

CORINTH

A Play in Three Parts

CAST: Jason, of the Argonauts
Young Jason
Pelias, King of Iolchus
Acastus, son of Pelias
Aeetes, King of Colchis
A Guard of King Aeetes
Penelope, wife of Odysseus
Suitors to Penelope (offstage)
Melantho, maidservant to Penelope
Medusa, the Gorgon
Perseus
Medea, wife of Jason
Medea's younger brother
Odysseus (voice only)

A Greek Orator

PART 1: PROLOGUE

(THE ORATOR, in full ancient Greek garb and with a Chorus facemask, enters from STAGE LEFT and stands STAGE LEFT CENTRE)

ORATOR (declaiming loudly to the audience):

“Paint me a cavernous waste shore
Cast in the unstilled Cyclades,
Paint me the bold anfractuous rocks
Faced by the snarled and yelping seas.

Display me Aeolus above
Reviewing the insurgent gales
Which tangle Ariadne's hair
And swell with haste the perjured sails.”

Ah, Eliot... now THERE was a man who understood the Human mind. And not just the Human mind, but the Greek mind, and not just the Greek mind, but the Ancient Greek mind. A mind forged in the Age of Heroes, and undated Age, an impossible Age, but an Age more Real, More Eternal, than anything that has come since - for why else have we remembered it? In the worst of our daily scramble they are there for us, the Heroes, the Monsters, the Deeds, the Metamorphoses, for without them we would have only the reality of our lives, and that alone would be impossible to live with. The one truth in life

is that we all need Heroes, and the best, the eternal, are those that never existed, for they can never die, and only they can do no wrong.

So, to the first of our Heroes, Jason!
(STAGE goes dark)

Most valiant of men, he who seduced a queen, sailed the world and found the Golden Fleece. Ohhhh Jason! Those who the Gods love die young, and those to whom they are indifferent grow old, and wither and are forgotten. Woe to those who seek greatness by subverting the will of the Gods, for they shall stare into the Abyss!

PART 1: THE TRUTH ABOUT MEDEA

LIGHT fades on ORATOR, who EXITS STAGE LEFT and comes up on JASON, sitting propped against the forward keel of an old wooden ship, STAGE RIGHT. He is holding a flask of wine and is drunk. He speaks in a thick Glaswegian accent)

JASON (to AUDIENCE): See you Jimmy... eh? EH? Talking about me eh? Ahh, ya wee fucking pussies... Aye, I'm talking to you... and now I'm gonna have a wee drink... what are you gonna do?... Where's your drink? Eh? EH? (waves flask mockingly at them and drinks)... Aye, that's better... you know, some folks are quite decent when all's said and done... bringing me all this kit and shite... but then, I expect it's just so they can bask in a wee bit of reflected glory ... "Hey, guess who I saw today... Jason! That's right... I gave him a flask of wine... Oh, it's nothing, I often do it... we're quite pally now, don't you know... we're like THAT, him and me..." ... Bah! Think they know me? They don't know me from Adam, and I don't know them from fucking Adam either, and I don't fucking want to, either... What the fuck do I care? As long as they keep me pissed... At least I've been around a bit, more than they'll ever do... nothing lasts for ever... Sic Transit Gloria, that's what I say... talking of Sic (turns and vomits loudly)... (recovers, wipes his mouth, looks at flask)... what the fuck do they put in this retsina? Bit past its sell-by date if you ask me...

Ah Well, here she is, just me and her, the old Argo. You know, Argo just means "ship" in Greek - we never did get round to giving her a name. Same with X-rays... ha! She and I have seen some things, I can tell you. Back in the day she was a sight to behold, with her gleaming white sails cracking in the wind and her banks of oars rocking back and forth... sometimes she was so beautiful she made me want to cry... she was so fast with her prow shearing the waves like a knife I'd swear she was going to take to the air... No other ship could keep up with her, so I painted on the stern

"My Other Ship's a Trireme"...

Hagh hagh hagh... Agh, what the feck... Come to gawp at an old man who used to be somebody?... You ever ask yersell, What happens to a Hero once he stops being a Hero? No-one's a Hero for ever, no-one's Young for ever, he has to stop sometime, even if he

disnae want to... and then what? I'll tell you what - sweet fuck all. That's the time you start to find out who your real friends are, and if you're a big enough hero, believe me, by the time you've finished all your real friends are dead. There's a high fucking mortality rate being a Hero, I can tell you. And if, by some grotesque chance of ill-fortune, you DO survive it all, then what've you got in front of you? Eh? EH? There's no fucking pension-plan for heroes...

(Starts to sing)

Don't you remember, you called me Jase,
It was Jase all the time,
Don't you remember, I'm your pal,
Themistocles, can you spare a drachma?

Ok, I know I need to work on the scansion a wee bit, but Rome isnae gonna be built in a day

(something above him attracts his attention and he looks up, gawking incredulously)

Hey (to the audience) you see that? Look, up there... it looks like some bastard flying across the sky and giving some other fucker a piggy-back... can ye no see it? PLEASE somebody tell me they can see it too... (looks in horror at his flask, then at the audience, then back at his flask)... so I am starting to see things... fuck me... Ah well...

Anyway, see me and yon Medea. All everyone THINKS they know is that me, the evil, bad, dissolute, faithless Jason, left his poor wee wife and the bairns all alone to go cavorting off with some other wee floozy. That's the version they WANT ye to believe, and that's the version that YE all believe 'cos it's come down tae ye through the ages in the Pelican Book of fucking Greek Myths as What Really Happened. Naebody wants to hear MY side of things, because that means they'd have to take intae consideration that maybe they'd been wrong about me all this time, and that maybe fate'd fed me a shite sandwich for lunch... It's much easier tae think Aye, he got his just desserts, serves him right. That way you don't have to have your conscience dragged intae it.

