

The Quest of Medusa's Head

Introduction

Perseus had been sent on a journey to capture the gorgon, Medusa's head. This trophy was to be exchanged for his mother's freedom from having to marry the evil king. Anyone looking at the face of the gorgon would be turned to stone so the challenge was dangerous and difficult. But, Perseus had help. The Maidens of the West had given him a sword, a shield, a magic pouch and a cap of invisibility to protect him. Once Perseus had completed his mission and with Medusa's head safely in his magic pouch, he headed for home to save his mother.

The Great Sea Beast

As Perseus made his way over the vast oceans, he came across a strange sight. He saw a beautiful girl chained to a rock by the seashore and far away a huge sea beast was swimming towards her to devour her. Quick as blink, he flew down and spoke to her.

Perseus removed his cap and stood by her on the rock. When the girl saw him with his long hair and wonderful eyes, she thought him the handsomest young man in the world.

"Oh, save me! Save me!" she cried as she reached out her arms towards him.

Perseus could see the sea monster coming closer so he took the Gorgon's head out of his magic pouch, held it up high and the inevitable happened.

Then, Perseus slipped the Gorgon's head back into the pouch and hastened to speak with the young girl. She told him that her name was Andromeda and that she was the daughter of the king and queen of that land. Andromeda told Perseus that she was being sacrificed to the sea monster as a punishment for her mother's vanity. As the pair talked, the king, queen and many people of the land came to see what was happening. As a reward for saving his daughter, the king agreed to let his daughter marry Perseus. Forgetting his quest, Perseus stayed happily with Andromeda and her family for many months.



The Timely Rescue

But, Perseus had not totally forgotten his mother. So, one fine summer day, he and Andromeda sailed in a beautiful ship to his own home. The ship came to land at the very spot where the wooden chest had been cast so many years before and Perseus and his bride walked through the fields towards the town.

Now, the wicked king of that land had never ceased trying to persuade Danae to become his wife but she would not listen to him. The more he pleaded and threatened, the more she disliked him. At last, when he found that she could not be made to marry him, he declared that he would kill her.

So, as Perseus and Andromeda came into the town, they were greeted with the scene of his mother fleeing to the safety of the altar of Zeus with the king following, intent on killing her. When Perseus saw the king rushing like a madman after his mother, he again took the head of Medusa from his magic pouch.

"I promised to bring you a present and here it is!" he cried.

The king saw it and was turned into stone, just as he stood, with his sword uplifted and a terrible look of anger on his face.

With his mother safe, Perseus decided that they should all return home to Argos. So the three of them set sail the following day.



The Deadly Quoit

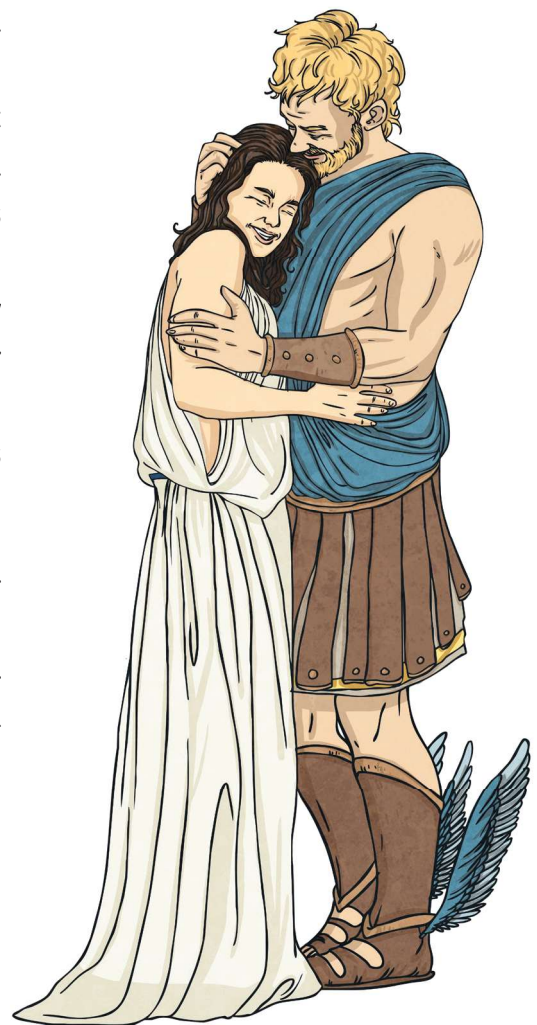
When Danae's old father, the king of Argos, heard that a strange ship was coming over the sea with his daughter and her son on board, he was in great distress; for he remembered what the Pythia had foretold about his death. So, without waiting to see the vessel, he left his palace in great haste and fled.

"My daughter's son cannot kill me if I keep out of his way," he said.

But, Perseus had no wish to harm him and was distraught when he heard what the old man had done. With his grandfather gone, the people of the kingdom wanted Perseus to rule over them, which he did willingly in memory of the man he had never known.

A while later, Perseus was taking part in challenges and games with neighbouring kingdoms. He threw a heavy quoit a great deal further than any had been thrown before. It landed in the crowd of spectators and struck a stranger who was standing there. As Perseus ran to help him, he saw that he was dead. The man was none other than Danae's father, the old king of Argos. He had fled from his kingdom to save his life, and in doing so had only met his death.

Perseus was overcome with grief and had no wish to continue as ruler of the kingdom, so he and Andromeda left the country and lived happily in the neighbouring kingdom of Mycenae for many years.



Questions

1. What is the purpose of the introduction before the next part of the story begins?

2. In The Great Sea Beast, locate and copy a phrase which describes how quickly Perseus moved.

3. What does the phrase 'the inevitable happened' mean?

4. Why do you think Perseus forgot his quest after he met Andromeda?

5. Why do you think Perseus and his bride continued on the quest sometime later?

6. Use the information in the text to help you work out the meaning of the following words. Write synonyms for each word that would make sense if they were used in the story.

Word used in the story	Synonym to replace it
intent	
uplifted	
foretold	
vessel	
distraught	
quoit	
struck	
overcome	

7. Why do you think the altar of Zeus was a safe place for Perseus' mother?

8. If the King of Argos thought that Perseus wanted to kill him, should he have run away or stayed to face him? Give reasons for your answer.

Do you think the King of Argos deserved to die?

10. Write your own version of what happened to Perseus next in the adventure.

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