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Have Faces* A
MYTH
RETOLD

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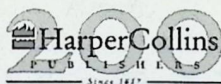
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To Joy Davidman

PART ONE

I

I am old now and have not much to fear from the anger of gods. I have no husband nor child, nor hardly a friend, through whom they can hurt me. My body, this lean car-
rion that still has to be washed and fed and have clothes hung about it daily with so many changes, they may kill as soon as they please. The succession is provided for. My crown passes to my nephew.

Being, for all these reasons, free from fear, I will write in this book what no one who has happiness would dare to write. I will accuse the gods, especially the god who lives on the Grey Mountain. That is, I will tell all he has done to me from the very beginning, as if I were making my complaint of him before a judge. But there is no judge between gods and men, and the god of the mountain will not answer me. Terrors and plagues are not an answer. I write in Greek as my old master taught it to me. It may some day happen that a traveller from the Greeklands will again lodge in this palace and read the book. Then he will talk of it among the Greeks, where there is great freedom of speech even about the gods themselves. Perhaps their

wise men will know whether my complaint is right or whether the god could have defended himself if he had made an answer.

I was Orual the eldest daughter of Trom, King of Glome. The city of Glome stands on the left hand of the river Shennit to a traveller who is coming up from the south-east, not more than a day's journey above Ringal, which is the last town southward that belongs to the land of Glome. The city is built about as far back from the river as a woman can walk in the third of an hour, for the Shennit overflows her banks in the spring. In summer there was then dry mud on each side of it, and reeds, and plenty of waterfowl. About as far beyond the ford of the Shennit as our city is on this side of it you come to the holy house of Ungit. And beyond the house of Ungit (going all the time east and north) you come quickly to the foothills of the Grey Mountain. The god of the Grey Mountain, who hates me, is the son of Ungit. He does not, however, live in the house of Ungit, but Ungit sits there alone. In the furthest recess of her house where she sits it is so dark that you cannot see her well, but in summer enough light may come down from the smoke-holes in the roof to show her a little. She is a black stone without head or hands or face, and a very strong goddess. My old master, whom we called the Fox, said she was the same

whom the Greeks call Aphrodite; but I write all the names of people and places in our own language.

I will begin my writing with the day my mother died and they cut off my hair, as the custom is. The Fox—but he was not with us then—said it is a custom we learned from the Greeks. Batta, the nurse, shorn me and my sister Redival outside the palace at the foot of the garden which runs steeply up the hill behind. Redival was my sister, three years younger than I, and we two were still the only children. While Batta was using the shears many other of the slave women were standing round, from time to time wailing for the Queen's death and beating their breasts; but in between they were eating nuts and joking. As the shears snipped and Redival's curls fell off, the slaves said, 'Oh, what a pity! All the gold gone!' They had not said anything like that while I was being shorn. But what I remember best is the coolness of my head and the hot sun on the back of my neck when we were building mud houses, Redival and I, all that summer afternoon.

Our nurse Batta was a big-boned, fair-haired, hard-handed woman whom my father had bought from traders who got her further north. When we plagued her she would say, 'Only wait till your father brings home a new queen to be your stepmother. It'll be changed times for

you then. You'll have hard cheese instead of honey-cakes then and skim milk instead of red wine. Wait and see.'

As things fell out, we got something else before we got a stepmother. There was a bitter frost that day. Redival and I were booted (we mostly went barefoot or sandalled) and trying to slide in the yard which is at the back of the oldest part of the palace, where the walls are wooden. There was ice enough all the way from the byre-door to the big dunghill, what with frozen spills of milk and puddles and the stale of the beasts, but too rough for sliding. And out comes Batta, with the cold reddening her nose, calling out, 'Quick, quick! Ah, you filthies! Come and be cleaned and then to the King. You'll see who's waiting for you there. My word! This'll be a change for you.'

'Is it the Stepmother?' said Redival.

