Without his cloak, he was very cold. Despite Metis's objection, he wished he had worn it. After all, he could have let it slip from his shoulders before stepping from his hiding place. Instead he must remain here, shivering. He began to wonder if his legs would respond reliably when it was time to offer the goblet.

Still there was no sound from the other side of the throne. Zeus waited impatiently, shifting his weight back and forth between his numbed feet. By now he decided that he must have been waiting for a very long time and that he could endure the cold no longer. He must do something. Reaching out, he slowly scraped the sole of one of his sandals against the bottom edge of the throne. Immediately he was rewarded by a low, indefinable sound that probably represented the stirring and shifting of a great weight upon the huge seat. He waited nearly a minute, then repeated his action.

This time he heard a sudden intake of breath, then a low grunt. There were more obvious stirring sounds now, and then a deep, wavering voice said, "Speak up, Crios-all the gods are listening!"

At the last moment Zeus remembered to once again fix the visage of Menoitios firmly in his mind; he was not certain, but it might well have faded from him while his thoughts were elsewhere. Then he took a deep breath and stepped around the side of the throne, thrusting the golden tray ahead of him.

"Your drink, my lord!" he said quietly, letting his eyes dart upward for an instant.

Upon the throne sat an enormous god-at least a head taller even than the largest of the Titans Zeus had seen. Thick black hair hung like a mane nearly to his shoulders, merging in places with the curls of his full beard. Dull gray eyes looked Wearily toward the boy, blinking and trying to focus upon him. The face had once been handsome, Zeus realized with surprise, and still might be under different circumstances.

At last the god seemed to see the goblet, and an enormous arm appeared from beneath a heavy cloak of skins and wavered in its direction. Zeus moved closer, maneuvering so that the great hand more easily found what it sought. Then the boy bowed his head and stepped back out of sight behind the throne.

He was far too curious to remain there, however, and when he had allowed ample time for the Titan to look away, he edged back around until he could see the side of the god's face.

As Zeus watched Kronos gulped down an enormous draft of the liquid, then slowly lowered his hand until the goblet rested on the arm of the throne. He was not yet fully awake, but soon would be; that was clear as he continued to blink and rub his eyes, yawning now and sitting more upright. Within moments-if Metis's herb did not do its work promptly-the Titan would realize that something quite unusual had occurred, and when he did ...

It happened quickly. One moment the Titan was still yawning and stretching; the next his eyes snapped completely open, shining and alert. At almost the same instant the giant swung around to look after the new cupbearer who had appeared so unexpectedly at his side. Zeus had no warning, no time to duck back into concealment. Instead he found himself looking into the face of the Lord of the Crooked Paths.

"Come here, boy," a deep, level voice commanded.

Zeus caught himself and somehow overcame his instinct to run; he even managed not to betray his companions by casting a frightened glance toward them. He forced a pleasant smile to his lips and stepped boldly forward.

"Yes, my lord?"

Now the eyes bored into him, probing. "Who are you? Why are you here?"

For an instant Zeus wondered if his true features were still concealed beneath the semblance of Menoitios; in his excitement, they might easily have slipped away. A quick glance down at the slender arms and hands protruding from his chiton reassured him. "I am your new cupbearer, my lord, come to serve you here on-"

He got no further. As he spoke the god's expression changed again, became pained; with one hand he clutched at his abdomen. A gasp escaped him, and then he rose up and stepped down from his throne.

"What have you fed me?" he demanded, moving after Zeus.

He towered over the youth-but only for a moment. Before he could take a second step he groaned loudly, then doubled over, clasping his great arms across his belly. Zeus stepped back and watched in horror. The god's eyes were watering and he was making gagging sounds deep inside his throat. Still Kronos staggered forward, reaching out one hand to grasp Zeus, but the boy easily backed out of his reach.

Now Zeus became aware of Metis and Rhea, who had come forward from the

little room at the rear of the chamber, where they had been watching. Kronos halted, staring up at his wife.

"You!" he cried, his face contorted in pain.

Rhea stood beside her son, looking tall and regal, a grim, disdainful smile on her thin lips. "Yes, husband, it is I, and the son I hid from you. Now-give me back my other children!"

As if in answer to her command, the great chest and abdomen of the enormous deity began to convulse, throwing up first the nectar he had just consumed, then a little food. Spasm after spasm shook him, and for a few moments it seemed as though his gigantic body were struggling to turn itself inside out. He moaned horribly, and then his chest and neck began to swell, to bloat. He coughed and choked, the swelling moving upward, toward his head. His mouth opened wider and wider-impossibly wide-and something dark appeared in it. Metis started toward him, holding open one of the blankets Rhea had given her, but the other goddess restrained her. Another spasm shook the Titan, and the dark thing tumbled out, striking the floor heavily.

"It is the stone with which I deceived him," Rhea said. "Wrapped in a blanket and bearing the phantom image of an infant, I gave it to him to devour-instead of his newborn son, instead of-him!" She gestured toward Zeus.

Kronos was on his knees now, panting, and when his convulsions began again, Metis darted forward with her blanket. A second object appeared, and she caught it before it struck the floor-a purplish thing, so shriveled that it no longer resembled anything divine. While Metis gently laid her burden upon the floor behind them, Rhea stepped closer to the Titan, blanket ready. Through watering eyes Kronos recognized his wife and vainly sought to grab her, but another spasm seized him and put an end to such efforts. A second shriveled, purplish thing appeared, which Rhea caught and bundled in her blanket.

"What are they?" Zeus gasped in horror, afraid that he already knew.

"These are your brothers and sisters," the Titaness told him. "Here before you is proof of your father's madness. He knew that one of his children was destined to overthrow him, and so as each child was born he took it from me and in secret crammed it down his hideous throat. He devoured them, but could not consume them-for they are divine. He made a prison for them of his own body, from which they could never escape without his knowledge. All these long years they've remained there inside his horrible gullet-shrunken, withered, but still alive-immortal and waiting to be freed."

When Kronos had disgorged the last of the six objects, Rhea said, "We must go quickly now, before he recovers."

Metis shook her head. She was looking at Kronos, who lay face down on the floor. Even though he was still very large, he looked smaller now, deflated. "He won't recover soon. I assure you of that."

"Nevertheless, I won't feel safe until we've gone far from this dreadful place. You and I must each carry two of the babies." She turned toward Zeus. "You must carry one, and the stone. It saved you from sharing their fate, and so made their rescue possible. It must be preserved for future generations to see, that the hideous crimes of your father may never be forgotten."

As they were preparing to leave, Zeus noticed someone entering the great hall from the rear corridor. It was Menoitios. Somehow he had gathered the courage to leave his hiding place and now he stumbled toward them, teeth still chattering. He reached the throne before he saw Kronos. Stopping abruptly, he stared down at the god wallowing upon the floor.

Rhea led Zeus and Metis silently toward the great golden doors and the portico beyond. "Leave him here," she whispered.

Zeus glanced back from the doorway. Kronos was still moaning, and once again he tried to raise himself up. For an instant his eyes cleared and he saw Menoitios. With a cry like an enraged animal the Titan lunged across the floor toward the god he mistook for his treacherous new cupbearer. His huge hand closed around the youth's ankle and yanked him from his feet. Menoitios began to scream and kick, but his efforts to free himself were useless. Slowly the Titan pulled him closer.

"Come!" Rhea said insistently, and Zeus turned to join the others. Outside they grew wings and flew after her down the mountainside.

TwentyThree

Rhea led them to a warm spring nearby. There, kneeling beside the bubbling water, she bathed the infants one by one. She worked slowly, examining, caressing, and fawning upon each in turn. From a pouch that had been concealed within her clothing she produced ambrosia and forced a little into each tiny mouth. Metis dried and wrapped them in clean blankets. It was nearly night by the time they finished.

"There's much to do," the Titaness told her companions. "We must separate if we are to complete the task before morning. I've found homes for each of these lovely babies, where they may grow up in safety, far from both Olympos and Mount Othrys. They'll be safe enough, even without careful guardianship such as the Kouretes provided you, my son."

"Guardianship? You mean the Kouretes were my guards? I never knew!"

"You were not to know. At first I had planned to visit you as often as I could, but I soon realized that would be too dangerous and the decision was made to let you grow up thinking yourself the son of Amaltheia. That way you could not even betray yourself. The Kouretes were always near you, just out of sight...."

"Metis and I will each transport two babies to their new homes," she continued. "Zeus, you will carry the fifth. On your way you must deposit this stone on the slopes of Mount Parnassos, that it may be found there in a future age."

Now she turned toward the Okeanid. "Your mother has agreed to rear one of my children for me, Metis, as has your sister Doris. You must select two of them-I leave the choice to you-and be on your way as quickly as possible."

"But where will we meet afterwards?" Metis asked quickly, glancing toward Zeus.

"You may return to Mount Othrys without fear, I think," the Titaness answered slowly. "I doubt that Kronos recognized you. Zeus and I, however ... He may well seek me out as soon as your herb no longer troubles him. If he finds me ..." She shrugged. "I fear nothing now. But how long do you think that will be before Kronos recovers?"

"A week at the very least. A few weeks are more likely. He should have

slipped into unconsciousness soon after we left him, and probably won't even stir for most of that time."

A grim smile formed on Rhea's lips. "Good. Zeus, of course, must not return to the home of the Titans."

"But I want to go back to Mount Othrys!" Zeus interjected.

"I'm afraid that's impossible, my son. I've thought the matter over more fully since we spoke of it last. No amount of argument will serve to assuage the anger of Asterie's father or of Helios. To return there--"

"No!" the boy said firmly. "I won't let them drive me off. I want to live on Mount Othrys, at least for a while longer, and I shall!" He paused for a moment, realizing that such an outburst would not sway his mother, then moved closer to the Titaness and slipped an arm around her. "Please, Mother, don't ask me to leave again, so soon. I know you want me near you and that's where I want to be. Don't deny us both what we want. If I must, I can keep myself hidden within your palace."

Rhea grimaced, waving him away with one hand. "Don't ply me with your coy flattery. No, it's impossible. It's far too dangerous."

"Would it not be wiser if we talked of this tomorrow?" the boy asked. "Certainly we'll both be safe there for a day or two, while we settle our plans for the future."

"You're right," Rhea agreed, glad to postpone further discussion of a topic she found distressing. "We have more pressing matters to attend to tonight." She turned toward Metis. "We'll each return to Mount Othrys. It would be best if we met in one place, so we'll know we've all returned safely and not have to go back and forth across the moun-taintop seeking one another. My home seems most suitable. If you arrive before we do, my dear, please feel free to enter and refresh yourself in whatever way you like."

Metis selected two of the infants, then flew off into the darkening night. She went first to the Kingdom of Nereus deep below the waters of the Aegean, where her sister Doris was queen. Shortly before reaching her destination, she realized that it might not be prudent to fulfill her mission too openly, and so she lost much time in stealth. The great coral palace swarmed with golden Nereids, the beautiful daughters of King Nereus and Queen Doris, and eventually two of them discovered her. Metis swore them to secrecy, then let them conduct her surreptitiously to their mother. While Doris and the Nereids cooed over the infant, which had now lost its purplish cast and begun to become quite appealing, Metis slipped away.

She swam quickly to the surface of the sea. There she discarded the fish tail and fins she had assumed to facilitate her journey and grew wings again, then flew toward the west and the Kingdom of Okeanos, which lay in the deep flowing ocean at the edge of world. She flew rapidly, for the distance she had to cover was great, and reached the palace of her father shortly before midnight. Here she knew her way with perfect assurance and went directly to the bedchamber of her mother.

Lovely Tethys awakened at her soft call and sat up with a pleased cry as she recognized Metis and the blanket-wrapped bundle her daughter offered her. A gentle smile spread across her face and she took the infant in her arms. Metis lingered with her mother briefly, but the Titaness asked many questions that were better left unanswered and soon the Okeanid excused herself and swam rapidly away, promising to return soon.

It was nearly morning when she reached Mount Othrys, having completed her journey more rapidly than she had expected. Entering the Palace of Rhea through one of its upper windows, she made her way down a broad stairway to the atrium below, calling aloud as she descended. No one answered. By the time she reached the ground floor, she was certain that Zeus and Rhea had not yet returned.

She found nectar and ambrosia, and while she waited, expecting them to appear at any moment, she sat near the little fountain in the middle of the atrium and ate. She was tired, but too excited and anxious to sleep now. As she ate she began to ruminate upon the future.

Eventually Kronos would recover, and their intrusion upon Olympos might well stir the Lord of the Crooked Paths from his long years of lethargy. That did not bode well for anyone, but Zeus in particular would be in danger. If Kronos ever set his mind to finding the child destined to occupy his throne, Zeus would find no safe haven in all the world.

As she finished eating, she made up her mind. Internal debate and long conjecture were unnecessary; she knew what she would do—even if it was not the wisest choice. Her heart compelled it. She would follow the god she loved into hiding, go wherever he must go . . . if he would have her with him . . . even if he was not willing to make her his wife. The thought saddened her a little. Though she had not thought overmuch about it, she had always taken for granted that someday she, too, like so many of her sisters, would have a grand wedding in the great palace of her father....

She shrugged, casting off the thought. She loved Zeus. That was more important than anything else, more important than what her family and friends might think or say. She was prepared to sacrifice everything for that love . . . if he would only give her the opportunity. Besides, she thought more cheerfully, by going with him now he might in time come to love her as thoroughly as she loved him, and then anything might be possible—even a wedding.

Zeus and Rhea had still not returned, and Metis found herself growing sleepy. She crossed the room and lay down upon a low divan, intending only to rest more comfortably. Within a few minutes, however, she was fast asleep.

When she finally awakened, it was late in the afternoon and Rhea stood beside her.

"We've let you sleep as long as we can," the Titaness said pleasantly, "but now that Zeus and I have had a little sleep, too, we really need to talk some sense into my son. He still insists that he'll remain here on Mount Othrys."

Metis sat up, rubbing her eyes and looking about in momentary confusion. Zeus was beside her too.

"Mother wants me to go away tonight. You don't want me to go, do you?"

Metis was flustered. She stood up, straightening her hair and clothing, then followed the others back toward the fountain, where they sat together and talked.

"He won't listen to reason," Rhea said. "It's difficult to refuse such a child anything, but I'm very concerned about him. It's far too dangerous for him to remain here. Now that I've had time to consider, I've thought of an excellent place where he can live in complete safety. I won't tell

you where, since secrets are always safest when not shared. Won't you help me convince him?"

Metis's heart sank at the Titaness's words. It seemed clear that Rhea was not going to suggest that the Okeanid accompany her son.

"Mother, please," the divine youth interrupted before Metis could answer. "I've been cooped up away from everyone and everything for most of my life. How can you be so cruel as to send me away again, after I've only just discovered how wonderful life can be? I've only just met my own mother. Don't you want to be able to have me near you?"

"It isn't I who made it impossible for you to remain on Mount Othrys," the goddess reminded him pointedly. "I didn't terrorize poor Asterie."

The boy hung his head for a moment. "I've already told you I'm sorry. I know it was foolish, but it wasn't completely my fault. If her gown hadn't accidentally--"

"We've been through all that," Rhea said sharply, preventing him from expounding more fully on the subject. "Whatever the cause and whoever was at fault, the fact remains that grave harm will befall you if you're discovered here by some of the Titans. However much I want you to be with me, I can't let my selfishness endanger you."

"Then you want me to act like a coward. Am I to let the likes of Helios chase me away? You say I'm someday to become King of the Gods. Shouldn't I begin to act in a manner appropriate to such a destiny?"

Rhea put her arms around her son and held him tenderly. "There's much truth in what you say--but not now! You're not yet fully grown, and many things still must occur before that day arrives. You must be patient--and prudent!"

"No!" the youth cried, stamping his foot. "You're asking too much, Mother. And your fears are exaggerated. Kronos doesn't know who I am. He knows neither my face nor my name, so I have nothing to fear from him. As for the Titans--well, as long as they don't know I'm here, they can't do me any harm either."

Rhea looked puzzled. "What do you propose? Do you really mean you'd be satisfied to spend all your time here, within this palace?"

"I'll stay here with you, Mother, or with Metis, whichever you think best. As much as possible, I'll venture out only at night, and when I do--I'll wear the appearance of some other god. Just as I impersonated Menoitios back on Mount Olympos to deceive Kronos, I can impersonate other gods here, to deceive my enemies on Mount Othrys. Now tell me, what flaw can you pick in that plan?"

