

Perseus and Medusa

There was once a young man called Perseus whose mother was very beautiful. His father had died when he was a baby, so Perseus and his mother were all alone in the world.

The evil king of the land was desperate to marry Perseus's mother. But every time he asked her, she said no. She did not like his angry, mean face. Perseus did his best to protect his mother from the king's anger. So the evil king plotted to get rid of Perseus.

One day the king called Perseus to his court. "I will leave your mother in peace," he said, "but only on one condition".

"What condition is that?" asked Perseus.

The king chuckled.

"Bring me the head of the monster Medusa on a plate."

"Your wish is my command!" said Perseus, trying not to tremble, and off he stamped.

Medusa and her sisters were scary monsters called Gorgons. Instead of hair, they had snakes sprouting out all over their heads. Anyone who looked at Medusa's face was instantly turned to stone! Perseus was brave, but not foolish. He knew he would need help to defeat her. So he went to see a wise man.

"How can I help you, Perseus?" asked the wise man.

"I've promised to take the evil king the head of Medusa on a plate!" replied Perseus.

"You are a silly boy!" gasped the wise man.

"Help me, I beg you," pleaded Perseus.

The wise man gave Perseus a shield. It was so shiny that Perseus could see his own reflection in it.

"When you are about to kill the Gorgon," he said, "do not look directly at her. Use this as a mirror."

Then he gave Perseus a sword with a crystal blade to cut off Medusa's head.

"Thank you." Said Perseus and he turned to leave but...

"Not so fast," called the wise man. "Medusa is a very dangerous monster. These weapons alone are not enough. You will also need a helmet that will make you invisible, a pair of sandals with wings so you can fly, and a silver bag to put Medusa's head in."

"But where will I find them?" asked Perseus.

"You must go and see the three witches. They live in a hut at the bottom of Mount Atlas. They only have one eye between them, so it shouldn't be too hard to creep up on them."

Perseus thanked his friend once again and set off to find the three witches.

"I hear footsteps," said one of the witches as Perseus approached her cave.

Her sister took the eye.

"I can't see anything," she said.

"Let me have a look," whined the other sister. But just as the second witch was handing over the eye, Perseus leapt forward and grabbed it from her hand.

"No need to snatch," cried the witch, thinking it was one of the sisters.

"It wasn't me," cried the first witch.

"Then who was it?" the three witches cried together.

"Me!" shouted Perseus boldly. "And I'll only hand it back if you give me what I want."

"Well, what do you want?" they demanded all three together, showing their broken teeth.

"Sandals with wings, a magic helmet and a silver bag. I know you have them in here somewhere," answered Perseus.

The witches knew they had no choice. They felt their way around the hut and found what Perseus wanted.

Now the young hero had everything he needed to kill Medusa. He gave the witches back the eye and headed for the Gorgon's lair. As his winged sandals carried him through the sky, Perseus could feel his heart beating very quickly. He knew he was had to be very brave if he was going to save his mother from the evil king.

He put on the helmet to make himself invisible, gritted his teeth, and flew into the cave. He had never seen such a ghastly sight - the snakes on Medusa's head were hissing loudly. Her sisters wailed noisily on either side of her.

Perseus knew he has no time to lose. He picked up his crystal sword and dived at Medusa. She heard him coming and looked up. The snakes hissed louder and louder and her sisters screamed with fright - how had someone got into their cave without them noticing?

Perseus grabbed a handful of snakes, and taking care not to look directly at Medusa, raised his sword. With one blow, Medusa's head flew off her neck. Quickly, Perseus put it in his silver bag and swooped up into the air. Medusa's sisters chased after him. They still couldn't see him, but they could follow the smell of Medusa's blood. Perseus heard them shrieking and wailing behind him.

"Ha!" he thought to himself. "They'll never catch me with these winged sandals," and soon he has left Medusa's sisters far behind.

As soon as he was home, Perseus went straight to the evil king. The king was very surprised to see him alive and well.

"Have you bought me what I want?" he asked, smiling to himself. "Ha! Of course you haven't. Now I will marry your mother after all."

"Stop right there," called Perseus and suddenly he pulled Medusa's head out of the silver bag for the cruel king to see.

"Do you like it?" he asked.

But, of course, the king did not reply. He had looked at the face of Medusa and was turned instantly to stone!