'Oh, worse than that, worse than that; you'll see,' said Batta, polishing Redival's face with the end of her apron. 'Lots of whippings for the pair of you, lots of ear-pullings, lots of hard work.' Then we were led off and over to the new parts of the palace, where it is built of painted brick, and there were guards in their armour, and skins and heads of animals hung up on the walls. In the Pillar Room our father was standing by the hearth, and opposite him there were three men in travelling dress whom we knew well enough—traders who came

to Glome three times a year. They were just packing up their scales, so we knew they had been paid for something, and one was putting up a fetter, so we knew they must have sold our father a slave. There was a short, thick-set man standing before them, and we knew this must be the man they had sold, for you could still see the sore places on his legs where the irons had been. But he did not look like any other slave we had ever known. He was very bright-eyed, and whatever of his hair and beard was not grey was reddish.

'Now, Greekling,' said my father to this man, 'I trust to beget a prince one of these days and I have a mind to see him brought up in all the wisdom of your people. Meanwhile practise on *them*.' (He pointed at us children.) 'If a man can teach a girl, he can teach anything.' Then, just before he sent us away, he said, 'Especially the elder. See if you can make her wise; it's about all she'll ever be good for.' I didn't understand that, but I knew it was like things I had heard people say of me ever since I could remember.

I loved the Fox, as my father called him, better than anyone I had yet known. You would have thought that a man who had been free in the Greeklands, and then been taken in war and sold far away among the barbarians, would be downcast. And so he was sometimes, possibly more often

than I, in my childishness, guessed. But I never heard him complain; and I never heard him boast (as all the other foreign slaves did) about the great man he had been in his own country. He had all sorts of sayings to cheer himself up with: 'No man can be an exile if he remembers that all the world is one city', and 'Everything is as good or bad as our opinion makes it'. But I think what really kept him cheerful was his inquisitiveness. I never knew such a man for questions. He wanted to know everything about our country and language and ancestors and gods, and even our plants and flowers.

That was how I came to tell him all about Ungit, about the girls who are kept in her house, and the presents that brides have to make to her, and how we sometimes, in a bad year, have to cut someone's throat and pour the blood over her. He shuddered when I said that and muttered something under his breath; but a moment later he said, 'Yes, she is undoubtedly Aphrodite, though more like the Babylonian than the Greek. But come, I'll tell you a tale of our Aphrodite.'

Then he deepened and lilted his voice and told how their Aphrodite once fell in love with the prince Anchises while he kept his father's sheep on the slopes of a mountain called Ida. And as she came down the grassy slopes towards his shepherd's hut, lions and lynxes and bears and

all sorts of beasts came about her fawning like dogs, and all went from her again in pairs to the delights of love. But she dimmed her glory and made herself like a mortal woman and came to Anchises and beguiled him and they went up together into his bed. I think the Fox had meant to end here, but the song now had him in its grip, and he went on to tell what followed; how Anchises woke from sleep and saw Aphrodite standing in the door of the hut, not now like a mortal but with the glory. So he knew he had lain with a goddess, and he covered his eyes and shrieked, 'Kill me at once.'

'Not that this ever really happened,' the Fox said in haste. 'It's only lies of poets, lies of poets, child. Not in accordance with nature.' But he had said enough to let me see that if the goddess was more beautiful in Greece than in Glome she was equally terrible in each.

It was always like that with the Fox; he was ashamed of loving poetry ('All folly, child') and I had to work much at my reading and writing and what he called philosophy in order to get a poem out of him. But thus, little by little, he taught me many. *Virtue, sought by man with travail and toil* was the one he praised most, but I was never deceived by that. The real lilt came into his voice and the real brightness into his eyes when we were off into *Take me to the apple-laden land* or

*The Moon's gone down, but
Alone I lie.*

He always sang that one very tenderly and as if he pitied me for something. He liked me better than Redival, who hated study and mocked and plagued him and set the other slaves on to play tricks on him.