"It's preposterous, that's all," Rhea said, laughing despite herself. "You'll never get away with such a thing. You'll be discovered, probably the first time you try it." She looked at Metis. "What do you think?"

Metis's heart leaped; here was a way she could keep Zeus near her. "There are risks," she replied cautiously, "but such a plan might succeed, at least for a while."

"You see," Zeus said. "Even Metis agrees. Now let's have no more arguments over this, dear Mother."

Rhea was far from convinced, but the boy refused to be swayed. "All right," she said grudgingly, "we'll let you try your mad scheme. But at

the first indication that your disguise has been pierced-or the first time you get into some new trouble-you must leave. Is that understood?"

Zeus nodded and kissed her.

When no one else brought up the matter of where Zeus would stay, Metis at last broached the subject herself.

"The only danger in his staying with me," Rhea said, "is if Kronos should come here. But since he thinks his son looks like Menoitios, Zeus should be safe enough. Of course you may come and visit us as often as you like, my dear."

The Okeanid's hopes plummeted, but she managed not to show her disappointment. A short while later Zeus left the atrium, but returned as Metis was herself preparing to depart. To her surprise he had changed into a fresh chiton and cloak, and obviously planned to go out himself. Metis held her breath, wondering if he intended to walk her home and perhaps remain there with her for a while. But once again her hopes were dashed.

"Where are you going?" Rhea demanded.

"I do have some other friends here on Mount Othrys," he answered. "Not everyone was delighted to see me leave so abruptly."

Pausing before them, the youth turned away for an instant; when he swung back around, his face and form were completely different. Now they looked upon the narrow face and slender body of Menoitios.

"Well?" he demanded, grinning at them. "Do you think anyone will be suspicious of me? Look at this!" His form and features blurred, then in quick succession Helios stood before them, then Pallas, then Perses.

Rhea shook her head in dismay. "You do have an uncommon ability, my son. I know of but two other gods who could do as well-and you've only begun to practice this talent. But you still haven't answered me. Where are you going tonight?"

"I haven't answered, Mother," he said in the form of Prometheus, "because I'm not certain yet." A moment later Epimetheus continued, "It depends partly on who's home, and alone-free of the company of other gods that I might not be able to trust."

"But may you trust anyone here? I'm not at all sure you may.'"

Now the familiar, handsome features of her son returned, an almost condescending smile on his lips. "If I misjudge anyone and am betrayed to my enemies, then I'll be forced to flee, I suppose. But I'd rather flee then-when it's truly necessary-than now, when it isn't."

The Titaness was still shaking her head. Zeus gave her a quick kiss, waved good-bye to Metis, and sprinted toward the outer door. When he was gone, Metis rose too and made her departure, walking a good bit more slowly. As she left the Palace of Rhea, she was surprised to find that it was already night again.

She loved Zeus completely and hopelessly-and hated herself for loving him. Friends indeed! She could well guess where the wanton youth hoped to spend his evenings, and with which goddesses. Back in her apartment, she threw herself face down upon her bed and wept until sleep claimed her.

Twenty-Four

For hours Menoitios had covered within his hiding place off one side of the corridor that led to the great hall. When Metis and the other gods left him, he wanted to follow them-to rush into the great throne room and betray their presence to the Lord of Olympus, but his uncooperative legs refused to function. Cold and fear held him paralyzed, and he waited, listening.

For a long time he heard nothing, but at last there was a loud groaning sound and then voices. The sounds roused him, and he struggled to regain control of his body. Unless he acted now-immediately-all his efforts would be in vain. He stumbled from his hiding place and out into the corridor.

When he reached the doorway he saw Metis and Rhea standing near the throne and advanced toward them with halting steps. Zeus was nowhere in sight, but a god with oddly familiar features stood watching the goddesses. The throne obstructed his view until he was very close, and then at last he saw the Titan king. He lay face down upon the floor in a great pool of vile yellow-brown liquid. As Menoitios came to a startled halt, the god groaned horribly and looked up at him through watery, unfocused eyes. His huge face had turned a sick, greenish color and was contorted in pain; dark strands of thick, viscous liquid clung to his nose and mouth and dripped from his chin. By now it was too late to retreat; the god's hand closed upon Menoitios's ankle, pulling him to the floor, and the youth began to shriek in terror.

As he went down, Menoitios twisted and kicked wildly, turning on his stomach and sinking his fingernails into the thick frost in an effort to somehow grip the edges of the flagstones beneath and drag himself away. Again and again he kicked at the giant hand with the heel of his free foot, but could not dislodge it. The fingers were locked there, gripping him with the strength of bronze bands. Inch by inch, Kronos drew him inexorably closer.

The effort was too much for him, and at last Menoitios slumped flat upon the icy floor, cursing Metis. He lay perfectly still, eyes closed, listening and waiting. What Kronos intended to do to him he dared not even imagine, but if he ever managed to return to Mount Othrys he would hunt down that detestable goddess and repay her tenfold. Somehow he would be revenged upon those responsible for his predicament.

As he lay there, he eventually realized that Kronos was no longer pulling him closer. Raising himself up on his elbows, he twisted around to look toward his feet. The Titan was very still now. His eyes were shut and his head rested upon the floor. He seemed to be sleeping.

Menoitios grinned. He sat up slowly, then slid closer to Kronos and began to pry at the Titan's enormous fingers. He could not move them. Shifting his position, he edged still closer and tried again. Still they would not open. He jerked his leg away as forcefully as he could. When that failed to break the iron grip, he slipped off his other sandal and sought to insinuate the toes of his free foot between his captive ankle and Kronos's palm, so that he could more effectively push and pry. It was useless. The fingers of the Titan would not budge. Even in unconsciousness, they were unmovable.

Now a different sort of panic claimed him-a slower, more pervasive type. It settled in slowly as the full realization of his situation became evident. He was trapped. He would have to remain here, without food or drink, until Kronos regained consciousness, however long that might be.

And then . . . what?

Menoitios shuddered. Such a wait, in constant dread of what would happen when Kronos did awaken, was more than he could bear, and once again he set himself to trying to pry apart the giant fingers, but it was a useless effort. His own hands were shivering from the cold and seemed nearly frozen; his fear and frustration had built to the point that he was near tears. It would be better, he thought, to waken Kronos now-at whatever cost-than to go on like this indefinitely. If he could arouse him, he might be able to pull himself free during the Titan's first moments of disoriented wakefulness. If he were lucky and fast, he might be able to slip from his grip and stagger out of the great hall before Kronos could act.

He leaned toward the god's torso and poked at him. He poked gingerly at first, then more forcefully, prodding and finally pounding on the enormous chest. His efforts failed to elicit even a low grunt from the unconscious deity.

Menoitios was sobbing now, and he turned to vent his frustrated rage on the god's face, striking it again and again with his clenched fists and screaming at the insensate features.

Still the Titan refused to stir.

It was nearly night, and already quite dark and difficult to see within the great hall. For some moments the youth lay upon his back again, exhausted, but then he sat up and leaned across the body of the Titan, pressing and probing along the far side, where he could not see. He had neglected to bring a knife with him, but if Kronos wore one and he could find it, it was possible that he could hack off the massive hand. Certainly those fingers would relinquish their grip then-and even if they did not, he could carry the hand away with him, to be cut free at his leisure back on Mount Othrys. Even the unthinkable seemed reasonable here: If the Titan's bones were too hard, he would cut off his own foot to escape. Somehow he must free himself.

But there was no knife, and again he collapsed back against the icy stone floor. He was hungry and thirsty-very thirsty- but he knew that he must not think about food and drink; that would only make his discomfort even more intense. The room grew still darker, until at last he was unable to see the huge figure at his feet. He straightened his cloak as best he could, pulling it around him so that it covered the largest possible portion of his body, and tried to sleep.

As he lay there, he brooded upon the events that had led to his situation. Eventually he remembered the oddly familiar god with Metis and Rhea, and began to wonder where Zeus had gone. As he continued to ponder, the face of the strange god troubled him more and more, until at last he realized where he had seen it before-in his own mirror. It looked different there, of course, as mirror images always do, and for that reason he had not immediately recognized himself.

Slowly he began to understand what must have happened. Like Proteus and a few other gods, Zeus must be capable of assuming the appearance of others. There could be only one reason he would do that here, and that was to misdirect the wrath of Kronos-toward Menoitios!

Now Menoitios understood why Kronos had glared at him with so much anger, why he had expended his last bit of energy lunging after him. Because of Zeus, the Titan had mistaken him for one of his attackers. That was why he was a prisoner now, freezing in this dreadful room.

Lying in the darkness, the youth wept in fury. Even more than Metis, Zeus was the cause of his trouble. His crime was intentional and extreme, and his punishment must be equally extreme. The Cretan god must be crushed.

When he awakened it was morning. The cold had penetrated every part of him, even his mind. For a long time he lay immobile, barely aware, but at last he roused himself enough to try again to pull his foot free from the restraining hand of the Titan. Those awful fingers were still there, still wrapped about his ankle. Having determined that, he fell back and slept again.

All day he slipped in and out of semiconsciousness. Darkness returned, then daylight came again. Sleep was very pleasant. There were few dreams to trouble him, and he felt the cold and hunger less when he slept. Occasionally he would remember why he was there and try to pull his foot free; but as soon as he felt the restraint of the Titan's hand he abandoned the effort and let himself drift back into pleasant unconsciousness. He liked the nights best, because they were less intrusive and did not compel him to remember where he was.

Days passed-how many he could not hope to guess-and eventually he even ceased to test the divine bands that held him. His limbs had grown so stiff that it was painful and difficult to move them, and it seemed a pointless effort, since the result was inevitably the same....

Another day came. Lying upon his back with his eyes barely open and looking vacantly upward toward the vast ceiling of the chamber, a vagrant memory came to him, reminding him of where he was and why he remained there. The thought startled him into greater wakefulness and he undertook the effort yet again, contracting his unwilling leg muscles and pulling his foot slowly toward his body. Each moment he expected to meet the familiar restraint of Kronos's unmovable fingers, but this time was different.

Consciousness returned more fully now-abruptly-and he struggled to raise himself up so that he could look. His body resisted, but at last he managed to peer toward his feet.

He was free! The Titan lay in a different position. He had stirred during his long sleep and turned on his side, in the process releasing Menoitios's ankle and drawing his arm up under his huge head.

It was difficult to think-to remember everything. Slowly the young god pushed himself up to his knees, then to his feet. They refused to support him, and he slipped back to the floor. He must have food. Was it his imagination, or did his limbs look thinner than when he had entered this room? With full wakefulness his hunger returned in earnest, and he began to look about the huge chamber. Certainly Kronos must keep food somewhere nearby.

Crawling to the throne, Menoitios pulled himself up and stood unsteadily beside it, surveying his surroundings. When he failed to discover within the great hall what he sought, he turned his attention toward the rear doors and set out in that direction, tottering. More than once on the way he fell and had to laboriously regain his feet.

Eventually he found nectar in one of the rear rooms, and slumping into a chair he commenced to fill his stomach. The imperishable fluid revived him and within an hour he felt strong enough to depart.

Crossing the great hall again, he paused near the fallen Titan, drawing back a foot to give the god a parting kick in the face; but he changed his mind before delivering the blow, which might have awakened Kronos, and spat upon him instead. Then he continued out through the great double doors to the portico. A glance at the sky told him that it was late afternoon. Commanding large hawk wings to grow from his back, he flew down from Mount Olympos.

It was night when he reached his destination. During the long trip, with his mind clear again for the first time in many days, he had considered his possible courses of action. He could revenge himself upon Zeus and Metis without any assistance, but that might take too long to accomplish. He was anxious to act against them immediately, and Zeus was conveniently vulnerable in at least one area. He flew first to the palace of his father, where he made his way surreptitiously to his own apartment, devoured a bowl of ambrosia, cleaned himself, and donned fresh clothing.

Then he left again, as stealthily as he had come, and went to the Palace of Okeanos. Assuming the form of a hawk, he alighted on a ledge outside the apartment of Metis to watch and listen. After some minutes he succeeded in establishing that the Okeanid was at home and alone.

Still in avian form, he flew next to the Palace of Rhea. When he found that he could learn little without entering, he flitted into one of the rooms and reassumed his natural shape, then crept forward until he heard voices. Peering around a doorway, he found the Titaness talking with Zeus, who seemed to have recently returned from an outing and was about to go out again. He listened with interest as Rhea warned her son about the ever increasing danger he faced of being discovered, then watched as Zeus took on the appearance of a lesser god of the Palace of Atlas, waved good-bye to his mother, and left the building.

Silently Menoitios slipped back the way he had come. He flew again to the Palace of Okeanos, where he resumed his own form and recovered his clothing from the place where he had left it, then hurried on foot to the Palace of Hyperion.

A sullen functionary finally responded to his repeated pounding at the great bronze door and peered out in annoyance. Only then did he realize that it must be later than he had guessed; nevertheless he persisted and asked to see the son of Hyperion. Muttering, the god led him inside and left him to wait in the atrium.

The attendant returned a short while later to inform him that Helios would be down eventually. The wait turned out to be considerable, and Menoitios paced the wide chamber, still trying to work the remaining stiffness out of his muscles. Finally a tall figure came toward him from a stairway near the rear of the atrium, walking briskly.

Since the disappearance of Zeus from Mount Othrys nearly three months before, Helios and his comrades had pursued their schemes against Iapetos and his children with only lukewarm interest. Epimetheus's inept, almost farcical attempts to revenge himself upon them provided a reliable outlet for their ill will, and Helios had grown increasingly dissatisfied with the meekness of their efforts. For some time now he had been focusing his thoughts instead upon finding some bolder plan that might more quickly unseat Iapetos as leader of the Titans and elevate his father Hyperion to that station. The unlikely visit of Iapetos's youngest son intrigued him, and as he strode toward him he wondered if the youth's presence might presage some new and unexpected opportunity.

The older Titan halted within a pace of his visitor, placed his hands on his hips, squared his shoulders, and stared down haughtily. "So you've reappeared at last, son of Iapetos? Did your brothers find you? I understand they've been searching across the broad earth. What do you want of me? You've picked an unusual time to call."

"They've been searching for me?" Menoitios asked in surprise. "How long have I been gone?"

Helios shrugged indifferently. "I don't concern myself with the comings and goings of children."

Menoitios frowned, then changed tactics. "Does the god Zeus still concern you?"

Helios's expression changed abruptly; now he, too, frowned. "What of him? Do you know where he is?"

Menoitios smiled. He enjoyed holding information that others were desperate to know, and instinctively delayed revealing it. "Perhaps. But first we must discuss other things. You still haven't answered my question. How long was I missing?"

Helios glared at him and drew himself up to his full height. "How dare you take such an attitude with me, you miserable little wretch? It wouldn't take much of a provocation to make me bat your sneering smile through the back of your head."

Menoitios backed away a little, but smiled more broadly. "Come, come, noble son of Hyperion-I came here to offer myself as your ally against a common enemy. But if you're not interested in the Cretan god . . ." He turned slowly, waiting for Helios to stop him from leaving.

Helios gritted his teeth. "If you know where he is, then perhaps it's a different matter. Stop playing with me and say what you want."

Menoitios turned again to face the handsome deity. "I still require that you answer my question. How long was I gone? I'm not asking foolishly. I must know."

"Two weeks at least, perhaps three weeks," Helios said, puzzled now. "I don't keep track of such things. How can you not know yourself?"

"I was.... occupied. I had no idea it was so long. Their punishment must be very terrible indeed."

"You're a very annoying creature, Menoitios," Helios cried, clenching his fists. "But I don't really care where you were or what you were doing, or even why you don't know how long you were gone. Tell me what you know about that backwoods upstart Zeus."

"He's here on Mount Othrys again. Probably he's been here most of the time I was gone. I know where he is and I know . . . something else."

"Then it's true! The knave! I thought it was only baseless rumor. But what else is it that you know?"

"I know who he is."

"Who he is? What do you mean? He's the fatherless son of some lesser goddess or other."

Menoitios's smile grew more prominent as he slowly shook his head.

"Then who is he? Tell me what you're talking about."

"No, Helios," Menoitios said slowly. The knowledge he possessed gave him a certain degree of power over the older god and he intended to savor that power. "Listen. You don't like me or my family; there's no secret to that. And I detest you. You're arrogant and foolish, and not particularly smart, either.'"

