

Perseus & Medusa

1 There was once a king in Greece who was foretold by a prophet that his own grandson would one day kill him. The king was determined to make sure this wouldn't happen. In order to outsmart the gods, he placed his beautiful daughter and her baby son in a large chest and threw them into the sea. He thought that by doing this, he would never see them again and would not have to live in fear of his grandson.

2 Little did he know that the waves would be kind to his daughter and her child. The chest floated lightly upon the water and at last came to rest upon a sandy beach of an island. Here a fisherman found the chest along with the princess and her child, Perseus. He took them to the ruler of that land and they were taken care of. They lived with the ruler for many years and during this time, Perseus grew to be a strong and active young man.

3 The ruler was kind to Perseus and his mother for the longest time, but eventually the ruler became annoyed at Perseus's mother and made her a slave. Since Perseus had become such a strong young man, the ruler began to fear that he would try to avenge his mother for her suffering. So the king sent Perseus far away on a dangerous journey to the very ends of the earth.

4 At the very ends of the earth lived a terrible woman called Medusa. The hair of Medusa was a mass of living snakes. Medusa was so hideous to behold that just to look upon her would turn a person to stone. Perseus was commanded to bring home the head of this woman, but he did not know where to find her.

5 Perseus's mother had told him stories about Medusa and a time when an entire ship of men had arrived on an island where Medusa's cave was located. Medusa's hate for men was so great that even when they outnumbered her, she refused to back down. Everyday Medusa would think to herself of new and creative ways to get unsuspecting men to look her in



the eyes. She would woo them by saying in a soft, sweet voice, “Look at me.” The men could not resist her sweet voice and they would look into her eyes and turn immediately to stone. It brought her so much joy to stare them down. She would stand and watch them turn to stone, one-by-one.

6 Perseus pondered this while he was wandering aimlessly, until the god Hermes and the goddess Athena came to his aid. They gave him courage for his dreadful task. They told Perseus that he must have a pair of winged sandals and a helmet, which would make him invisible so that he could complete his task.

7 The wonderful gifts were in the cave of some sea-maidens. The only people who knew where the maidens could be found were three old women. These dreadful women shared one eye and one tooth among themselves. They would take turns passing around the eye and tooth to one another. Hermes led Perseus to these women and then left him. At first Perseus could not get them to tell him what he wished to learn. This all changed when he stole their only eye as they were passing it from one to another. After Perseus outsmarted the women they were more than happy to tell him what he wanted.

8 When at last Perseus reached the cave of the maidens, he easily took the sandals and the helmet from them. Putting these on, he soon reached Medusa’s cave and found her lying asleep on the ground, but he did not dare try to approach her. Perseus knew that if he challenged Medusa face to face, he would turn to stone. The goddess Athena came to help Perseus out and gave him a bright shield to use as a mirror. Holding this before him, Perseus walked backwards, not looking upon Medusa, but only upon her reflection in the shield. When he was near enough, he struck off her head with a sharp sword, given to him by Hermes. While still not looking at Medusa’s head, he threw it into a bag and hurried away.

9 As he journeyed back from the ends of the earth towards his home, Perseus experienced many adventures and he found Medusa’s head was a wonderful weapon. It was better than any sword or spear. If he wished to harm his enemies, he only had to take Medusa’s head from his bag and hold it before their eyes. They were at once turned to stone.