We worked most often (in summer) on the little grass plot behind the pear trees, and it was there one day that the King found us. We all stood up, of course, two children and a slave with our eyes on the ground and our hands crossed on our breasts. The King smacked the Fox heartily on the back and said, 'Courage, Fox. There'll be a prince for you to work on yet, please the gods. And thank them too, Fox, for it can't often have fallen to the lot of a mere Greekling to rule the grandson of so great a king as my father-in-law that is to be. Not that you'll know or care more about it than an ass. You're all pedlars and hucksters down in the Greeklands, eh?'

'Are not all men of one blood, Master?' said the Fox.

'Of one blood?' said the King with a stare and a great bull-laugh. 'I'd be sorry to think so.'

Thus in the end it was the King himself and not Batta who first told us that the Stepmother was really at hand. My father had made a great match. He was to have the

third daughter of the King of Caphad, who is the biggest king in all our part of the world. (I know now why Caphad wanted an alliance with so poor a kingdom as we are, and I have wondered how my father did not see that his father-in-law must already be a sinking man. The marriage itself was a proof of it.)

It cannot have been many weeks before the marriage took place, but in my memory the preparations seem to have lasted for almost a year. All the brick work round the great gate was painted scarlet, and there were new hangings for the Pillar Room, and a great new royal bed which cost the King far more than he was wise to give. It was made of an eastern wood which was said to have such virtue that four of every five children begotten in such a bed would be male. ('All folly, child,' said the Fox, 'these things come about by natural causes.') And as the day drew nearer there was nothing but driving in of beasts and slaughtering of beasts—the whole courtyard reeked with the skins of them—and baking and brewing. But we children had not much time to wander from room to room and stare and hinder, for the King suddenly took it into his head that Redival and I and twelve other girls, daughters of nobles, were to sing the bridal hymn. And nothing would do him but a Greek hymn, which was a thing no other neighbouring king could have provided.

'But, Master —' said the Fox, almost with tears in his eyes. 'Teach 'em, Fox, teach 'em,' roared my father. 'What's the use of my spending good food and drink on your Greek belly if I'm not to get a Greek song out of you on my wedding night? What's that? No one's asking you to teach them Greek. Of course they won't understand what they're singing, but they can make the noises. See to it, or your back'll be redder than ever your beard was.'

It was a crazy scheme, and the Fox said afterwards that the teaching of that hymn to us barbarians was what greyed the last red hair. 'I was a fox,' he said, 'now I am a badger.'

When we had made some progress in our task the King brought the Priest of Ungit in to hear us. I had a fear of that Priest which was quite different from my fear of my father. I think that what frightened me (in those early days) was the holiness of the smell that hung about him—a temple-smell of blood (mostly pigeons' blood, but he had sacrificed men too) and burnt fat and singed hair and wine and stale incense. It is the Ungit smell. Perhaps I was afraid of his clothes too; all the skins they were made of, and the dried bladders, and the great mask shaped like a bird's head which hung on his chest. It looked as if there were a bird growing out of his body.

He did not understand a word of the hymn, nor the

music either, but he asked, 'Are the young women to be veiled or unveiled?'

'Need you ask?' said the King with one of his great laughs, jerking his thumb in my direction. 'Do you think I want my queen frightened out of her senses? Veils of course. And good thick veils too.' One of the other girls tittered, and I think that was the first time I clearly understood that I am ugly.

This made me more afraid of the Stepmother than ever. I thought she would be crueller to me than to Redival because of my ugliness. It wasn't only what Batta had said that frightened me; I had heard of stepmothers in plenty of stories. And when the night came and we were all in the pillared porch, nearly dazzled with the torches and trying hard to sing our hymn as the Fox had taught us to—and he kept on frowning and smiling and nodding at us while we sang, and once he held up his hands in horror—pictures of things that had been done to girls in the stories were dancing in my mind. Then came the shouts from outside, and more torches, and next moment they were lifting the bride out of the chariot. She was as thickly veiled as we, and all I could see was that she was very small; it was as if they were lifting a child. That didn't ease my fears; 'the little are the spiteful,' our proverb says. Then (still singing) we got her into the bridal chamber and took off her veil.