The Titan glowered at him and seemed to be about to lose control of himself.

"But how we feel about one another isn't important, because we share a common desire—the destruction of the god from Crete. I can put aside my personal animosity toward you to accomplish that goal. Can you do the same?"

Helios's eyes were bulging and his anger seemed almost to be strangling him, but at last he managed to nod.

"Good. Then I offer you a pact. I'll tolerate you, and you will tolerate me, until we've destroyed Zeus. We will not offer harm to one another in any way or by any means. Do you agree to this?"

"Yes," the Titan answered grudgingly.

"Will you swear it by the Earth and starry Heaven?"

Helios hesitated, unwilling to bind himself so fully. At last, reluctantly, he said, "I swear it by the Earth and starry Heaven. Now tell me where he is, and who he is."

"And will you swear you won't act against him without my consent—that we must reach agreement on whatever is done?"

"Yes," Helios growled. "I swear that too."

"By the Earth and starry Heaven?"

"Yes," the Titan cried in exasperation, "I swear it by the Earth and starry Heaven. Now tell me."

Menoitios stared into the other god's eyes. "Your backwoods upstart is as much a Titan as you. He's the son of ... Kronos and Rhea."

Helios stared at him in disbelief, mouth agape.

"Do you understand? He's the child of the prophecy—destined to become our king!"

"That can't be," Helios roared. "How do you know this?"

"I heard it from Rhea's own lips."

"Him—our new king? No. That can't be. I will not let it be!"

Menoitios smiled. "I thought you might feel that way."

"Where is he?"

"Just before I came here, he was in the palace of his mother.'"

Helios started toward the stairs. "I'll get my sword and call Pallas and Perses. We'll drag him from his hiding place."

"You are stupid," Menoitios said quietly. "You'll do no such thing. We must act with cunning-and keep our own hands clean. Tomorrow I'll learn more of what's happened during my absence. Tomorrow night I'll visit you again, and we'll begin to set our course. In the meantime, you must not tell Pallas and Perses what I've told you. They'd only blabber it about."

The Titan turned slowly and came back toward him, stopping so near that his bulging chest was almost pressed against Menoitios's face. "I've sworn all those things you made me swear, son of Iapetos. I've sworn and I shall honor my oath. But I swear one thing more-when we've finished with Zeus, I'll make you regret your insolence."

TwentyFive

For an hour or two each day, Metis was quite happy. She had feared that once Zeus found himself back on Mount Othrys, with many attractive maidens contending for his attention, he would forget her; but to her surprise and intense gratification, he came to visit her every afternoon without fail.

When they were not wrapped in each other's arms, they usually sat or lay on the pillows Metis always scattered across the atrium. Sometimes he teased and bantered with her, or they tussled together playfully upon the floor, but more often she lay on her side, watching him as he talked. He told her of his childhood on lovely Crete, of Pan and Amaltheia, of Ida andAdrastia and the Kouretes.

During the weeks since they had returned from Mount Olympos, she had learned a great deal about this rash, callow god, and always found him more endearing as a result. He was seldom serious, preferring light and amusing conversation to solemn conjectures and philosophizing; and he was never bitter or resentful, even toward Kronos. Occasionally, though, he confided his self-doubts and apprehensions. He was not at all certain it was really such a fine thing to have a great destiny awaiting him; might it not be much more pleasant to carelessly roam the fields and meadows, never concerned about the morrow?

Today, however, Metis had serious matters of her own on her mind. "You were nearly caught again, I understand. At least that's what I've heard."

"Not really," he answered cheerfully. "The instant I entered, I realized Kelema's father had laid a trap for me. I turned around immediately, and by the time they followed me outside, I was so well hidden they had no idea where I'd gone." His expression told her he considered the incident a minor triumph.

"But how much longer do you think you can keep this up?" she asked. "That must be the third attempt to catch you in as many days."

He shook his head, grinning. "Fifth. There were two others I didn't tell you about. I'd been warned and didn't venture near them."

"You know that Skleros complained to the Council today?"

Zeus sat up, much interested. "No, I didn't. What did he say?"

"That the god Zeus was sneaking into his home to visit his daughter, though of course she claimed it wasn't so; that he'd seen him and chased him away; that other gods have noticed suspicious things going on in their homes, and that the Titans had better do something about it."

"I do wish he hadn't seen me in my own form. That was unfortunate. What did the Council do?"

"Nothing, of course. Crios made light of it, saying he didn't see how they could be expected to catch phantoms. Koios said Skleros was probably mistaken, since no one else had seen Zeus in months."

"So I'm safe a while longer, at least."

"No, you're not! Skleros left the Hall of the Titans fuming, and he wasn't the only one. There were many of the other lesser gods there with him, and they're very unhappy with you too. They're convinced that someone is toying with their goddesses behind their backs—that you are that someone—and they don't like it. If they catch you, they won't go back to the Council for justice, you know. They'll take matters into their own hands. ..."

Zeus shrugged. "I'll be more careful. Did I tell you that Psephos thrashed one of his own sons? He found him in Iachema's room and thought he was me in disguise!"

Zeus laughed and Metis smiled wanly; she was in no mood to appreciate such humor.

"Have you heard that Menoitios has returned?" she asked. "He told his parents an outrageous story about chasing a prowler from their home, following him across the Great Sea, and getting lost, but no one believes him, of course."

"Yes, I heard. Do you think he's been on Mount Olympos all this time?"

She shrugged. "The real question, though, is what his return means to you. He probably knows you're Kronos's son and will suspect that you're staying in your mother's palace."

"I'll have to be more careful."

"Is that your answer to everything? There's Kronos to think about, too. He'll soon recover, if he hasn't already. We have no way of knowing what Menoitios may already have told him."

"What are you getting at?"

"I think it may be time for you to consider leaving Mount Othrys."

When he did not respond, she sat quietly for some moments, preparing to broach a more sensitive topic. "Do you think you could ever content yourself with a single goddess?" she asked at last.

He seemed distracted and did not answer at first.

Usually she avoided speaking of his other relationships; the subject bruised her feminine pride too much. But now she persisted, trying to make the question sound light and offhand. "Please answer. Would it grieve you so much to have to limit yourself to only one?"

"I suppose that would depend on a number of things, such as who the goddess was."

"Me!" she blurted out, annoyed at what she interpreted as his frivolous attitude.

He was surprised at how beautiful and vulnerable she appeared as she sat

across from him, cross-legged on the floor, looking away while she awaited his answer. "Really, Metis, I haven't given any thought to such a thing. Why should I? I'm young. I'll have more than enough time to ponder weighty concerns in years to come."

She sat up straighter, frowning. His answer, delivered simply and honestly, made her angry. The matter he hadn't even considered was virtually all that she thought about! As she looked into his handsome, smiling face--so untroubled by her own grief--all her suppressed emotions surged up.

"Don't you understand how much you're hurting me?" she demanded. "You come and spend a little while with me each day, but then you go off-to them. Don't you think that hurts me? Do you know what I do every day after you leave? I cry!" She had not intended to tell him any of this, but once she started to unburden herself she could not stop. "I throw myself on my bed and cry, because I know you're with them instead of with me. I care about you"--her voice started to break with emotion--"very, very much. ... I love you! Don't you know that? Don't you understand? I love you!"

He tried to comfort her, edging closer and slipping an arm around her back. "I'm sorry. I didn't know you felt like that-- so strongly, I mean. Metis, I love you too, but...."

"But not enough, it appears," she said bitterly, wiping tears from her eyes. "I can't bear to be away from you, even for a few moments, but you can't bear to be away from . . . them. I can't go on like this, sharing you. It hurts too much."

"I'm sorry," he said again; it was all he could think to say.

She buried her face between his neck and shoulder, letting him comfort her. When she was calm again, she pulled away and looked directly into his eyes. "I'll ask you again. Do you think you could ever content yourself with a single goddess--with me?"

"I don't know," he said simply. Her emotional outburst had upset him greatly. He cared very much for her; she was very special, and if he had to restrict himself to 'but one goddess, she would certainly be his first choice. But he cared about many of the others, too. They were special as well, each in her own way, as he had discovered to his surprise over the past few weeks; and he was not at all sure he could do without any of them.

When he tried to put his arm around her again, Metis shook it away. She got up and walked across the room. As she neared the wall she swung around and faced him.

"I've been thinking it might be best if we didn't continue seeing each other."

"I hope you don't mean that," he said quietly.

"I don't think I have any other choice. I can't continue like this much longer. A goddess needs more from the god she loves than a brief visit each day. She needs commitment.... marriage."

"I don't want to lose you," he said. "I had no idea. ..."

"And I don't want to lose you!" she said. "We're both distraught. Will you think about what I've said?"

He nodded.

She smiled at him, a sad, forlorn smile, then came toward him, threw her arms around his neck, and kissed him. "You'd better go now. Tell me tomorrow what you've decided."

After he left, her apartment seemed oppressive. She yearned to leave its confines, if only for a short while, and so she sought out the pleasant solitude of the wide forests and gardens of the mountaintop. Even more than usual, in recent days she had found a sort of peace there, walking among the trees and flowers, and even occasionally forgot how miserable she was.

This afternoon her wandering brought her to the edge of the mountain, and for some minutes she stood there, peering downward at the vast and magnificent vista of smaller mountains and hills separated by green, thickly forested valleys.

She had been so certain that Zeus was destined to become her husband-had so thoroughly convinced herself of the inevitability of that event-that she found it extremely difficult and painful to force herself to admit the unavoidable truth. Deep within, probably, she had realized all along that she was indulging herself in self-deception of the most foolish sort.

She could not hate him, she decided-even now. Her life would never be the same. He had sauntered through her life and changed it utterly; undoubtedly the same was or would be true of many others. And yet she did not really blame him. It was his nature to do the things he did. In a way it made as much sense to blame the hare for despoiling a patch of clover-or the lion for satisfying its hunger upon some lovely fawn. Or was she merely making excuses for him- and herself?

As she stood at the edge of the cliff, a movement far in the distance caught her eye and for some time she stared in that direction. She could discern a number of divine figures, which were moving through a valley. As she looked more closely she realized that amid them traveled the most amazing creature she had ever seen-an enormous goat, its head rising well above the waists of the gods that accompanied it. Now Metis watched with genuine interest, for she knew that the goat must be Amaltheia, the strange goddess who had helped rear Zeus, and that her companions must be the Kouretes, the savage bodyguard Rhea had mentioned. Zeus had related to Metis his conversation with Pan, and so she knew that Amaltheia and her companions were searching for the two youths.

Poor creature! she thought. Here was yet another victim of Zeus's callousness. How long must she be allowed to continue her hopeless search? Metis considered flying down and telling the goat goddess where she could find at least one of the gods she sought, but she quickly decided against such an impulsive action, which might further complicate Zeus's stay on Mount Othrys. Instead she would inform Zeus and encourage him to go to the poor creature. She would tell Rhea, too, who might have a thing or two to say to her son about his lack of consideration.

Evening was approaching and she turned back toward her apartment, walking slowly and whistling a sad, reflective air. She found Prometheus awaiting her just outside the Palace of Okeanos.

"Greetings, Metis." His smile and manner were pleasant-perhaps too pleasant, as if concealing some serious reason for his visit. "I haven't seen you in many days. Are you busy now? Do you have time to talk?"

"I always have time for my friends." She did her best to return his cheerfulness.

They entered the building, climbing the wide stairway side by side.

"We've missed seeing you," the Titan began awkwardly when they reached the atrium of her apartment. He settled into a large armchair while she mixed nectar for them. "Epimetheus and I, I mean. I expected you to see us as often as before, after you returned from visiting your parents."

"If you missed me so much, you might have come here to visit. How is Epimetheus?"

"He's as well as can be expected. The wounds should heal properly, which is the important thing. Father has told him that if he gets in any more rights-no matter who's at fault-he'll be sent away and not allowed back on Mount Othrys until he learns to control himself."

"That's a shame. We both know Helios and his friends are really responsible."

"Yes, but Epimetheus keeps acting so foolishly that it doesn't usually look that way to everyone else. But I didn't come to talk about my brother. Metis, I hope you don't mind my visiting you like this. ..."

"Why should I mind? You can be very foolish yourself at times, you know!"

"I only thought, under the circumstances...." He paused, then tried again. "I thought, since that day I told you how I felt, you might not be comfortable having me ..."

She carried the filled goblets toward him, set his on the small three-legged table that stood beside his chair, then seated herself across from him. "Prometheus, how can you think such things? The way I feel about you hasn't changed. I feel as I've always felt-as I'll always feel. You're my dear friend. Nothing can change that."

"What about Zeus?" he asked. "Do you still.... love him?"

"What makes you think I love him?"

"It's pretty obvious. You haven't been the same since you met him. You do love him, don't you?"

She did not wish to lie to him, and so for a moment or two she sought a way to evade his question. At last she said, "Yes. More than before, I'm afraid. I know it's foolish. I know you must think me a fool for feeling as I do, but I can't help myself." She went on more quickly now. "I know I'm a fool, and I sit here alone in my room most of the time, while he's out wooing every goddess who catches his eye, and I curse myself. But we can't control how we feel, Prometheus. At least I can't."

Prometheus looked up suddenly. "Wooing other goddesses? What do you mean? You speak as if he were still here on Mount Othrys, or here again."

She pressed her lips tightly together and turned away, ostensibly to retrieve her goblet from the table where she had set it. "You see," she said when she had finished sipping, "you've made me say too much. You must promise not to tell anyone what I said."

The Titan nodded gravely.

"Zeus is indeed here. He returned the same day I did. There's much I may not tell you-please don't question me further-but he is here."

"I knew it! There were just too many rumors for it not to be true. But how does he accomplish it? Nearly everyone knows what he looks like, from his first visit."

Metis smiled wryly. "May I speak freely? You mustn't use anything I tell you to harm him."

"I won't."

"He's a talented youth, and acquires new skills easily. He's become a skilled shape-changer and can mimic any god he likes. He has a safe place to stay-no, not here or anywhere within this palace-and when he wishes to venture out, he merely assumes the image of a suitable god and wears it until he's safely reached his tryst. The ladies of Mount Othrys are more trustworthy than many of you gods may think, for none has yet given him away."

"Then he comes and goes as he likes? Has no one questioned him? How does he avoid encountering the very god he's impersonating?"

Metis shrugged. "Perhaps he does. He's clever, my friend, and the possibilities are numerous. I presume he's cautious."

A scowl was slowly settling on Prometheus's face. "Metis, how can you love such a god? I don't understand at all. Half of Mount Othrys would worship you if you gave them the slightest encouragement, yet you squander your love on such a creature! How can the wisest of goddesses be such a fool?"

"It's easy," she said, the corners of her mouth quivering. "I'm in love."

"But really, Metis, if-"

"No, you must stop," she said. "I know you're saying such things because you believe them and because you want to help me, but I don't want to hear any more. You don't understand because you see him only with your eyes and not with your heart. You see only an uncouth, callous youth. There's much, much more to him, more than you can imagine. He is no ordinary god, Prometheus. You're mistaking a forest fire for a firefly, because you're viewing from so great a distance-and that's an error with potentially disastrous consequences! I tell you, Prometheus, there are no other gods like Zeus."

He drew away as she spoke, stunned by the intensity of her outburst. Her face was gleaming.

She laughed suddenly and wiped her eyes. "I see you're staring at me and shaking your head. You think I'm only a foolish female in love-than which there's nothing more foolish, or so my father used to assure his daughters. But everything I've said is true. The god who judges Zeus too quickly does so at his own peril. You've seen only a tiny fraction of his greatness.'"

Prometheus was shaking his head. "I don't know how to answer any of that," the Titan said, "except to say that it makes me very sad. A love such as yours can only lead to grief. And if you marry him-"

She laughed lowly. "There's little chance of that."

"-your life will be ruined. You'll never be happy with such a god. If he won't marry you, I count that as lucky, for certainly there are a dozen others ready to become your husband."

"Perhaps not ... now."

He scrutinized her face. "What do you mean?"

She had not intended to say so much, but went on and blurted out the rest. "I'm carrying Zeus's child."

Prometheus leaped from his chair. "Oh, Metis! And he won't marry you? The beast!" He was shaking with anger.

"He doesn't even know."

"You haven't told him? By Heaven and Earth, why not?"

"I wouldn't have him as my husband if he married me for such a reason alone."

