

THREE VARIATIONS

(i) Look, Medusa!

Medusa living on a remote shore
troubled no one: fish swam, birds flew, and the sea
did not turn to glass. All was as before.
A few broken statues lay untidily
on the lonely beach, but other than these
there was nothing wrong with that peaceful scene.
And so, when the hero Perseus came to seize
the Gorgon's head, he thought he might have been
mistaken. He watched for awhile, but she turned
nothing to stone. The waves roared as waves will,
till at last the hidden hero burned
to be seen by her whom he had come to kill.
"Look, Medusa, I am Perseus!" he cried,
thus gaining recognition before he died.

(ii) The Pond

Birds, wind, insects — the world roared, but he
heard nothing, saw nothing; the leaves overhead
were blurred for him. He did not pause. Instead
he stumbled to the pond where his own beauty
was mirrored so plainly for him to see.
There he stood, and gazed at himself. He read
every feature of that beautiful face. He said,
"Who could be worthy of one such as he?"
The nymph who followed agreed quietly.
"If only I could be the water in this pond."
The nymph echoed and was soon transformed.
But, since his bright reflection did not grow dim,
he didn't notice. He drank from the pond so thirstily
that he swallowed himself and her with him.

(iii) Eurydice

Death was rather sudden, but pleasant enough.
He came. I rose, gliding smoothly through
the green wood. The going was easy, not rough;
I had no hesitation about what to do.
Death made it simple: he led, I followed.
There was no question, he knew that I would.
And I didn't mind at all that he chose the road;
I was his forever, that was understood.
And so, when my lover came, brave and confident,
and won me from Death by means of his charm,
what could I do, but prove obedient?
He led. I followed till some slight alarm
made him look back, and then I fled, since he
was not Death's master, but a slave, like me.

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