I know now that the face I saw was beautiful, but I did not think of that then. All I saw was that she was frightened, more frightened than I—indeed terrified. It made me see my father as he must have looked to her, a moment since, when she had her first sight of him standing to greet her in the porch. His was not a brow, a mouth, a girth, a stance, or a voice to quiet a girl's fear.

We took off layer after layer of her finery, making her yet smaller, and left the shivering, white body with its staring eyes in the King's bed, and filed out. We had sung very badly.

II

I can say very little about my father's second wife, for she did not live till the end of her first year in Glome. She was with child as soon as anyone could reasonably look for it, and the King was in high spirits and hardly ever ran across the Fox without saying something about the prince who was to be born. He made great sacrifices to Ungit every month after that. How it was between him and the Queen I do not know; except that once, after messengers had come from Caphad, I heard the King say to her, 'It begins to look, girl, as if I had driven my sheep to a bad market. I learn now that your father has lost two towns—no, three, though he tries to mince the matter. I would thank him to have told me he was sinking before he persuaded me to embark in the same bottom.' (I was leaning my head on my window-sill to dry my hair after the bath, and they were walking in the garden.) However that might be, it is certain that she was very homesick, and I think our winter was too hard for her southern body. She was soon pale and thin. I learned that I had nothing to fear from her. She was at first more afraid of me; after that, very lov-

ing in her timid way, and more like a sister than a step-mother.

Of course no one in the house went to bed on the night of the birth, for that, they say, will make the child refuse to wake into the world. We all sat in the great hall between the Pillar Room and the Bedchamber, in a red glare of birth-torches. The flames swayed and guttered terribly, for all doors must be open; the shutting of a door might shut up the mother's womb. In the middle of the hall burned a great fire. Every hour the Priest of Ungit walked round it nine times and threw in the proper things. The King sat in his chair and never moved all night, not even his head. I was sitting next to the Fox.

'Grandfather,' I whispered to him, 'I am terribly afraid.'

'We must learn, child, not to fear anything that nature brings,' he whispered back.

I must have slept after that, for the next thing I knew was the sound of women wailing and beating the breast as I had heard them do it the day my mother died. Everything had changed while I slept. I was shivering with cold. The fire had sunk low, the King's chair was empty, the door of the Bedchamber was at last shut, and the terrible sounds from within it had stopped. There must have been some sacrifice too, for there was a smell of slaughtering, and blood on the floor, and the Priest was cleaning his holy

knife. I was all in a daze from my sleep, for I started up with the wildest idea; I would go and see the Queen. The Fox was after me long before I reached the door of the Bedchamber. 'Daughter, daughter,' he was saying. 'Not now. Are you mad? The King—'

At that moment the door was flung open and out came my father. His face shocked me full awake, for he was in his pale rage. I knew that in his red rage he would storm and threaten, and little might come of it, but when he was pale he was deadly. 'Wine,' he said, not very loud; and that too was a bad sign. The other slaves pushed forward a boy who was rather a favourite, as slaves do when they are afraid. The child, white as his master and in all his finery (my father dressed the younger slaves very fine) came running with the flagon and the royal cup, slipped in the blood, reeled, and dropped both. Quick as thought, my father whipped out his dagger and stabbed him in the side. The boy dropped dead in the blood and wine, and the fall of his body sent the flagon rolling over and over. It made a great noise in that silence; I hadn't thought till then that the floor of the hall was so uneven. (I have re-paved it since.)

My father stared for a moment at his own dagger; stupidly, it seemed. Then he went very gently up to the Priest.

‘What have you to say for Ungit now?’ he asked, still in that low voice. ‘You had better recover what she owes me. When are you going to pay me for my good cattle?’ Then, after a pause, ‘Tell me, prophet, what would happen if I hammered Ungit into powder and tied you between the hammers and the stone?’

But the Priest was not in the least afraid of the King.

‘Ungit hears, King, even at this moment,’ he said. ‘And Ungit will remember. You have already said enough to call down doom upon all your descendants.’