"I'll marry you. I'll gladly marry you-and consider myself the most fortunate of gods." He dropped to one knee before her. "Will you marry me? No one need ever know. Now-today-immediately?'"

She smiled tenderly at him, touched by his devotion. "Nor would I have you as my husband-for such a reason."

"But it wouldn't be because of that-for me. I've always wanted to marry you. Will you be my wife?"

She shook her head sadly. "No. I wouldn't do such a thing to you."

"But you would only be making me happy. Nothing would make me happier. I don't care about... that... if it makes you agree to marry me. I welcome it-I exalt in it-if it makes you my wife!"

"No," she said firmly.

"The worm! The toad! Oh, how I hate him!" he roared, pounding his fist against his leg.

"No, you mustn't hate him. The fault is as much mine as his, if it is a fault. You're making me sorry that I've told you."

For a long moment he stood completely still before her, his head bowed. At last he looked up slowly. "I must think." He turned to leave.

"Promise me!" she cried, running after him. "Promise you'll do nothing foolish. I know you won't betray my confidence, but you must not try to harm Zeus. This is my problem and only I can solve it."

He looked back at her again, his eyes dull and distant. Nodding, he opened the outer door of the apartment and left her.

He descended slowly to the ground floor of the palace, then made his way outside. Night was falling. Head down, he walked back toward the Palace of Iapetos. As he walked, he became more and more angry. In his own apartment, he settled into a chair to think, and the more he thought, the more determined he became upon a single course of action. From an adjacent room he brought a dagger, which he strapped to his waist. In another room he found a thick piece of wood that would serve as a club, and with a long strip of rawhide he hung it from about his neck in such

a way that it could easily be concealed beneath a cloak. Now he had only to wait.

For hours he paced the wide entrance hall of his apartment, pausing occasionally to look out the window. Finally, when he thought it late enough, he left the palace again.

He was determined to locate the Cretan god, and so he began a circuit of Mount Othrys, stopping at each palace that housed a divine maiden. In a situation such as this, he felt no obligation to abide by the formalities normally associated with such visits, and his intimate knowledge of the Titan settlement allowed him as often as not to enter at will and make his way unseen to any room within those enormous structures.

His unexpected intrusions garnered many peculiar looks, but a quick apology, and his ready explanation that he had lost his way while searching for some other household member, invariably quelled the concern of the goddesses he encountered. More often than not, they invited him to remain and chat.

As he was leaving the Palace of Atlas, his brother, where he had failed to find Zeus among the Pleiades, he collided with another god, who was rushing up the great stone stairs that led to the entrance as he was rushing down them. Both deities drew back in surprise.

"Father!" Prometheus cried. "Pardon my carelessness. I didn't see you coming."

Iapetos nodded his head in greeting, but continued climbing. His face was furrowed in a deep scowl and he appeared completely preoccupied. Prometheus turned too, but father and son traveled only a few steps before both swung around again and rushed back toward each other.

"Has anyone seen Zeus?" they asked simultaneously.

The echoed question left both of them speechless for a moment; then Prometheus said, "No, I'm seeking him too. How do you know he's on Mount Othrys?"

"Half the gods say he's here," the Titan growled back in a hoarse undertone. "And when I find that miserable ..."

"What has he done, Father?" Prometheus asked. "Why are you seeking him?"

Iapetos's eyes were blazing and his voice rasped like bronze on bronze. "He's been courting Themis-and most of the other goddesses of Mount Othrys."

"Themis is no longer your wife, Father. She can spend her time with whatever god she pleases," Prometheus said, hoping to distract his father from whatever questions he probably intended to ask in return.

"That isn't all," Iapetos said meaningfully.

Prometheus's eyes widened. "You mean-?"

Iapetos nodded, gritting his teeth. "Yes! The whelp's gotten her pregnant!" The elder god looked up the steps toward the Palace of Atlas. "I must make certain he isn't here-with my granddaughters!"

Prometheus watched his father disappear through the broad entrance, then

resumed his interrupted mission, even more confused and distressed than before.

While Prometheus hurried on through the night, a new god arrived on Mount Othrys. He had been climbing since morning, and now, as he stood at last on the relatively level surface of the cliff's edge, he paused to rest his shaggy legs and smell the sweet air of the mountaintop. Still higher above him he could see in the moonlight the towering edifices Zeus had described so vividly, where so many beautiful goddesses lived.

As soon as his feet would allow him to continue, he rose and made his way through a thick forest, pausing at last near one of the great stone structures. A burst of tittering laughter emanated from somewhere inside, and with a wide grin Pan sprinted toward the sound.

TwentySix

"Are you certain he's here?" Helios demanded a second time, nodding toward the low, broad structure within which many of the children of Nyx resided.

"Yes," Menoitios said patronizingly. "I followed him from his mother's home not long ago. Unless he departed almost immediately-not a very likely prospect, I'd say-or left by some other route, he must still be within."

"Who has he come to see?"

"Eris, I think. She was near the door when he entered, and went off with him."

"You said he'd taken on the appearance of another god. Which one? Whom does he look like?"

"Philotes, Eris's brother." Menoitios snickered. "What better way to gain entrance-not merely to this palace, but to her bedroom as well?"

Helios looked behind them suddenly, toward two approaching figures. Pallas had been sent to find his brother and was returning with him now.

"Have you told them anything yet?" Menoitios asked.

Helios shook his head. "Only to come quietly, and to tell no one where they were going."

"Good. They need not know everything I've told you. Tell them only that Zeus is inside, and that we're going to capture him and take him before the Titans."

"But I don't want to take him to the Council!" Helios objected.

"Tell them anyway," Menoitios whispered as the others drew near. "Otherwise they might accidentally reveal what we really plan. Zeus will come more readily if he thinks he has only a trial and banishment to fear."

Now Pallas and Perses reached them.

"Why is he here?" one asked, pointing at Menoitios.

The son of Iapetos sneered at them. "To help you accomplish that which you're too dull to accomplish by yourselves."

Perses took a threatening step toward the boy, but Helios stopped him. "Ignore his taunts—for tonight. He's located Zeus. Do you know the god Philotes? Zeus has become very skilled at changing shapes and can even assume the forms of other gods. Menoitios saw him enter this palace in the guise of Philotes."

As they continued to talk in hushed tones, another god approached. He traveled briskly, scanning the trees and nearby buildings. The moon was bright tonight, and the direction from which he came allowed him to see the hidden gods clearly and to recognize them. To find Helios and his young companions skulking about in the night was suspicious; to have Menoitios with them was doubly so.

Adapting a more stealthy manner, Prometheus turned about and retreated for some distance along the walkway he had been following, then entered a grove of tall trees and made his way silently toward their hiding place. He could not help thinking that their presence might have something to do with the very god he was seeking.

Normally he would have been much more cautious; but Prometheus was angry tonight and in no mood for meekness. If they discovered him, he was fully prepared to step out boldly and interrogate all four of them by whatever means necessary. He advanced until he was no more than a few paces away, with only leaves and shadows to conceal his presence. He listened carefully for some minutes. When he had learned what he was most interested in knowing, he slipped back among the trees.

Circling toward the rear of the Palace of Nyx, he scrambled into a window, crossed a number of dark rooms, and at last found himself in a wide, dim corridor. He had no idea where Eris's rooms might be, except that they almost certainly would not be on the ground floor, and so he sought a stairway and ascended. Once he reached the level above, he traveled from apartment to apartment, brazenly entering each one. Most were unoccupied. Whenever a startled god or goddess met him, he smiled and bowed, backed away muttering, "Pardon—I must have the wrong room," and continued down the corridor toward the next door.

At last, in a rear room of the last apartment on the second floor, he found what he sought. Three steps carried him from the doorway to the bed. Both god and goddess were too occupied to notice his intrusion until he grasped Zeus by his thick black hair and one arm and hauled him from the bed.

The divine boy, who had abandoned the form of Philotes the instant he and Eris had reached the privacy of her chambers, shrieked in pain as the Titan pulled him to a standing position. His golden-haired companion cried out too, in surprise. She was an attractive older goddess, endowed with a full figure and mature charms that she made no effort to conceal as she sat up and watched in astonishment.

"What are you doing here?" she demanded. "You have no right to enter my rooms."

"Be quiet," Prometheus told her. "If you make noise, you'll only embarrass yourself still further."

Zeus tried to twist from the Titan's grasp, but Prometheus only pulled back harder on his hair, eliciting more cries of pain. Forcing the boy to stand completely upright, Prometheus walked him across the room.

"Pick up your clothing and put it on," he commanded, pushing him downward so that he could reach the garment.

Again Zeus tried to break free, but the Titan yanked his head back so forcefully that he found himself staring at the ceiling and convinced of the wisdom of cooperating with his captor, at least for the present. He picked up his chiton and awkwardly began to slip it on over his head, hoping that he could escape when Prometheus was forced to relinquish his hold momentarily. But the powerful hands of the Titan kept a firm grip on various parts of his anatomy until the operation had been successfully completed.

When he finished belting and adjusting the garment, Prometheus told him, "Put on your cloak, too-quickly."

Zeus complied. "Why have you followed me here? What do you want?"

"Justice."

The youth looked puzzled. "Have I done something to you? Is this goddess-?"

"Not here. We'll talk in private." Without another glance at the goddess, Prometheus pushed the boy out of the room, across the apartment, and out into the corridor. Eris started to follow them, shouting objections all the way, but stopped near the outer door since she still had not taken the time to dress.

Holding Zeus ahead of him with both hands, Prometheus marched him down the corridor until they reached a room the Titan knew from his previous explorations to be vacant. He shoved the boy inside, then closed the door after them.

"Do you love Metis?" he demanded.

"Metis?" Zeus asked in surprise. "Is she the reason you've sought me out like this?"

"Do you love her?" Prometheus asked again.

Zeus remembered his conversation with the Okeanid earlier that day. Despite his promise to carefully consider what she had said, he had promptly pushed the troubling subject out of his mind, hoping that her extreme agitation was only a temporary aberration and that it would soon pass.

"Answer me!"

"Yes, I suppose I do love her. I told her that today."

"Will you marry her?"

Zeus's eyes grew large. "Marry her? Is that what she was talking about? She said something about marriage, but I thought ..."

Prometheus's frown grew pronounced.

"I do love her. I hadn't really thought much about it till she brought up the subject. Perhaps when I'm older, some years from now ..."

"Would your answer be any different if you knew that she carries your child?"

The youth looked stunned. "I-I didn't know."

"Will you marry her now?"

"I-I don't know. I'm not sure. . . . I do care for her- very much-but marriage. . . . I need to think. . . ."

The Titan glared down at him. He stood nearly a head taller than Zeus and was still holding him roughly by both arms. Now one hand moved to grip his throat. "Listen to me, boy. You've dishonored a goddess a thousand times better than yourself, a goddess I love-that I've loved since we were children. She loves you, and you're going to marry her. Furthermore, you're going to act as if this is your idea, as if you want to marry her more than you want anything else in the world. You owe her that, for what you've done to her. If you don't-if you hurt her with a single careless word or look-I'll cut you apart and scatter your innards across the wide earth. Do you understand me?"

"Y-yes, I understand, Prometheus," the boy said, but as the Titan relaxed his grip, Zeus leaped away and ran toward an adjacent room.

But the youth was no match for the full-grown Titan. Prometheus overtook him in an instant, swung him around and threw him against a wall. A large club appeared from beneath Prometheus's cloak. Zeus attempted to dodge the blow, but could not move fast enough. The club struck his head and he slumped unconscious to the floor.

Prometheus stood over him briefly, then stooped to straighten the boy's clothing. He hefted the limp body to one shoulder and carried it out of the apartment and down the corridor toward the stairway. When he reached the ground floor, he retraced his steps to the rear of the palace and clambered out the same window through which he had entered a short while before. He pulled the limp form after him.

Helios and his companions were still hiding near the front entrance, where Prometheus had first seen them. Still carrying the youth's body slung over one shoulder, he moved cautiously past them through the nearby trees, finally reaching a path that would lead him to the Palace of Okeanos.

Entering that palace without being seen presented yet another problem. Through the open door he could see a number of gods and goddesses socializing within the atrium. After brief consideration, he readjusted the boy's weight, then went along the side of the building until he reached a suitable position near its rear. Here he approached a dark window, lifted and shoved the boy through it, and climbed in after him.

A little-used stairway brought him to the floor he sought. Before continuing on to Metis's apartment, though, he located a vacant chamber, deposited the boy on the floor just inside the doorway, then quickly secured a lighted torch from the corridor. With it he lit a number of lamps that stood about the room.

Zeus was stirring when he returned from replacing the torch in its sconce outside. Prometheus pulled up a chair and sat watching as the youth groaned and tenderly explored the lump on the back of his head where the Titan had struck him. At last the boy opened his eyes.

"I told you before," Prometheus said calmly, "you are going to marry Metis, or I'll punish you so thoroughly that you'll rue the day you first set eyes on Mount Othrys and the Titans. She loves you-why I can't imagine, but she does. You're going to make her happy, at least for a short while.

"Soon I'll take you to her apartment," the Titan continued, "and I'll

tell her that I found you and told you of her situation. I'll say that as soon as you knew, you insisted on marrying her as quickly as possible-tonight. Then you'll tell her that you really do love her, that all other goddesses pale to nothingness beside her, that you love her all the more because of the child she's to bear, and that you can't endure the thought of being without her. No matter what she says or how much she objects, you'll insist that the marriage take place immediately. You'll beg her to marry you, and the whole time that you're there, until the wedding is accomplished, you will indicate in no way that you're acting other than of your own accord. You will smile. You will laugh. You will implore her to give you her love. Do you understand me?"

All the while that Prometheus spoke, Zeus sat silently, glancing up only occasionally at the Titan's stony face and icy eyes.

"Long ago," Prometheus continued, "Kronos, King of the Gods, sought to discover if the gods are truly immortal, or if we can be killed. To this day the question has not been fully answered. Severed limbs grow back, ghastly wounds in time heal themselves, decapitated heads even grow new bodies. But what would happen if a god's skull were split open, his brains scooped out and scattered to the winds to feed the crows and vultures? Could even an immortal god survive such injury? Disobey me, boy, and you will supply the answer."

Now the Titan rose and stood over him. "Stand up and straighten yourself. It's time to go."

He led him down the corridor to Metis's apartment. When she opened the door she looked back and forth between the two in surprise, then began to cry. Prometheus nudged the boy forward. He entered and Prometheus followed just behind him, ready to act at the first sign of treachery.

They followed Metis deep into the room. "What have you done?" she demanded of Prometheus. "I asked you to let me handle my own problems."

"I've done nothing, except to tell Zeus what you should have told him yourself."

"You had no right! What I told you was in confidence-as a trusted friend. Oh, how could you, Prometheus?"

"I could because I am your friend, and I knew you were making a mistake. You misjudged him. Because you've heard that he's seeing other goddesses, you think he doesn't love you. There are innocent friendships as well as passions, you know. There are also unfounded rumors and misunderstandings. But whatever his relationships may be with these other goddesses, the boy loves you. The moment I told him, he was wild to see you."

Metis hesitated, confused. She looked at Zeus. "Is this true?"

Zeus nodded. From the corner of his eye he could see Prometheus watching him closely. The Titan was standing just beside him and nudged him softly when he did not speak up immediately.

"Yes, it's all true. I'm sorry I've hurt you. I realize now how much I love you."

"Then you've thought over what I said?" she asked uncertainly.

Zeus nodded, rinding that a less demanding response than to try to think of the appropriate things to say.

"He says he wants to marry you tonight-immediately," Prometheus said.

"Is this true?" Metis asked.

Zeus glanced at Prometheus, who was still observing him carefully.

"Yes!" he answered quickly, then did his best to repeat all the things the Titan had told him to say.

Metis's heart leaped at his words, such words as she longed to hear. But she could not quite bring herself to believe them. She peered into Zeus's face. "How can I tell that you aren't just saying that, because of ..."

"I'm not," he answered, this time without waiting for Prometheus to prompt him. "Oh, I admit that I hadn't been thinking of marriage-no one my age does. But now that I've had a chance to think about it, I realize it's a wonderful idea."

Metis was grinning and daubing her eyes with a kerchief.

Prometheus nudged Zeus again, and the boy said, "Will you marry me, Metis? Tonight? Right away?"

"That would certainly be unusual... and would raise questions in many minds," she said, speaking with difficulty.

