

Laurence Goldstein

MEETING THE GRAIAE

Perseus speaks

. . . to press my case. Hermes had said
“Use eloquence, then violence.”

All three were swan-shaped, ugly
as the spinster Gorgons they guarded,
passing their eye each to each
for quick peeks at the baffling world.
They looked easy to outwit, aunts
who trade anything for words of love.

I began with customary epithets:

“Sisters grey from your birth,
grey shadows of the elder world,
give me, not your eye or tooth,
not these remnants you share
in the holy spirit of community,
give me your vital secret. Now.

I need the address of the Nymphs
who keep the winged sandals, the cap
of invisibility, and the bag in which . . .
some enemy’s head will bide its time.”

They seemed to know my type: the hero
who spares them a tiny portion
of his immortality; still, they demurred
so I had to get rough, and I can.

I seized their one viscous eye
and threatened to stomp it, fling it
deep into the Tritonian lake, or eat it.
Eerie screams you can’t imagine, and then
the information. I stuck the jelly
into the nearest crone’s empty socket
and resumed my fabulous destiny.

And you know the rest. I slew Medusa,
stabbed to death the sea-fiend
who would have made Andromeda
its meal (she was delicious, then).
I should write my own epic deeds;
instead, past my lurid prime
I ponder the meaning of it all.
The supreme stuff of Zeus is in me
yet I feel infirm as the Graiae,
as if I were part of *their* story,
a chance adventurer, bold
but nothing extra-ordinary,
nothing they couldn't serenely outlive.
On visits to great Olympus, I'm sure
those witches entertain the gods
with *my* story, the task-oriented hunk
unworthy of a wandering eye,
one of many interruptions of their
endlessly fascinating lives, a speck
of mortal time, like a gaudy sunset.
The gods have heard it all before,
so often they lip-synch every phrase—
no text is sacred to those know-it-alls.
Yet they applaud; the story's on *me*,
boy wonder, latest has-been . . .

Yes, I do have other duties.
Send me a transcript of this interview.
I'll add it to my archive,
large enough almost for a room
in this inherited castle, grand,
richly appointed, though the kids
rarely visit, and never write.

for John Barth