‘Descendants,’ said the King. ‘You talk of descendants,’ still very quiet, but now he was shaking. The ice of his rage would break any moment. The body of the dead boy caught his eye. ‘Who did that?’ he asked. Then he saw the Fox and me. All the blood rushed into his face, and now at last the voice came roaring out of his chest loud enough to lift the roof.

‘Girls, girls, girls!’ he bellowed. ‘And now one girl more. Is there no end to it? Is there a plague of girls in heaven that the gods send me this flood of them? You—you—’ He caught me by the hair, shook me to and fro, and flung me from him so that I fell in a heap. There are times when even a child knows better than to cry. When the blackness passed and I could see again, he was shaking the Fox by his throat.

'Here's an old babbler who has eaten my bread long enough,' he said. 'It would have paid me better to buy a dog as things turn out. But I'll feed you in idleness no longer. Some of you take him to the mines tomorrow. There might be a week's work in his old bones even now.'

Again there was dead silence in the hall. Suddenly the King flung up his hands, stamped, and cried, 'Faces, faces, faces! What are you all gaping at? It'd make a man mad. Be off! Away! Out of my sight, the whole pack of you!'

We were out of the hall as quick as the doorways would let us.

The Fox and I went out of the little door by the herb-garden on the east. It was nearly daylight now and there was a small rain beginning.

'Grandfather,' said I, sobbing, 'you must fly at once. This moment, before they come to take you to the mines.'

He shook his head. 'I'm too old to run far,' he said. 'And you know what the King does to runaway slaves.'

'But the mines, the mines! Look, I'll come with you. If we're caught I'll say I made you come. We shall be almost out of Glome once we're over *that*.' I pointed to the ridge of the Grey Mountain, now dark with a white daybreak behind it, seen through the slanting rain.

'That is foolishness, daughter,' said he, petting me like a small child. 'They would think I was stealing you to sell.'

No; I must fly further. And help me you shall. Down by the river; you know the little plant with the purple spots on its stalk. It's the roots of it I need.'

'The poison?'

'Why, yes. (Child, child, don't cry so.) Have I not told you often that to depart from life of a man's own will when there's good reason is one of the things that are according to nature? We are to look on life as—'

'They say that those who go that way lie wallowing in filth—down there in the land of the dead.'

'Hush, hush. Are you also still a barbarian? At death we are resolved into our elements. Shall I accept birth and cavil at—'

'Oh, I know, I know. But, grandfather, do you really in your heart believe nothing of what is said about the gods and Those Below? But you do, you do. You are trembling.'

'That's my disgrace. The body is shaking. I needn't let it shake the god within me. Have I not already carried this body too long if it makes such a fool of me at the end? But we are wasting time.'

'Listen!' said I. 'What's that?' For I was in a state to be scared by every sound.

'Horses,' said the Fox, peering through the quick-hedge with his eyes screwed up to see against the rain. 'They are

coming to the great door. Messengers from Phars, by the look of them. And that will not sweeten the King's mood either. Will you—ah, Zeus, it is already too late.' For there was a call from within doors, 'The Fox, the Fox, the Fox to the King.'

'As well go as be dragged,' said the Fox. 'Farewell, daughter,' and he kissed me, Greek fashion, on the eyes and the head. But I went in with him. I had an idea I would face the King; though whether I meant to beseech him or curse him or kill him I hardly knew. But as we came to the Pillar Room we saw many strangers within, and the King shouted through the open door, 'Here, Fox, I've work for you.' Then he saw me and said, 'And you, curd-face, be off to the women's quarters and don't come here to sour the morning drink for the men.'

I do not know that I have ever (to speak of things merely mortal) been in such dread as I was for the rest of that day—dread that feels as if there were an empty place between your belly and your chest. I didn't know whether I dared be comforted by the King's last words or not, for they sounded as if his anger had passed, but it might blaze out again. Moreover, I had known him do a cruel thing not in anger but in a kind of murderous joke, or because he remembered he had sworn to do it when he was angry. He had sent old house-slaves to the mines before. And I

could not be alone with my terror, for now comes Batta to shear my head and Redival's again as they had been shorn when my mother died, and to make a great tale (clicking her tongue) of how the Queen was dead in childbed, which I had known ever since I heard the mourning, and how she had borne a daughter alive. I sat for the shearing and thought that, if the Fox must die in the mines, it was very fit I should offer my hair. Lank and dull and little it lay on the floor beside Redival's rings of gold.