"Unusual, perhaps, but not unheard of," Prometheus said. "You wouldn't be the first impetuous lovers to have an impromptu ceremony. I think it's a wonderful idea. Besides"- he laughed-"why give him the chance to change his mind?"

Metis was laughing too now, and nervously walking back and forth in front of them. She wanted to believe it all-wanted to marry Zeus this instant, before everything turned out to be only a dream-but her good sense resisted such impulsiveness.

"All we need are a couple more witnesses."

"This is outrageous," Metis continued, grinning. "Look at me. I wouldn't venture downstairs looking like this. I was about to go to bed. I can't get married dressed this way."

"Well, why don't you change? Take your time, as long as you don't take too long. Zeus and I will look for guests to invite and be back shortly."

Before she could object, Prometheus maneuvered Zeus through the outer door and into the corridor. Behind them, Metis almost floated across the atrium toward her bedroom. She was deliriously happy. She knew it was impossible. Her good sense nagged away at her, but she refused to listen to its stuffy misgivings. Zeus loved her-he had said so! The god she loved loved her in return, and would soon be her husband. Nothing else mattered.

Prometheus, keeping a firm hand on the youth's arm, pushed Zeus ahead of him down the stairs toward the atrium. He hoped to find there two other deities who, with himself, could serve as witnesses to the ceremony. He knew that the more time Metis had to think, the more likely she was to see through his plan. Before they reached the ground floor they met three Muses, who were returning home from visiting the Okeanid Akaste.

"Thalia," he cried. "Melpomene, Erato-just the goddesses I wanted to

see. Will you come with us for a bit, to the apartment of Metis? Something interesting is about to take place there tonight."

"Certainly, most noble Titan," Thalia answered with one of her characteristic grins, "But how does young Zeus here come to be with you? When did he return to Mount Othrys?"

As they ascended the stairs, Prometheus explained quickly, elaborating and inventing additional details in response to their questions.

"How romantic," Erato said. "Of course we'll help you. We'll be honored!"

"What an excellent idea," Thalia said, laughing, "to get this handsome boy safely married before he gets himself into trouble!"

Metis was still dressing when they entered. The Muses immediately busied themselves preparing refreshments.

"How lovely she is!" one cried, and everyone turned to look at Metis, who had just appeared in the hallway that led from her bedchamber. She wore a flowing white peplos of especially fine craftsmanship and delicate design.

Soon the ceremony began. Erato knew the words by heart and whispered them to the bride and groom whenever they hesitated. At last Melpomene brought forward the golden goblet. Metis took it from her and held it up near her face.

"May our love be like nectar," she said softly, smiling across at the god she loved. "May it be sweet and satisfying and imperishable." She drank, then passed the goblet to Zeus, saying, "Drink well, O my husband."

"Like nectar may our love be," he recited in turn, "sparkling and heady and beyond the touch of time." Then he drank, too.

"Ours is the kiss of marriage," Metis continued, "the kiss that binds us one to the other, in perpetual love."

"Ours is the kiss of marriage," Zeus said, stumbling over the words, "that joins us together and proclaims our eternal union."

Beaming, Metis lifted her lips toward his and kissed him, then threw her arms around her husband and pressed herself fiercely against him.

Thus did Metis, daughter of the Titans Okeanos and Tethys, become the wife of Zeus.

While all of this was happening, Iapetos, the father of Prometheus, had continued to seek Zeus among the palaces and lesser dwellings of Mount Othrys. At last he arrived at the Palace of Okeanos. Remembering that Metis had lodged Zeus on the occasion of his first visit among the Titans, he decided to begin his search of the building with her apartment.

There was a great deal of noise from that suite of rooms, much laughing and singing that could easily be heard through the outer door. Iapetos started to knock, but hesitated. After a few moments consideration, he tried to open the door instead, pushing gently inward upon it until a slit appeared wide enough to allow him to view a portion of the room. To his amazement and consternation he saw his own son there- within arm's reach of the fugitive he sought. Five deities were congregated close

together, sitting or reclining upon chairs or divans near the far side of the chamber. He pushed the door open still farther and found on his left, not far away, the dark entrance to another room. No one seemed to have noticed him, and so Iapetos slipped silently into the atrium, then disappeared through the nearby doorway.

Except for the presence of Prometheus, it was just the sort of scene he might have expected to find—the shameless Cretan god surrounded by four equally shameless maidens. He had no idea why they were all here tonight. One or another of the Muses kept singing, and he could understand little of the intermittent conversation. Grimly he squatted down to wait.

"Have you run out of nectar?" Erato demanded some minutes later. "That's hardly the proper way to give a party."

Metis rose from beside her husband and hurried off to check. When she returned, she said, "There should be some in the supply room down the corridor, near the stairs. I'll be back shortly."

"Oh, no, Metis," Melpomene objected. "Let someone else tend to such chores tonight. Prometheus, you'll go, won't you?'"

The Titan looked unhappy at the suggestion and shot a stern look at Zeus. The boy was busily talking to Erato and did not seem likely to bolt at the first opportunity. Besides, Zeus had no reason to flee now; he and Metis were incontestably married. If he was going to leave his new wife, he could do so as easily tomorrow as tonight. Prometheus rose and went to attend to the errand.

Within the darkness of the nearby room, Iapetos shifted his position to ease his complaining muscles.

Prometheus had been gone only a few moments when Thalia cried, "Where is it? You must show us."

Instantly the goddesses were on their feet and moving toward Metis's bedroom to examine some object of feminine apparel, deserting Zeus in the atrium. Iapetos did not hesitate; probably he would not have another opportunity such as this. Drawing his sword, he crept silently through the doorway and toward the boy.

Zeus was looking away from him, toward the rear hallway down which the goddesses had disappeared. When the Titan reached a position directly behind him, he raised his sword and brought its pommel down heavily on the youth's head.

Hoisting the limp body to his shoulder, he carried it quickly out of the apartment and down the corridor toward one of the rear stairways, where he was less likely to be discovered.

TwentySeven

"Where is he?" Helios demanded, fuming. "How long must we wait?" He was standing very close to Menoitios, and as he spoke he leaned closer still, so that his scowl threatened to bruise the younger god's nose.

Menoitios backed away a step. "How am I to know? Instead of making faces at me, you should be thanking me for helping you find Zeus. If I hadn't told you about him, you'd still be wondering if he was on Mount Othrys at all."

Helios snorted in disgust, turning back to look at the wide portal that

served as the main entrance of the Palace of Nyx. "How do I know he's really in there? I've only your word. Maybe this is your distorted notion of humor, getting us to crouch out here in the dark half the night."

Pallas crowded closer. "Why do we think Zeus will come back out at all tonight? He may stay with the goddess till morning."

Menoitios glared at them both disdainfully. "I'm not keeping you here. You can all go home, or you can go into the palace and try to find him. I don't know where Eris's room is-do you?"

Helios consulted with Pallas and Perses. "What do you think? Is it time to go in after him?"

"Yes," Perses said. "Anything's better than waiting out here."

Pallas agreed, and Helios turned back toward Menoitios. "We'll seek him out within the palace," he announced. "You are coming with us. Things had better be as you say they are." Taking hold of the younger god, he pulled him along as they left their hiding place and climbed the wide steps.

Just within the building they encountered an attractive young goddess and asked the location of Eris's room.

"Let me get her for you," she offered, smiling attractively.

"That isn't necessary," Helios insisted. "She's expecting us."

The goddess looked puzzled and perhaps a trifle skeptical.

"We're going to help her move some heavy things," he continued quickly, unable to think of any more convincing explanation of their presence here at this time of night.

"Well, then," she said, "I'll lead you there."

Helios started to object, but after an instant of confusion acquiesced instead.

The goddess escorted them up a stairway and down a long corridor, at last gesturing toward a doorway. "Just let me warn her that her visitors have arrived," she said, reaching for the huge golden handle.

"No," Helios said firmly, stepping between her and the door. "She's waiting for us. Thank you for snowing us the way."

He pulled the door partway open, allowed his companions to enter through the narrow breach, then closed the door behind them, leaving their dismayed guide standing alone outside.

They found Eris in her bedroom, sitting at the side of her bed-alone. She was still completely unclothed, and at their sudden appearance she jumped to her feet and let out a loud shriek. "Not again!" she cried. "Is the whole world going to tramp through my bedroom tonight?"

All four gods halted abruptly just within the chamber, gawking at her. Eventually Helios remembered what they had come for, however, and forced the others to begin. They spread out across the room, searching behind furniture and wall hangings.

"Where is he?" Helios asked.

"Who? Zeus?" Eris stood with her hands firmly planted on her generous hips, watching them.

"Yes, the Cretan god-where is he? We know he came here with you."

By now the outraged goddess had begun looking for a weapon. A small, three-legged stool stood nearby, and she swooped it up and raised it above her head.

"Where has he gone?" Helios asked, not looking at her.

"How should I know? Prometheus dragged him away long ago. Get out, do you hear! I won't be treated this way."

"Prometheus?" Helios cried, looking at Menoitios. "Do you hear that? Your brother has taken him away. What would he want with-?"

The stool struck the Titan and sent him reeling backwards. Before he could recover his balance, Eris snatched up a small table and came after him, swinging it with both hands. Helios threw up an arm to ward off the blows and lurched toward the doorway, the other gods slipping out ahead of him. Eris followed them, hurrying them on their way with blow after blow, so that first one god and then another yelped in pain.

At last they reached the corridor, but to their dismay they discovered that a large crowd had gathered there. Suspicious of their peculiar conduct, the goddess who had brought them to Eris's apartment had gone to consult with a number of her sisters. Their conduct had been peculiar enough to warrant further investigation, and a large contingent of the daughters of Nyx had hastened to assure the welfare of their sister.

Eris appeared in the doorway behind them, screaming imprecations, and the gods found themselves surrounded by two dozen outraged females who began to jostle and push them toward the stairway. Small, hard fists and feet pounded and kicked them all the way, nimble fingers tore at their hair and clothing, and shrill voices screamed insults in their ears. Pallas stumbled and nearly fell, but Helios managed to pull him up before he was trampled.

The goddesses followed them down the stairway, abandoning the chase only when the last of the intruders had left the building. The gods continued to flee until they were out of sight of the palace, then slumped down to rest together near one of the walkways.

"I won't forget that," Helios said, glaring at Menoitios, who was sitting some distance from him.

"It wasn't my fault. You heard what she said. Zeus was there. How could I know my brother would interfere?"

"Where would Prometheus take him?" Perses asked. "If we knew that, perhaps we could still find Zeus tonight."

Menoitios shrugged. "Why would he take him is probably more to the point."

"Well, why?" Helios asked.

"There's only one reason I can think of. He's in love with-"

Just then Menoitios noticed someone walking toward them. He fell silent and gestured toward the dimly visible figure. As it drew nearer, the figure resolved itself into a tall, bearded god who seemed to be

carrying something quite bulky over one shoulder. Instinctively the young gods edged back from the walkway to allow greater room for him to pass.

Menoitios rubbed his eyes and looked again. The figure resembled-

"Menoitios," a deep voice called. "Is that you, Menoitios?"

"Yes, Father," the boy said, scrambling to his feet. "Who... ? What... ?"

Now the approaching figure was quite near, and it was clear that his burden was the limp body of a god. Iapetos came to a stop beside his youngest son. Menoitios leaned around his father to look behind him and learn the identity of the unconscious deity.

"Why are you carrying Zeus?" he asked in astonishment.

Iapetos ignored his question, just as he ignored the other youths nearby. "Come walk with me. I have something for you to do."

Menoitios followed the Titan until they were some distance from Helios and the others. Again his father halted and turned toward him.

"I want you to find two gods or goddesses for me and bring them to the Palace of Themis. Not Titans, you understand. That might cause too many questions to be asked. Lesser goddesses would be best."

"Any goddesses?"

"Yes. Find them quickly and bring them. Can you accomplish this?"

"Y-yes, Father-but why?"

Iapetos grimaced. "Do as I have directed, and be quick. I'm depending on you."

Without saying any more, the Titan turned and continued down the path. Menoitios hesitated, watching him, then hurried back to his companions. Quickly he explained what his father had asked of him.

"I don't understand any of this," Helios said. "Eris said your brother Prometheus took him off, but now your father has him."

"I don't understand either, but I must do what my father wishes. While I'm gone, follow him. Try not to let him see you. As soon as I learn what's going on, I'll let you know. There may be some way we can profit by all this-and insure that Zeus receives the punishment he deserves."

Iapetos continued on until he drew near the Palace of Themis. In an open area of a nearby grove he slid his burden from his shoulder to an upright position. Holding him there, he commenced to vigorously shake the unconscious youth.

"Wake up," he commanded. "I didn't hit you that hard."

Soon Zeus began to regain consciousness. "Who-who are you?" he finally managed to ask, blinking his eyes again and again in an attempt to clear his vision.

"That doesn't matter. You will listen to me and do as I say. You have defiled the goddess I love."

"Which goddess?"

"Themis-not merely a goddess, but a Titaness, one of the great gods!"

Zeus was still not sure his senses had sufficiently returned and that he understood the other god. His fingers gently explored the second lump he found on the back of his head.

"You've used her cruelly and selfishly," Iapetos continued, "and now you will remedy the situation in the only way possible."

"You don't mean... ?" Zeus asked, aghast.

"She's pregnant."

"Pregnant!"

"Yes, you thick-witted scoundrel. That's the usual result of such sport, or didn't you know?"

"And you want me to marry her?"

"I don't want it, boy. I demand it!"

"But I can't. I'm-"

"Oh, yes, you can! No excuse will get you out of this. You deserve to be severely punished. You'll do what is necessary for Themis, or I'll-"

"But you don't understand. I'm-"

"Silence! I'll brook no argument. One more word and-"

"But-"

The Titan reached for his sword and half drew it from its sheath. Zeus lapsed into submissive silence.

"You'll do and say exactly as I instruct you. Do you understand?"

The youth nodded silently.

After Menoitios left them, Helios and his companions had followed Iapetos at a distance. They waited until he reappeared from the nearby grove, then watched as he pushed Zeus ahead of him toward the Palace of Themis. Once the Titan and the youth were out of sight within the building, they scurried forward and took up hiding places near the entrance.

A number of minutes passed, and then Menoitios appeared with the two lesser goddesses he had been sent to find. Helios tried to catch his attention as he went past, but Menoitios gestured back, warning him to remain hidden.

Meanwhile Prometheus left the Palace of Okeanos and walked slowly toward his own apartment. The disappearance of Zeus puzzled him; he really had not expected the boy to run away tonight. Metis had taken his sudden absence with amazing aplomb, though, admirably concealing her own distress. The Titan would have remained with her indefinitely, but eventually she insisted on sending everyone away.

Prometheus had walked less than half the distance to his home when he encountered Atlas on the path.

"Wait a moment, brother," the older Titan called to him. When they drew

close together, Atlas went on in a confidential tone, "Tell me, do you know if Father managed to find that scamp Zeus? I've a score to settle with that boy myself."

Prometheus was surprised to see his normally even-tempered brother looking so belligerent. "I doubt it. What does he plan to do with him if he does find him? Do you know?"

"To make him do the right thing! He didn't tell you? The boy went and got Themis with child."

"He wants to force Zeus to marry Themis?" Prometheus asked incredulously.

Atlas nodded. "I'd like to get my hands on him, too. He's been sniffing around my daughters-sneaking into my home disguised as one of my functionaries. Of course I know they wouldn't do anything foolish themselves. . . . Still, can you believe the gall of the imp? I've been out trying to find him myself, but haven't had any success either."

After they parted, Prometheus walked more slowly. Could his father have had anything to do with Zeus's sudden disappearance from Metis's apartment? he wondered. It seemed unlikely, but Prometheus found himself uneasy at the thought. He turned his steps toward the Palace of Themis and proceeded in that direction with lengthening strides.

As Prometheus neared his destination, Helios signaled to his companions to conceal themselves more carefully, and so the approaching Titan did not see them hiding nearby. He mounted the wide stairs and pounded at the heavy bronze door. Soon it swung inward, and he found himself staring into the face of Iapetos.

"Father," he began uncertainly, "did you find Zeus? Atlas just told me--"

Iapetos pulled him inside and closed the door behind them. Prometheus could hear the sounds of laughter and revelry from a neighboring room.

"What have you done, Father?" he asked in dismay.

