

Now, as the dark sky begins to lighten, Esmeralda sees the face of Sachette on the other side of the window. The witch's thin fingers hold Esmeralda's arm tightly and her eyes are full of hate for the gypsy. The girl falls against the wall. She knows that Sachette will never help her. She knows that this is the day of her death.

"What have I done to you?" she asks the old woman.

"You know your crime. I had a pretty little child, my Agnès," she begins. "Your people—the gypsies—stole her from me. They stole her and ate her. That's what you did to me."

"But maybe I wasn't born then," Esmeralda answers.

"Oh, yes. You were one of them. They came fifteen years ago to my little house in Rheims. Agnès was the most beautiful baby in the world. You took her and you took my life. Poor little child! Now I'll watch you hang."

There is more light in the sky now and Esmeralda hears the soldiers coming toward the Place de Grève.

"I've done nothing to you. Please don't hold me here. I don't want to die," says the girl.

"My Agnès didn't want to die!" screams Sachette. "Give me back my child and you can live. Look, this little shoe is the only thing that the gypsies left me."

"Show me that shoe!" cries Esmeralda. With her free hand she pulls the little bag from around her neck. She takes out a baby's shoe and a small note. It says, *When you find the other shoe, your mother will open her arms to you.*

Sachette's eyes grow wide. She looks at the shoe and reads the note. "My daughter! My daughter!" she cries.

"Mother!" answers Esmeralda.

The witch opens the door and pulls the girl into her dark prison. Then she kisses Esmeralda's hands and holds her in her arms. The tears of fifteen years run down her face, but now they are tears of happiness.

"My child, my daughter," she repeats again and again. "How

beautiful you are! We'll leave here and return to Rheims. We'll be happy again. I'll love you and protect you."

"Mother!" says Esmeralda. "I'm so happy!"

Suddenly, the two women hear the sound of horses. Esmeralda throws her arms around Sachette and cries, "Save me, Mother! They're coming for me. They want to kill me."

"They can't take you from me. I've only had you for a minute," cries Sachette. She looks out the window. "They're almost here. I'll talk to them. Hide in that corner. I'll say that you've escaped."

Esmeralda hurries to the dark corner and Sachette covers her with an old sheet and a big stone. Then she hears the voice of Father Claude Frolo as he passes her door. "This way, Officer Phoebus de Châteaupers!" the priest shouts.

Esmeralda hears this name and tries to move.

"Don't move!" orders Sachette.

A group of soldiers on horseback now arrive. Sachette stands in the door, so nobody can look inside.

"Old woman," says an officer, "we're looking for a young gypsy. The priest says you have her."

"I don't know anything about a gypsy. I hate all of them," says Sachette.

"He told us, 'The girl is with the witch,'" says one of the soldiers.

"She was here," Sachette says quickly, "but she bit me and ran away."

"Which way did she go?" asks the officer.

"Toward Mouton Street, I think," Sachette says.

"We've been on Mouton Street and we didn't see a gypsy girl."

"Maybe she went toward the river," says Sachette.

"Old woman, you're lying! Let's take her to the torturer and get the true story," shouts one of the soldiers.

"Yes, take me! Quick! Let's leave now," says the witch. She wants to guide the soldiers away from Esmeralda.

"She really is crazy," says one of the soldiers.