In the evening the Fox came and told me that there was no more talk of the mines—for the present. A thing that had often irked me had now been our salvation. More and more, of late, the King had taken the Fox away from us girls to work for him in the Pillar Room; he had begun to find that the Fox could calculate and read and write letters (at first only in Greek but now in the speech of our parts too) and give advice better than any man in Glome. This very day the Fox had taught him to drive a better bargain with the King of Phars than he would ever have thought of for himself. The Fox was a true Greek; where my father could give only a Yes or a No to some neighbouring king or dangerous noble, he could pare the Yes to the very quick and sweeten the No till it went down like wine. He could make your weak enemy believe that you were his best friend and make your strong enemy believe you were

twice as strong as you really were. He was far too useful to be sent to the mines.

They burnt the dead Queen on the third day, and my father named the child Istra. 'It is a good name,' said the Fox, 'a very good name. And you know enough now to tell me what it would be in Greek.'

'It would be Psyche, grandfather,' said I.

New-born children were no rarity in the palace; the place sprawled with the slaves' babies and my father's bastards. Sometimes my father would say, 'Lecherous rascals! Anyone'd think this was Ungit's house, not mine,' and threaten to drown a dozen of them like blind puppies. But in his heart he thought the better of a manslave if he could get half the maids in the place with child, especially if they bore boys. (The girls, unless they took his own fancy, were mostly sold when they were ripe; some were given to the house of Ungit.) Nevertheless, because I had (a little) loved the Queen, I went to see Psyche that very evening as soon as the Fox had set my mind at rest. And so, in one hour, I passed out of the worst anguish I had yet suffered into the beginning of all my joys.

The child was very big, not a wearish little thing as you might have expected from her mother's stature, and very fair of skin. You would have thought she made bright all the corner of the room in which she lay. She slept (tiny

was the sound of her breathing). But there never was a child like Psyche for quietness in her cradle days. As I gazed at her the Fox came in on tiptoes and looked over my shoulder. 'Now by all the gods,' he whispered, 'old fool that I am, I could almost believe that there really is divine blood in your family. Helen herself, new-hatched, must have looked so.'

Batta had put her to nurse with a red-haired woman who was sullen and (like Batta herself) too fond of the wine-jar. I soon had the child out of their hands. I got for her nurse a freewoman, a peasant's wife, as honest and wholesome as I could find, and after that both were in my own chamber day and night. Batta was only too pleased to have her work done for her, and the King knew and cared nothing about it. The Fox said to me, 'Don't wear yourself out, daughter, with too much toil, even if the child is as beautiful as a goddess.' But I laughed in his face. I think I laughed more in those days than in all my life before. Toil? I lost more sleep looking on Psyche for the joy of it than in any other way. And I laughed because she was always laughing. She laughed before the third month. She knew me for certain (though the Fox said not) before the second.

This was the beginning of my best times. The Fox's love for the child was wonderful; I guessed that long before, when he was free, he must have had a daughter of

his own. He was like a true grandfather now. And it was now always we three—the Fox, and Psyche, and I—alone together. Redival had always hated our lessons and, but for the fear of the King, would never have come near the Fox. Now, it seemed, the King had put all his three daughters out of his mind, and Redival had her own way. She was growing tall, her breasts rounding, her long legs getting their shape. She promised to have beauty enough, but not like Psyche's.