"What I've done doesn't matter, son. Come join us in our celebration. The Titaness Themis has just become the bride of Zeus.'" Neither Iapetos's voice nor his features showed any sign of joy; neither did they indicate anger. Instead he looked tired and very sad.

"Come," he said again, "you must greet the bride and groom."

TwentyEight

As he entered the room, Prometheus's eyes fell upon Zeus and Themis. The youth was seated in a large armchair; his tall, stately wife stood behind him, her hands on his shoulders. She was beaming, her entire face alight with happiness as she conversed with two lesser goddesses who stood nearby. She noticed Prometheus and beckoned him forward.

"I'm so glad you've come. I've always thought of you and your brothers almost as my own children-the children I thought I'd never have-and so it particularly pleases me to have you here. Come and wish us well."

Prometheus halted near the middle of the room and stood there stiffly, long enough for the others to become aware of his uneasiness.

"What is it?" Themis asked. "Please speak, Prometheus."

"Zeus cannot marry you."

"What do you mean?" Iapetos demanded, coming forward now to stand beside his son. "They are married. Everything has been done according to the laws and traditions of the Titans, and no one can interfere. State whatever objection you may have"-he glowered at his son-"but it can make no difference. What is done, is done."

"I tell you, they can't marry," Prometheus insisted. "Zeus is already married! This very evening-just before you brought him here, if that's what happened-he wed the Okeanid Metis in the palace of her father."

Iapetos spun around to glare at Zeus. "Is this true?"

The youth nodded reluctantly.

"Why did you not tell me?"

"I tried. You wouldn't listen to anything I wanted to say."

Themis was looking back and forth between Iapetos and her new husband. "I don't understand. If you were already wed, why did you marry me?"

The boy nodded in the direction of Iapetos, and the Titan-ess stared at her fellow Titan. At last she understood. "You forced him to do this? He didn't marry me of his own free will?" Iapetos's expression told her all she needed to know, and the beautiful, tawny-haired goddess turned away, sobbing.

"It doesn't matter," Iapetos insisted. "The second marriage must take precedence. He couldn't marry Themis while still married to Metis. Since he did marry her, he must have put aside his first wife."

"What kind of logic is that?" Prometheus demanded. "Have you witnesses? A marriage can't be dissolved in an instant-as you well know. Such things must be done with all proper formality. Who saw and heard him announce the severance? No, Father, you can't gain your way by twisting our laws. Has such a thing as this ever happened before? Is there any precedent? If not, then only the first marriage can be considered valid, for he was not free to marry Themis."

Meanwhile Menoitios had been seated by himself in one corner of the room, watching and listening with interest and amusement. When he was certain that he had learned enough, he rose and quietly made his way out of the palace. He called out softly and Helios stepped forward, followed by Perses and Pallas.

Menoitios grinned broadly as he came up close to them. "We've got him!" he whispered; then he proceeded to tell them all he learned. "All we need do," he said in conclusion, "is inform the gods of Mount Othrys of this outrage. Go, spread the word. Wake them up if you must. Zeus's punishment will be assured without our having to lift a finger. The Council of Titans may not act forcefully, but a mob will."

Inside, Prometheus and Iapetos continued to argue. Neither would acknowledge the validity of the other's position, and more than once father and son seemed about to exchange blows. While they argued, Themis sobbed into a kerchief and the goddesses who had come to share the joyous occasion of her wedding did their best to comfort her.

"I don't know why I'm talking to you about this," Iapetos said at last. "We don't even know how Metis feels. She may not want him now that he's left her for another wife."

"Certainly she wants him," Prometheus insisted. "But you haven't asked Themis, either." He turned toward the Titan-ess. "Lady Themis, do you wish to remain married to this boy-now that you know why he married you?"

The goddess only sobbed more loudly.

"Go and get Metis," Iapetos told his son. "Let's see what she has to say before we go any further."

Prometheus stared at his father suspiciously for a moment. "And what will you do while I'm gone?"

"Do? What can I do? We'll wait for you and the Okeanid to come."

"How do I know you won't force Zeus to renounce Metis while I'm away?"

Iapetos frowned in such a way that Prometheus suspected he might well have intended to do just that.

"You swear you won't?" Prometheus insisted.

"Yes, yes, I swear. Now go-it's already late, and this may well take all night."

Still Prometheus hesitated. He crossed the room and spoke softly to the lesser goddesses. At his insistence each swore she would not be a party to such a renunciation during his absence.

"And there'll be no other trickery?" he demanded of his father.

"No. Now go. Your suspicions of your own father are highly offensive."

Prometheus strode quickly from the room and out of the palace. He was surprised to find a number of gods outside, standing just beyond the steps. As he emerged, they gathered around him and began to ask excited questions about Zeus, Metis, and Themis, displaying an astonishing knowledge of all that had happened tonight. He ignored them as best he could, even pushing some of the more insistent aside, then trotted off briskly toward the Palace of Okeanos.

Since the other gods had left her, Metis had walked slowly about her apartment, trying to occupy herself in tidying up. The disappearance of Zeus had left her feeling hurt and puzzled. She had sorted through the events of the evening and realized now that Prometheus might well have coerced the youth into marrying her; but even if that had been the case, it did not really explain Zeus's sudden absence. The boy was thoughtless and self-centered, but he had never purposely hurt her before. Indeed, he was usually very tender and solicitous. Whatever had happened, she could not believe he had left her on her wedding night of his own volition.

There was another possibility, every bit as troubling. It was unlikely, but still possible, that some of his enemies had somehow learned of his presence in her apartment. Helios, for instance, might have managed in those few moments that Zeus had been alone to knock him unconscious and carry him away. With a guilty start she realized that she was actually hoping that something of that sort had happened, for that would mean that her new husband had not abandoned her. As she worked, she tried to concoct other, completely innocent explanations that would equally well explain Zeus's disappearance, but could find none that were even slightly convincing.

Her chores at last completed, Metis began to consider venturing out. There was little likelihood she could find Zeus, and she had no clear idea where to look for him; but the prospect of a fruitless search was less troubling than to remain where she was, unable to do anything but worry. She had already draped a cloak over her shoulders and was about to open the outer door when someone knocked.

It was Prometheus, and he looked distraught. "You must come with me-quickly."

"Have you found him?" Her entire aspect brightened at the thought. "Where is he? Take me to him!"

"Yes, I've found him. Hurry."

She followed him into the corridor and down the stairs. Prometheus set a brisk pace, but her slender legs easily outpaced him. She questioned him repeatedly, but he refused to tell her anything more.

As they drew near the Palace of Themis, Prometheus halted. The small crowd of gods that had been gathered outside a short while before had now swollen to a sizable throng. Metis stood beside him, looking on in puzzlement. Even as they watched, more gods continued to arrive. It was a rowdy group, with a great deal of loud talking and not a little shoving and cursing.

While they stood watching, another small group approached from behind Prometheus and Metis-three youths, each carrying weapons. The Titan stepped into their path to talk with them.

"Tell us, please-why are you and all these other gods here tonight? What's happened?"

"They've cornered that rogue Zeus," one cried excitedly. "He's holed up inside the Palace of Themis."

"And he's not going to get away again!" the second added.

"But what has he done to you?" Metis asked, stepping forward now. "Why do you wish to harm him?"

"Alkyone was in love with me-until she met him," one said bitterly.

"And Kelaino with me," the second said.

"And Merope with me!" concluded the third.

Prometheus stepped aside and the youths rushed past them to join the seething mob. As they watched a god climbed partway up one of the columns outside the entrance of the palace and called loudly for quiet. Prometheus recognized him immediately as Helios.

"Listen, all of you," Helios cried when at last the noise subsided. Despite Menoitios's suggestion that he and his fellow conspirators step back and let the mob do their work for them, the proud son of Hyperion found it impossible not to take a dominant role in the proceedings.

"Even if Zeus is here, he may still escape us-unless we organize ourselves. We'll accomplish nothing this way. We must work together if we're to capture him, and quickly, before the gods inside become aware of us."

"What shall we do?" someone cried.

"All of you over there," Helios continued, pointing to one group, "go to the rear of the palace and stand guard, lest he escape that way. Others must watch on each side of the building. Be prepared to chase him if he seeks to escape by flight from one of the windows. He's skilled at changing his form, so we must not let anyone or anything leave. Once everyone is in position, I'll pound on the door and demand admittance. If they refuse, we'll storm the palace together."

"They'll rip him apart," Metis said quietly, wringing her hands. "Oh, Prometheus, what can we do?"

The Titan shook his head. "I don't know." He moved closer and slipped an arm around her slender body. She seemed to appreciate the emotional support he offered and leaned toward him.

"Please, Prometheus," she said, looking up into his face, "help me get inside. I don't know if there's anything we can do, but we must try."

When the various gods had taken up the places assigned to them, Helios approached the great bronze outer door and knocked heavily on it. Eventually his pounding elicited a response, and Iapetos appeared at the entrance.

"What do you want?" the Titan demanded, looking in surprise at the dozen or so gods gathered nearby. He had no idea that two or three times that number had already gone to surround the building.

"We know Zeus is inside," Helios said. "We have debts to settle with him. Send him out."

Iapetos scrutinized the faces that surrounded the doorway. There could be no doubt that their intentions toward the youth were unfriendly. "How dare you issue commands to me?"

he demanded, hoping to intimidate them by his rank as leader of the Titans, of which none of them could be unaware. "We have important matters to discuss here tonight-matters that are of no concern to any of you. You are interfering here. Go away. If you have some complaint against the boy, bring it before me tomorrow. The Council of the Titans will-"

A cry of dissatisfaction drowned out whatever else he was going to say, and the crowd surged toward him. Iapetos stood his ground and shoved back the first gods who reached him, so that they fell against those behind them.

"Remember where you are," he warned sternly. "The palace of a Titan is inviolate. If any of you dare enter here tonight without being invited, you'll be held accountable before the Council. Do you wish to be banished-or flogged?"

While Iapetos was arguing with the crowd, Prometheus took Metis's hand and led her forward. He shouldered his way through the other gods, until at last they reached the doorway and his father.

"Where have you been?" Iapetos demanded. "Look at what's happening here!" He stepped aside to allow them to pass, then resumed his place in the doorway, firmly repelling those who would have followed.

Prometheus found the scene inside the little room off one side of the atrium little changed. Zeus still sat glumly by himself toward the back of the chamber. Themis was still crying, and the two lesser goddesses

still sought to comfort her. Menoitios was enjoying the spectacle from his position against one of the side walls. After speaking with his fellow conspirators outside, he had returned to the palace, reasoning that he was well positioned here to keep an eye on Zeus and help prevent his escape; also, his father would be less likely to connect him with the events that were likely to follow.

Metis halted just within the room. "What's going on here?" she asked, turning to Prometheus for an answer.

The Titan took a deep breath, then told her. "Metis, there have been two marriages tonight upon Mount Othrys. Yours was the first. As best I've been able to piece together what happened, my father somehow discovered Zeus in your apartment and brought him here, where the second ceremony took place-between Zeus and Themis."

Disbelieving, Metis looked first at Zeus, then at Themis. "I really don't understand," she said after a few moments. "You must explain more slowly and completely."

Just then Iapetos appeared behind them. He had decided that it was pointless to argue with the gods outside and closed the door on them. "I sent for you," he told Metis, "because we must decide which of the two marriages is valid. Prometheus claims the first, but I say the second. Tell us, do you wish to be married to this scoundrel?"

"But why did he do it?" she asked, looking again at Zeus, this time with a betrayed expression. The boy averted his eyes and appeared even more uncomfortable than before.

"Because he was forced to, I'm certain," Prometheus said. "My father undoubtedly compelled him to marry her. Zeus almost said as much. He said my father wouldn't listen to his objections."

"And I suppose marrying Metis was completely his idea," Iapetos said in annoyance. "You didn't have anything to do with that, did you, Prometheus?"

"Let Zeus decide," Metis said quietly.

Twenty-Nine

"No," Prometheus objected. "You were first. Why should you give up what is rightfully yours?"

Metis shook her head. "Let him decide."

From across the room Themis spoke up, daubing her eyes as she looked at them. "I agree. Let Zeus choose between us. If he doesn't want me, I don't wish to be his wife."

Prometheus and Iapetos stared at each other, then finally nodded their agreement. They approached the youth. "Well," Iapetos demanded, "which is your wife-Themis or Metis?"

Slowly the divine boy shook his head.

"You must decide," Iapetos insisted.

Still Zeus shook his head.

"What do you mean? Why do you not answer?"

"I won't choose between them. All this was your idea- yours and

Prometheus's. I care for both these goddesses. I suppose I really do love them, though I hadn't stopped to think very much about it before. I won't hurt one by selecting the other."

"But you must!" Iapetos insisted. His eyes were bulging and he clenched his right hand into a huge fist.

"No!" Zeus said firmly. "All evening you two have been telling me what I must do, and I've been doing it. No more. I won't make such a choice. The goddesses may decide among themselves, but I won't."

Iapetos snarled in frustration and drew back his fist to strike the youth. Prometheus stopped him.

"That will only make matters worse." He turned toward Themis. "My lady, will you relinquish Zeus?"

"No!" the goddess answered quickly. "I love him. I've waited too long for him. I don't care why he married me-if he was compelled to do it, or if it was his first or second marriage. If he won't renounce me, I certainly won't give him up!"

"And you, Metis?" Iapetos demanded. "Will you relinquish him?"

Metis had been struggling all this time with her own feelings. It hurt her deeply to know that Zeus cared as much for Themis as for her, and a part of her would have reacted in haughty pique, spurning him. Before she answered, though, she looked again at Zeus-and her heart melted at the sight of his handsome face. "No!" she cried. "Never-no matter what!"

"This is impossible," Iapetos cried. "You can't both be his wife. It's unheard of. Such a thing is an abomination before the gods. Someone must choose. If none of you will, then I will bring the matter before the Council of Titans."

"They have no authority," Metis said. "Only Zeus and I-and Themis-can decide such a matter."

"Then decide it," Iapetos cried in exasperation.

"I've decided. I won't give him up."

"Nor will I!" Themis insisted.

"Then what are you going to do? Share him?" Iapetos asked, trying to point out the absurdity of their stubbornness.

"If the only way I can have him is to share him," Themis said, "then so be it!"

Metis shot an exasperated look at the other goddess, then assumed an expression of equal determination. "So be it!"

A loud noise came from the atrium. Iapetos had closed and barred the outer door, trusting that none of those outside would dare enter by any other route. He was wrong. At Helios's insistence, a god had climbed through a window on the ground floor and unbolted the outer door. Now the mob poured into the palace.

Iapetos rushed toward the door to the atrium, drawing his sword. "How dare you flaunt the laws of the Titans? Leave immediately, or by the Earth and starry Heaven I'll see to it that you're all tried and punished tomorrow."

"There he is," one cried, pointing across the room at Zeus. "He's been with my wife every afternoon."

"And my sister," another cried.

"And my daughter," cried others.

"Stay back, I warn you!" Iapetos swung his sword at those who tried to make their way from the atrium into the smaller chamber.

Prometheus was armed only with a dagger, which he drew as he joined his father.

"Give him to us," a bulky giant demanded, pulling smaller deities out of his way so that he could stand directly in front of Iapetos and Prometheus. "How can you defend such a knave? Do you know what he's been doing in my household- with my wife, with my three daughters, with almost every nymph and goddess in the building?"

"Whatever his crimes, they don't excuse your actions tonight. You have violated this palace, which is a crime in itself. Go now, before matters become even worse for you. Tomorrow I'll call together the Council of Titans and you can make formal complaint against-"

With a growl the god attempted to shove his way past the two Titans. "Enough of complaints and trials. We'll deal with the rascal ourselves!"

Behind him came others, and Iapetos knew he had no choice. He leaped back two steps, then swung his sword. It bit deep into the god's shoulder, nearly severing his arm; then he planted his foot on the god's great chest and propelled him backwards so that he fell into the gods behind him.

Prometheus followed his lead, shoving back the intruders when he could, poking and stabbing with his dagger. Weapons appeared in the crowd-knives and bludgeons, and a few swords. The younger Titan had to dodge to one side to avoid an unexpected sword thrust; then he threw himself on his assailant and wrestled the weapon from him. Now, with both father and son armed with swords and unafraid to use them, the crowd broke, retreating through the doorway to the atrium.

Together they swung the door shut. It was constructed from huge oak planks and quite sturdy, but it would not withstand a concerted effort to gain entry. The elder Titan pushed closed a pitifully inadequate bolt, then began to wedge chairs and small, tripod tables against the door.

Metis picked up the dagger Prometheus had dropped and tucked it into her belt; then she turned to Iapetos. "Don't waste too much time there," she told him. She gestured toward the broad windows on the opposite side of the room. Through them a score of enemies could enter.

"Can we escape that way, before they think to come by that route?" the Titan asked.

Metis shook her head. "There are at least two dozen gods milling about below, some of them with spears. We'd be spotted before we could spread our wings."

Now Themis came up to them. She pointed toward a doorway on the other side of the room. "That room has no windows or other entrances. We can barricade ourselves inside."

"Yes, that's our best hope," Iapetos agreed. "Quickly, everyone get within. Eventually the other Titans will put a stop to this outrage."

Just then something large and heavy struck the door to the atrium with a resounding crash. The great oak planks groaned beneath the impact.

Metis and Themis ran to Zeus. A goddess took hold of each of his arms and together they pulled him toward the other room.

A second blow struck the oak door, and the wood began to crack. From outside they could hear coarse shouts and the sounds of running feet. The noises indicated that other gods were joining those already within the palace.

Iapetos stopped Prometheus, who was about to follow the others. "We'll need to barricade the door to the rear room. Drag whatever you can back there--anything heavy. You too, Menoitios--don't just stand there."

Menoitios reluctantly abandoned his seat and began to assist his father and brother. Within two minutes the room had been stripped of everything that might be of use to them, except those objects which were already serving to barricade the door to the atrium.

A third blow snapped the small bolt, and now the gods outside began to shove inward, slowly pushing back the chairs and tables that held the door closed. Just as it swung completely open and the intruders poured into the room, Iapetos closed the door to the rear room and slid into place its equally frail latch. Then he and Prometheus began frantically to pile furniture against the barrier.

When they had finished, Iapetos turned and looked at his companions. Two small lamps burned within the room. Metis and Themis stood huddled close beside their husband, one on either side of him, and the two lesser goddesses cowered nearby. Menoitios leaned with his shoulder against a wall, viewing the entire affair with an air of almost amused disinterest.

"We've made a disastrous mistake," Iapetos announced a moment later. "If they can breach the outer door, they can breach this one just as easily. And now we have no place to retreat."

"Why don't you give them what they want? Undoubtedly he deserves whatever they plan to do to him," Menoitios observed.

"Because they have no more right to violate the laws than Zeus does," Iapetos answered gruffly. "If such conduct is allowed, we'll have no society."

Menoitios listened attentively, as if considering his father's argument, then said dryly, "I see. It's wrong for them to act on their own, without benefit of law and a proper trial before the Council of Titans. Were you or I to do the same, that would be wrong too, wouldn't it? We too would be taking the law into our own hands if we... abducted him... or forced him to do something against his will." The boy grinned sarcastically.

Iapetos caught his son's implication and glared at him.

"We've no time for this. Arm yourself and fight beside us, or stay out of the way and be quiet."

Already fists were pounding against the second door, and they could hear

the cursing and shouting of the gods just beyond the barrier. Soon the intruders maneuvered their makeshift ram into place and the second door began to shake beneath its onslaught.

Metis had been standing beside Zeus, but now she drew from her belt the dagger she had acquired earlier and started to join Iapetos and Prometheus before the door. Zeus grabbed her hand and held her back.

"Don't," he said quietly. "You'll only get yourself hurt. You can't stop all of this."

She tried to argue with him, but instead of listening he crossed the room to stand just behind Iapetos. He had to touch the Titan's arm to get his attention.

"Please put down your sword, Iapetos, before anyone else is hurt. I've let this go on too long already. There are too many of them. Open the door. I'd rather take my chances and try to escape them by myself than-

The Titan's enormous arm swept out and struck the boy across the chest, sending him sprawling backwards toward Metis. "Sit down," he commanded. "I'm making the decisions here."

A second blow shook the door, the bolt shattered, and then the intruders threw themselves against the barrier and forced it inward with their weight. Iapetos sprang forward, swinging his sword at the hands that gripped the door's edge. Severed fingers sprayed the room. Now Iapetos positioned himself so that he could strike through the narrow opening. Again and again his sword fell. Outside the wounded deities retreated, screaming in pain, but others immediately took their places. The door swung inexorably inward.

At last it stood open. Iapetos charged into the mob with Prometheus just behind him. Chopping and hacking as they advanced, they pushed the crowd back. Swords bit into shoulders and chests. All about them enemies slipped shrieking to the floor, honey-thick, translucent ichor streaming from ghastly wounds. But soon other gods appeared, using chairs and tables from the atrium to shield themselves. They surged into the room, until Iapetos and Prometheus found themselves wallowing impotently in a sea of divinity, unable to move or strike.

Someone ripped the sword from Iapetos's hands. Someone tripped him and someone else struck him heavily on the head with a piece of wood. He went down to one knee. Prometheus was nearby, similarly beset. As the father watched, a knife plunged into the son's neck from behind. Then a second blow struck Iapetos, and a third. The Titan slipped to the floor, unconscious.

Metis and Themis struggled to keep the mob from Zeus, but were pushed aside. A half-dozen gods dragged Zeus back to the larger room.

"Here's a rope," someone cried. "Tie him up."

"Why bother? Punish him here."

"Wait!" Helios shouted loudly. He had let the others do most of the fighting for him, but came forward now. "We must punish him properly, in a manner suited to his crimes. Tie him tightly-so tightly that he can't escape by changing his shape. Then we'll decide on the most suitable penalty."

"Beat him." someone cried.

"Flay him," another suggested.

"Cut off his head!"

"It isn't his head that needs to be cut off," someone else observed.

"Cut off everything!"

By now Metis had emerged from the rear room. She pushed and shoved her way through the crowd, until at last she stood beside her husband.

"Stop!" she cried, tears streaming down her face. "You don't know what you're doing. Stop this immediately!"

Themis had followed her and began to plead with the gods who held Zeus.

"Quiet!" Helios cried loudly. "We must have quiet." Slowly the room grew silent, waiting for him to speak again.

"We must make an example of this scoundrel, so that no one else ever dares to commit such crimes on Mount Othrys. We must--"

"Are you mad?" another voice cried-shrill and commanding. It came from the doorway leading to the atrium, and the assemblage turned to look in that direction. In the doorway stood the Titaness Rhea, outrage clearly evident on her face. The tumult within the palace had caught her attention as she was returning home, and she had followed the noises to investigate. Slowly she advanced into the room, eyes blazing.

"Have you taken leave of your senses? How dare you lay your hands upon this boy-upon the son of Kronos?'"

A gasp went through the assemblage. They backed away from her as she came forward, opening a path to Zeus.

"The son of Kronos?" someone cried. "You must be mistaken, Lady Rhea. This is the son of Amaltheia-some fatherless whelp from the broad earth."

"It is you who are mistaken! This boy is as much a full-blooded Titan as any of you. He is my son and Kronos's- and destined to be your king. You fools! Free him this instant-then bow before your future king and beg his forgiveness!"

Pallas and Perses were standing on either side of the tightly bound youth, holding him. As Helios watched, their hands fell away.

"Untie him immediately," Rhea commanded.

Pallas and Perses hesitated, then began to fumble with the knots that held the boy.

Helios glanced through the crowd at Menoitios, who stood off to one side, grinning and quietly enjoying everything that was happening. Metis followed Helios's gaze and saw the younger god make a small gesture in reply, as if to say, "Go on-don't worry about that!" The gesture told her what she should have suspected before, that Menoitios and Helios were united in working against Zeus and that Menoitios must have been instrumental in bringing about these disastrous events.

"No," Helios cried, moving to stand between Rhea and her son. "Lady Rhea must not know the magnitude of the crimes this god has committed. If all his other crimes were not enough, this very night he has wed two goddesses, flouting all propriety and law. Are we to tolerate such

behavior?"

"Whatever he has done," Rhea said, "so be it. Destiny is afoot tonight! Don't you understand? This is no ordinary god. Your laws do not apply to such a deity. Do you think you can bind the mammoth with the same twine that holds the hare? Listen to me, all you foolish gods. This is my son, who will one day rule the world-touch him at your own peril!"

Some of the gods were visibly cowed by her speech, but not Helios. "If this is the son of Kronos," he said, addressing the crowd, "do we want such a ruler? We've already had a taste of him. Is he what we want in a king? Will we give up our wives and daughters and lovers-to a king who won't be bound by the same laws we must obey?"

The crowd began to mutter. "He's right," someone called out. "I won't have such a king!"

"We know his crimes-don't let him escape his just punishment," Helios cried.

"But who will hold the sword? Which of us will dare administer the punishment-and be held responsible?" someone else asked.

"All of us," Helios said. "Drag him to the sheer northern cliffs and let him drop. The rocks will rip him into a thousand pieces before he crashes to the earth below."

"Yes-to the cliffs!"

"You're all mad," Rhea cried. "If you touch him again-"

But it was too late. The mob surrounded Zeus and lifted him up. Metis rushed to his side, drawing her knife to defend him, but she was quickly disarmed. They carried him across the room toward the atrium.

Thirty

As they carried Zeus away, Metis tried again to rush to him. One of the gods pushed her roughly aside, and she slipped to the floor. For a few moments she lay there, crying, then slowly rose to her feet and looked about the devastated chamber. Everything had been overturned and cast about. Food and broken furniture lay scattered all around. The goddesses who had served as witnesses at Themis's wedding were nowhere in sight; probably they had fled at their first opportunity, Iapetos had recovered consciousness by now and was cradling Prometheus in his arms, attempting to staunch the flow of ichor from the wide wound his son had received in the back of his neck.

Metis went to them and assisted the Titan in knotting a crude bandage.

"I must take him home and tend to him properly," Iapetos said. "Tonight will be answered for tomorrow."

Prometheus stirred, opening his eyes and looking up at Metis. "Whatever happens, you are still his wife-as long as you wish to be," he managed to say, then lapsed back into unconsciousness.

Iapetos lifted his son in his arms and carried him out of the chamber. Now Metis found herself completely alone.

What could she do? On all Mount Othrys was there anyone she could call on to help Zeus? It might be possible to convince the other members of the Council to take action-but could they possibly act in time? The sad

truth was that the boy had very few friends in all the world. Aside from the goddesses he had so successfully romanced, there was only . . . Then she remembered. If they had not traveled too far since she had seen them earlier today, Zeus's deliverance lay almost at hand, in the foothills below Mount Othrys.

Metis's lips spread into a triumphant grin as she rushed out into the atrium and then down the broad steps that led from the Palace of Themis. The savage Kouretes, the royal bodyguard of the future King of the Gods! They would give pause to Helios and his rabble-if she could find and bring them back in time.

The moon had risen, nearly full and quite bright, and she gave thanks for the assistance it promised. By the time she reached the path outside she had already grown wings. A moment later she was airborne, skimming above the great groves and forests of the mountaintop as she headed toward the cliffs from which she had seen Amaltheia and the Kouretes that afternoon.

Luck was on her side. She had barely reached the cliffs and begun her descent toward the many valleys below when she spotted what could only be a number of campfires. They were clumped close together in what looked like a wide clearing near the base of the mountain, and she altered her course and glided down toward them.

Arching her wings at the last moment to slow her rapid descent, she landed near the middle of their encampment. At her sudden intrusion, a hundred shaven-headed warriors sprang up around her, brandishing their spears. Fearless eyes blazed at her from ferocious, chalk-streaked faces.

Metis drew back a step to avoid being pierced by a spear thrust. Before she could speak another figure appeared-a goat of divine proportion. The creature came directly toward her, bleating in an almost inquisitive manner.

"I am Metis, daughter of the Titan Okeanos," she announced, addressing Amaltheia. "I come from Mount Othrys to tell you that Zeus is there-and in terrible danger. Soon many gods will drag him to the edge of the mountaintop and throw him over the side, so that as he falls he'll be ripped apart on the jagged rocks. He needs your help now more than ever."

Amaltheia bleated again, insistently. When Metis only stared at her, one of the warriors stepped forward-an enormous god, tall and powerfully muscled. He spoke gruffly, though there seemed to be no antagonism toward Metis in his tone.

"Lady Amaltheia asks that you show us which of the many peaks you mean." He spoke slowly, as though speech were not a familiar task for him.

Metis turned and pointed, then answered the warrior's questions until he was satisfied that he knew exactly where she meant.

"But we're wasting time," she continued. "I'll lead you there. We must hurry. Please come quickly."

Amaltheia's ears were up-perked as she listened to everything the Okeanid said. Now she barked an order, and instantly all around them naked warriors scurried to gather and pack their supplies.

"No," Metis said. "I'm afraid you don't understand. There's no time for all of that. You must grow wings immediately and follow me, or it'll be too late."

Amaltheia stared at her for a long moment, then slowly shook her shaggy head. The warrior looked sad.

"Neither we nor Lady Amaltheia are capable of doing what you wish."

"You can't fly?" Metis demanded incredulously. Many of the lesser gods and goddesses were unable to form wings or accomplish any sort of metamorphosis, but she had not considered that possibility. "Then there's no hope." She fought back tears of frustration. "I must go back. I must find some way to help him."

"We will follow you," the warrior said. "We can scale the mountain. All the Kouretes are great climbers."

"If you like," Metis said quietly, "but it'll make no difference. You can't possibly reach the summit in time. The way is far too steep on this side and it would take the better part of a day to go by a different route."

"We have ropes," the warrior said.

The Okeanid continued to shake her head. "You'll have to travel far to the west before you find a way that's passable. I must go now. Come when you can." Her voice grew suddenly hard. "You can help me punish them!"

She left them, flying faster than she had ever flown before.

Meanwhile, Themis and Rhea had followed the torchlit procession of outraged deities. Pleading and weeping, they ran along beside Zeus, who was trussed from head to foot with tight ropes and carried horizontally on the shoulders of a half-dozen gods. Again and again they tried to pull him free, but each time were roughly pushed away.

The mob had proceeded only a short distance when Zeus's captors began to hear noises from nearby—loud shouts and gruff laughter. As they rounded a thick grove of cypress trees they met a second procession, nearly as large as their own. At its head, tightly bound from head to foot and lying supine upon the shoulders of the gods who bore him, rode a divine figure of imposing ugliness, with the ears, horns and legs of a goat. The two groups halted, eyeing each other curiously.

"Make way," the leader of the second group called out. "We've captured a dangerous criminal and are on our way to punish him."

"Oh?" Helios replied, staring at their unlikely captive, who was clearly visible in the combined light of the moon and the bright torches that surrounded him. "And who is your great criminal?"

"An intruder," the other leader replied, "a villain and a scoundrel. In a single evening he's committed more outrages than any of us can recall since the Titans came to Mount Othrys. Now move aside and let us pass."

Helios shook his head. "We have an even greater criminal, whose outrages certainly outnumber those of your misshapen god, if only because he's been among us longer and so had more opportunities for mischief. You step aside, and let us get on our way. The upstart Zeus has enjoyed the hospitality of the Titans far too long already."

"Zeus?" a surprised voice cried from within the second group. "Is that who you have? Let us help punish him."

"Where are you taking him?" the leader asked.

"To the northern cliffs where he can fall all the way to the earth below. This god came to Mount Othrys by himself, but we're going to assist his departure. We're going to push him over the edge and let him slide and bounce his way to the bottom."

The leader of the second group turned toward his followers. "That's a good idea-much better than burying this freak of a god with rocks in the great pit. Let's take him there too, and treat him to the same speedy departure. After a lesson like that, it'll be a long time before either of them troubles us again. There's plenty of room along those cliffs, more than enough for all of us. Clear the path. Let our friends pass by and lead the way. This should be most interesting!"

Helios grinned, then signaled the gods- nearest him to hoist up Zeus again and continue their march. The second group waited for them to pass, then fell into line behind them.

As she flew back up the mountainside, Metis strove to find some way she could aid Zeus. She was heartened to discover the northern cliffs still deserted and sped on past them, having decided to plead Zeus's cause before Hyperion and the other members of the Council. As she flew she spotted the torches of the mob in the distance; she was pleased to see that they were progressing very slowly, but dismayed to find that the rowdy group had nearly doubled in size.

In no mood to stand on ceremony, she swooped down and alighted upon a high balcony of the Palace of Hyperion. She knew where the Titan's personal quarters were and went directly there. She found Hyperion in bed and shook him awake.