Of Psyche's beauty—at every age the beauty proper to that age—there is only this to be said, that there were no two opinions about it, from man or woman, once she had been seen. It was beauty that did not astonish you till afterwards when you had gone out of sight of her and reflected on it. While she was with you, you were not astonished. It seemed the most natural thing in the world. As the Fox delighted to say, she was 'according to nature'; what every woman, or even every thing, ought to have been and meant to be, but had missed by some trip of chance. Indeed, when you looked at her you believed, for a moment, that they had not missed it. She made beauty all round her. When she trod on mud, the mud was beautiful; when she ran in the rain, the rain was silver. When she picked up a toad—she had the strangest and, I thought, unchanciest love for all manner of brutes—the toad became beautiful.

The years, doubtless, went round then as now, but in my memory it seems to have been all springs and summers. I think the almonds and the cherries blossomed earlier in those years and the blossoms lasted longer; how they hung on in such winds I don't know, for I see the boughs always rocking and dancing against blue-and-white skies, and their shadows flowing water-like over all the hills and valleys of Psyche's body. I wanted to be a wife so that I could have been her real mother. I wanted to be a boy so that she could be in love with me. I wanted her to be my full sister instead of my half sister. I wanted her to be a slave so that I could set her free and make her rich.

The Fox was so trusted by now that when my father did not need him he was allowed to take us anywhere, even miles from the palace. We were often out all day in summer on the hill-top to the south-west, looking down on all Glome and across to the Grey Mountain. We stared our eyes out on that jagged ridge till we knew every tooth and notch of it, for none of us had ever gone there or seen what was on the other side. Psyche, almost from the beginning (for she was a very quick, thinking child), was half in love with the Mountain. She made herself stories about it. 'When I'm big,' she said, 'I will be a great, great queen, married to the greatest king of all, and he will build me a castle of gold and amber up there on the very top.'

The Fox clapped his hands and sang, 'Prettier than Andromeda, prettier than Helen, prettier than Aphrodite herself.'

'Speak words of better omen, grandfather,' I said, though I knew he would scold and mock me for saying it. For at his words, though on that summer day the rocks were too hot to touch, it was as if a soft, cold hand had been laid on my left side, and I shivered.

'*Babai!*' said the Fox. 'It is your words that are ill omened. The Divine Nature is not like that. It has no envy.'

But whatever he said, I knew it is not good to talk that way about Ungit.

III

It was Redival who ended the good time. She had always been feather-headed and now grew wanton, and what must she do but stand kissing and whispering love-talk with a young officer of the guard (one Tarin) right under Batta's window an hour after midnight. Batta had slept off her wine in the earlier part of the night and was now wakeful. Being a busybody and tattler in grain, she went off straight and woke the King, who cursed her roundly but believed her. He was up, and had a few armed men with him, and was out into the garden and surprised the lovers before they knew that anything was amiss. The whole house was raised by the noise of it. The King had the barber to make a eunuch of Tarin there and then (as soon as he was healed, they sold him down at Ringal). The boy's screams had hardly sunk to a whimper before the King turned on the Fox and me, and made us to blame for the whole thing. Why had the Fox not looked to his pupil? Why had I not looked to my sister? The end of it was a strict command that we were never to let her out of our sight. 'Go where you will and do what you will,' said my

father. 'But the salt bitch must be with you. I tell you, Fox, if she loses her maidenhead before I find her a husband, you'll yell louder for it than she. Look to your hide. And you, goblin daughter, do what you're good for, you'd best. Name of Ungit! if you with that face can't frighten the men away, it's a wonder.'

Redival was utterly cowed by the King's anger and obeyed him. She was always with us. And that soon cooled any love she had for Psyche or me. She yawned and she quarrelled and she mocked. Psyche, who was a child so merry, so truthful, so obedient that in her (the Fox said) Virtue herself had put on a human form, could do no right in Redival's eyes. One day Redival hit her. Then I hardly knew myself again till I found that I was astride of Redival, she on the ground with her face a lather of blood, and my hands about her throat. It was the Fox who pulled me off and, in the end, some kind of peace was made between us.

Thus all the comfort we three had had was destroyed when Redival joined us. And after that, little by little, one by one, came the first knocks of the hammer that finally destroyed us all.

That year after I fought Redival was the first of the bad harvests. That same year my father tried to marry himself (as the Fox told me) into two royal houses among the