The Titan listened tolerantly as she launched into her frantic explanation. "Please, my lord," she concluded, "come quickly. You can prevent your son from making a terrible mistake. He'll listen to you."

The Titan shook his head. "Helios may indeed be in the wrong. He often acts in a headstrong manner. Such things should indeed be brought before the Council and not acted on by individuals, but he and virtually every other god on Mount Othrys has had more than adequate provocation. I can't say I blame my son or anyone else-except this upstart Zeus. No, Metis, I won't help you. The boy's only receiving what he's amply earned."

Stifling a sob, Metis left the room and returned to the balcony. Where could she look for help now? Hyperion was the only Titan who might have dissuaded the mob, she decided. They had paid no attention to Iapetos, or Rhea, or Themis, and certainly would be equally unmoved by anything Crius or Koios might say. If only Zeus had more friends on Mount Othrys . . .

Another idea struck her-wild and improbable. But any possibility was better than simply giving up. Zeus did have friends here, many friends-all female. If she could gather enough of those goddesses and get them to the cliffs before it was too late, they might be able to save him. After all, those goddesses were the daughters, wives, and mothers of the very gods who were intent upon casting Zeus from the mountaintop. And if feminine pleas failed, they might even be able to wrest the youth free by superior numbers.

She flew directly to the Palace of Atlas, entered and made her way toward the apartments shared by the Pleiades. If she could convince all seven of Atlas's daughters to help her, she thought, she could then send

each of them off to spread the word and recruit other goddesses to hasten to Zeus's aid.

Within a few minutes she had them gathered together and once again launched into her recital. Before she could finish, the beautiful maidens-down even to little Maia, the youngest-began rushing about excitedly, dressing and preparing to venture out.

"We mustn't forget our mother," Alkyone pointed out. "She's as fond of Zeus as we are."

The maiden rushed out, returning a minute later with the hastily dressed Pleione. The older goddess wiped sleep from her eyes and smiled at Metis.

"What's this all about?" she asked. "Is Zeus really in trouble? Just a little while ago the Muses told me that you and he were married tonight. Is that true?"

Utter silence fell upon the room. Each of the Pleiades turned and stared at Metis.

"Y-yes, it's true. The story's long and complicated, but-"

"He's married?" Asterope demanded. "You're his wife?"

"Yes," Metis said. "I really don't have time to explain right now."

Merope was seated in a chair and had been in the process of tying on her sandals. "Well, isn't that sweet?" she cried, and instead threw the sandal across the room at Metis. "The no-good trifler! Instead of the cliffs, they ought to drop him off the edge of the world. And if you want to jump after him, I won't complain!"

The sandal missed Metis by half an inch. "I don't understand," she said. Frowning, glaring faces surrounded her. "I thought you were his friends."

"I think you'd better go now," their mother said quietly.

Stunned by their unexpected reproach, Metis fled from the palace. If the Pleiades responded in such a way to her pleas for help, could she hope for any greater success with the other goddesses of Mount Othrys? The question was moot now, anyway; she could spare no more time. If Zeus were to be saved, she would have to do it herself, somehow. She took to the air again and flew rapidly toward the cliffs.

While Metis had pursued her futile attempt to find allies among the Titans, the unruly caravan had wound its way slowly through the hills and forests of the mountaintop. Twice Helios had lost his way on the narrow, seldom traveled trails and been forced to backtrack, with much attendant grumbling and many catcalls, so that Metis reached the wide clearing near the cliffs almost at the same time the procession did. The gods who had been carrying Zeus dumped him unceremoniously upon the ground, and those who transported Pan followed their example a short distance away.

Metis rushed to Zeus and knelt beside him, seeking to assure herself that he had not been brutalized during the journey. As soon as she could make her way through the crowd, Themis joined them, kneeling on the other side. The distraught goddesses kissed and caressed the handsome boy, and wept over him. Within moments, though, Metis regained control of herself and began to slip her hands beneath his body, her strong,

nimble fingers searching for the knots that held him. Themis soon realized what she was attempting and tried to assist.

Rhea had found Helios and again began to harangue him. When he could stand no more, he had two gods gently but firmly remove her to the far side of the clearing.

"You gods over there," he called, "gather kindling and build a great bonfire for us. Some of our torches are already about to burn out, and others will soon follow."

"Why?" someone demanded. "Let's toss them over and be done with it."

During the long journey, Helios had had time to think, and his thoughts had left him decidedly uncomfortable. He detested the Council of Titans and was happy for any opportunity to flout it; but what they were doing tonight was a good bit more serious than dropping snide comments or even picking fights with the sons of Council members. Even ignoring Zeus's supposed destiny to become the new King of the Gods--and he was sure the other Titans would view that in the same dim light he did--the boy was the son of Rhea, a Titaness everyone revered. Without doubt there would be a great deal said about this affair tomorrow, and for many days and weeks to come.

The more he considered, the more convinced he became that he must do something to lessen his own too-public culpability; at the same time, he had already committed himself so fully that he could not back away now without exposing himself to charges of cowardice.

It was one thing to ignore the authority of the Council; after all, nearly everyone agreed that it was a hopelessly flawed institution, mired in indecision. To act swiftly, to administer decisive justice, would be admirable in the eyes of most of the gods, and might even advance Helios's general scheme of discrediting the Council. But to ignore the laws and traditions of the Titans was a very different matter, and a very dangerous one. He might well find himself in a situation from which even his influential father could not extricate him. He had to be able to argue the justice of his actions tonight, and the only way he could do that convincingly was to provide Zeus and this outlandish other god with a trial of some sort--however swift or biased.

"Quiet!!" Helios yelled out above the voices of the gods who had gathered around him. "Do you wish to be branded hot headed villains tomorrow? We must give these rogues a fair trial--and then throw them to the rocks below.'"

Another roar of disapproval met him, and for a moment he thought the mob might push him over the cliff's edge before turning on Zeus and Pan. He kept talking, raising his voice higher and higher to be heard, and soon the other gods began to listen and finally to see the wisdom of his suggestion.

While this was happening, Menoitios stood near Zeus. Becoming suspicious of Metis and Themis, he walked nearer. "What are you doing?" he demanded. Then he cried, "Come help me. They're trying to free him."

Four gods joined him and pulled the goddesses away, taking them to the other side of the clearing. They stood together there, finding an unexpected comfort in each other's company. Rhea was near them, vigorously scolding the gods who restrained her.

The bonfire was soon blazing, and Helios set the first trial in motion.

Witness after witness came forward to accuse the shaggy god and related his outrageous conduct in pursuit of the goddesses of Mount Othrys. When the last witness had finished, Helios had Pan brought near the fire and asked him to answer the charges. The god was still tightly bound and stood stiffly upright as he looked across the sea of angry faces that surrounded him. At last, unable to find anything to say, he shrugged and grinned foolishly. They carried him back and threw him down again near the edge of the cliff.

"What do you say, gods of Mount Othrys?" Helios demanded. "Is this god guilty or innocent? Does he deserve the punishment for which we've brought him here?"

"Guilty!" the throng cried. "Punish him!"

Now it was Zeus's turn. God after god stepped forward into the light of the bonfire to catalog the shameless misconduct of the deity; the recitals were lengthy and emotional, since most had numerous incidents with which to illustrate the righteousness of their wrath. Outraged husbands and fathers followed outraged brothers and cast-off lovers. Whole families had been seduced and defiled. As the magnitude of the youth's transgressions became clear, the anger of the mob grew, and Helios had difficulty keeping them from falling upon him immediately.

"Have you anything to say for yourself?" Helios asked Zeus when the last witness had finished. He addressed the youth where he lay, not daring to have him brought within easy reach of the gods milling about the fire.

"Nothing I say will change your minds," he answered. "Therefore I will say nothing."

"Then we have only to make our decisions. What do you say, gods of--"

"I will speak!" Metis cried, worming her way through the crowd. A cry of dissatisfaction greeted her, but she came forward bravely and immediately launched into a plea for mercy based upon Zeus's youth and inexperience. Even as she spoke, she knew her arguments were completely inadequate. Were he some other god, she would have been every bit as shocked and outraged by his conduct as they were. But she was hopelessly in love with him, and so she tried to make them see Zeus as she saw him, tried to make them understand that they were looking at only one unfortunate aspect of a very special god, who would in time outgrow his youthful excesses.

The crowd hooted her down, and at last she desisted and returned to her place near the edge of the clearing. Themis and Rhea wanted to speak too, but the crowd refused to listen.

"Gods of Mount Othrys," Helios called out, "what is your decision? How shall we answer this scourge that has fallen upon us? Is the god called Zeus guilty of these crimes? Shall he be punished?"

The roar of affirmation was deafening.

Helios gestured toward the captives. "Lift them up," he commanded. "Stand them at the very brink, that they may look down at what awaits them."

Gods hastened to accomplish the task. Metis came forward again, insinuating her way through the crowd. She had no idea what she would do, but was determined to do something.

Now Zeus stood with his toes at the very edge of the precipice. Below him lay an almost vertical wall of rock, dropping away nearly six

thousand feet to the earth below. Much of its surface was concealed in deep shadows, but the area he could see was sufficiently terrifying. Jagged points of rock protruded at irregular intervals from the otherwise sheer surface.

"Prepare to push them over," Helios commanded.

"No!" Metis cried, pulling free of the crowd and rushing toward Zeus. Menoitios was standing nearby, and he leaped forward to intercept the Okeanid. He threw his arms around her and pulled her away, laughing in her ear.

"Do you remember how Zeus made himself look like me, so that Kronos would think I was his enemy? This is his reward. Do you remember what you did to my pet? The saber-tooth, the one you made fall to its death? This is your reward, too!"

"Ready?" Helios called, raising his voice so that he could be heard over the tumult.

Before the gods who held Zeus and Pan could answer, another voice cried out-from the periphery of the crowd. It was a cry of pain, and as Metis looked toward the sound she saw gods scattering in every direction. There was another sound-was it bellowing? Gods were screaming now and trampling each other in their effort to get out of the way. Through the crowd came a large, dark figure with two long, spiraling horns that flashed white in the moonlight. A god shrieked as one of the horns impaled him, and then he was tossed over the beast's head, toward the edge of the cliff.

The figure paused near the middle of the clearing and Metis could see it clearly-it was Amaltheia, the goat goddess. But how could she have reached the mountaintop so quickly, without being able to fly? It was impossible, and yet here she was.

Now Amaltheia saw Zeus and Pan, and with another cry, which Metis interpreted as a sort of enraged bleat, she charged the gods who held them. They, too, fled, joining those who had regrouped a short distance away. Menoitios released Metis and she rushed toward Zeus. Amaltheia spun toward her, as if about to attack; but the goat goddess recognized the Okeanid and instead turned her attention back toward the cursing, shouting gods now moving to surround her.

Zeus was so thoroughly trussed that he could not walk by himself. Metis edged him away from the precipice. At his insistence she did the same for Pan; then she returned to Zeus and began frantically to try to untie him. There were many knots, all soundly tied, and her fingers soon ached from the effort.

Weapons flashed in the crowd, and gods stepped forward with spears, jabbing or throwing them at Amaltheia. The goat goddess seemed oblivious to their attacks. Again and again she charged at those who dared step into the clearing. The spears struck harmlessly against her impenetrable pelt and fell away.

By now Helios had recovered from his surprise. "Are we going to let this creature defeat us?" he demanded of those nearest him. "It's only a big goat. If we act together, we can grab it by the horns and render it harmless. Then we can throw it over the edge."

No one seemed anxious to undertake such a mission. At last he saw Pallas and Perses and went to them. He explained what he needed them to do, and

the three stepped into the clearing and cautiously approached the gigantic creature. They spread out around her, and when she turned to attack Pallas, Helios leaped to her side and took hold of her horns.

He was very strong, among the largest and most powerful of the Titans, and when he yanked backward the goat goddess's front legs came free of the ground. He lifted her until she stood on only her rear legs, then started to walk her toward the edge of the precipice.

"Ha!" the Titan shouted. "This is how it's done, my friends. Here's another for the cliff tonight-!"

He grunted. His wide grin froze on his face, then dissolved into a look of incredulity. His hands slipped from the goddess's horns, releasing her, and moved instead to grip the thick shaft that protruded from his side. He turned to look in the direction from which the spear must have come-saw a ferocious, naked, shaven-headed warrior running toward him out of the forest-and fell forward on his face.

Pallas and Perses drew their swords and started toward Helios's attacker, who was already recovering his spear from the fallen Titan; but now a second savage appeared, his chalk-streaked body gleaming in the light of the bonfire. As he advanced he beat his spear against his shield in an unnerving staccato.

Pallas went down with a spear through his chest, and Perses backed away so rapidly that he stumbled and fell.

"Who are these gods?" Menoitios asked, looking helplessly around him. "Why are they here?"

Someone pointed, and Menoitios saw a third savage advancing, then a fourth and fifth. The sound of spears beating against shields had become very loud, and now he realized that its volume foretold still more warriors making their way through the dark forest that grew near the cliff.

Menoitios looked at Zeus. Metis had almost finished untying him. He waited until no one was in a position to interfere, then darted toward them across the clearing. Metis looked up as he was almost upon them.

"You aren't going to spite me like this!" he shouted.

She pushed Zeus aside just as Menoitios's outstretched hands were about to thrust him over the edge of the precipice. Somehow Menoitios caught himself at the last moment, avoiding the fall he had intended for Zeus. He swung quickly around toward them again, his face burning with indignant anger.

Metis stepped toward him. "Oh, yes, I am," she said pleasantly, giving him her sweetest smile. Placing both hands firmly on his chest, she pushed. His arms flailed frantically in a hopeless attempt to catch his balance, and then he tumbled over backwards. His screams ended abruptly when he hit the first rocky projection.

A score of savage warriors had positioned themselves between Zeus and his enemies, and now those warriors began their irresistible advance, beating slowly upon their shields. The gods of Mount Othrys had rallied near one side of the clearing, and with loud, angry shouts they ran toward their adversaries, throwing their spears and clubs and wielding their swords. Their missiles fell harmlessly against the shields. One after another they met the glistening bronze spear points of the Kouretes and slipped shrieking to the rocky ground, until those who

remained turned and fled back through the forest toward the safety of their homes.

By now Metis had finished untying Zeus, and Themis came to stand on the other side of him. Rhea rushed to her son, kissing and hugging him. Amaltheia soon joined them, rubbing her head against the youth's leg and gratefully receiving his affectionate caresses.

"I don't understand," Metis said. "Neither Amaltheia nor the Kouretes can fly. It would take a very long time to scale Mount Othrys and they only learned of your plight a little while ago, just after you were taken from the Palace of Themis. How could they possibly get here so quickly?"

Zeus laughed. "You forget that Amaltheia is a goat-a divine one, but still a goat. Climbing is second nature to her. The side of the mountain is very steep here, but probably not so bad farther down-for a goat."

"But what about the Kouretes?"

"I'll find out." He left them and went to speak with one of the warriors, returning a minute later.

"They had ropes with them and tied some together, with many knots for handholds to make climbing easier. Amaltheia carried one end up as far as it would reach and secured it to a rock. When the Kouretes all ascended to that point, she carried the rope up again, so that they went straight up the mountainside, reaching the top quite rapidly."

"We must go soon," Rhea told them. "The gods may return in force."

Zeus was again standing near the edge of the cliff, with an arm around each of his wives. Metis glanced across at her rival, who was clinging to him and resting her cheek against his shoulder. A twinge of jealousy made the Okeanid stiffen beneath his affectionate caress.

Just then a shout caused them to look toward the bonfire. The Kouretes had formed a circle about it and were beginning a savage dance.

Zeus grinned boyishly. "It must be their battle dance-or victory dance, I'm not sure which. I used to hide nearby and watch them when I was a child." He fell silent for some moments, still watching the warriors, his mind far away. "Do you know what I've always wanted to do?"

Metis and Themis looked up at him, but he left the question unanswered. Instead he slipped his arms from about the beautiful goddesses and went toward the bonfire. Pan had been freed by now, and as they watched he, too, crept forward. Soon the two youths were leaping and prancing with boyish abandon among the savage warriors.

Metis smiled despite herself, then sighed and shook her head. She looked at Themis, then back at her new husband.

Oh, well, she thought philosophically; if nothing else, at least from now on life was going to be ... unusual.