But I'LL tell YOU whet the real story is. Back when it started I didnae even know who the fuck Medea was. All I knew was that I was a jobbing sailor between voyages, with nae two drachma to rub together in my poor wee callused hand...

LIGHT goes off JASON and onto YOUNG JASON, entering from STAGE RIGHT and stopping a few steps in from the wings)

OLD JASON: ... I'd heard stories about how my Father had been the King of Iolchus and that he'd been usurped by Pelias. Well, ye go intae any prison and ye'll be hard put to find any bastard who's actually guilty o' the crime he's been convicted of. By the same light, every drunken bastard who grabs hold of ye in a bar somewhere'll tell ye he's the son of a long-lost King and that one day he'll come intae his rightful inheritance, and that

he'll pay ye back what he owes ye if ye'll just lend him a few talents to see him through til payday. Agghhh, I didnae think my faether was a King anymore than my mother had been a harpy and my uncle a fucking centaur. So...

YOUNG JASON: ... I was crossing a river on the way to find somewhere to sleep for the night and on the way over I lost one of my sandals. So there I was, hobbling along on one sandal when suddenly I bumped into this royal party, coming the other way...

(PELIAS appears from STAGE LEFT, accompanied by his son, ACASTUS, and guards/s)

YOUNG JASON: I stood aside, but I was walking oddly due to having only the one sandal, and my peculiar gait caught the eye of the King. He waved everybody to stop and leaned over from his palanquin to look at me. Then he said,

PELIAS: I say, you there, you from the Lower Classes. My name is King Pelias, and it has been prophesied that my Kingdom will be taken from me by a wayfarer wearing but one sandal.

OLD JASON: So I said "Oh aye, well, King, I don't want your fucking Kingdom, all I want is to find a kip for the night, so if it's all the same tae ye I'll be on my way" - or words to that effect. And he said...

PELIAS (to YOUNG JASON): Well, my man, given the nature and portent of the Prophecy, can you give me one good reason why I shouldn't have you killed here right now this very minute?

OLD JASON: So I, recognizing the imminence of a *fait accompli* which might not work out to my best advantage, said -

YOUNG JASON: Well, your Highness, how about I do you some sort of favour, maybe a long way away from here, that'll keep me out of your hair and my head on its shoulders where I firmly, though possibly misguidedly, believe it belongs?

OLD JASON: So HE said -

PELIAS: Ho ho ho, I like the cut of your jib, young man, so I have a proposition for you. Far away, in the Kingdom of Colchis, a Golden Fleece hangs from a tree. It is defended by a vast and terrifying dragon that never sleeps, and which tears to shreds anyone who tries to approach it. Many men strong, brave and resolute, have gone before to bring me the Fleece, but none have ever returned. So I say to you what I said to them - Bring me the Fleece and I will give you my Kingdom!

OLD JASON: So I said...

YOUNG JASON: Yes, all right, then...

OLD JASON: Of course, I was well apprised of the fact that, if what your man the King said was true, it was supposed to be my fucking Kingdom anyway, but I was equally well apprised of the fact that any attempt to press my legitimate claim at that particular moment in the space-time continuum would probably result in me being hung from a selection of different trees in the immediate locality, and none of them very close to each other. So I thought Aye, why the Fuck not? It's not like I had anything better tae do wi' my time.

PELIAS (to YOUNG JASON): And while you're at it, take my son Acastus with you! (ACASTUS steps forward) He is young, mighty and strong, and will see you safely through your adventures no matter what!

YOUNG JASON: Oh - ok! Yes. Thank you...

PELIAS (in STAGE WHISPER to ACASTUS): And remember - if he tries to do a bunk with the fleece, KILL HIM!

ACASTUS: Righto!

(LIGHT DOWN but not OFF JASON. TABLEAU of YOUNG JASON, PELIAS and ACASTUS standing around talking about the project)

OLD JASON: So, with the assistance of your man the King and his son Acastus...

ACASTUS (to audience): Hi...

OLD JASON: ...with whom I became big buddies...

(YOUNG JASON and ACASTUS put their arms round each other's shoulders and sing)

"Dear Old Pals, Jolly Old Pals..."

OLD JASON:... I put together a crew, got the old Argo built, and set off on my *experiment perilous*. I won't bore ye with all the wee details of the journey there. Most of it's bollocks anyway. All that rubbish about giants wi' six arms and centaurs, that was just men wearing animal skins wi' bits flying about in the wind, and riding horses so they looked like they were growing out of each other. And the Clashing Rocks? I'll tell ye what the clashing rocks were - fucking ice-floes, that's what! Colchis is in what ye now call Georgia, and yon ice-floes were swept down intae the Black Sea from rivers in Russia during the spring thaw. Some o' them were pretty fucking big and in the nature of things sometimes they bumped intae each other and made a wee bit of a racket, and sure you had to be pretty nifty on the rudder and snappy with the oars sometimes to avoid getting crushed to matchwood. But Clashing Rocks? My arse. Still, people like a good story...

YOUNG JASON (lights back ON): ... Anyway, when we got to Colchis we were met by King Aeetes...

(AEETES appears from STAGE LEFT accompanied by a GUARD)

OLD JASON: We said we'd landed because we'd sprung a leak as a result of being caught among the Clashing Rocks, and that we'd only put ashore to make repairs and be on our way. And he said...

AEETES: Are you Greeks?

ACASTUS: Yes, we are, doughty voyagers on a landfall from Far Hellas! We were heading off for the Straits of Hercules, but -

OLD JASON: And he said...

AEETES: I HATE Greeks! I hate the bloody lot of them. If you multiply every star in the sky by every grain of sand on every beach in the world, that isn't one-millionth of how much I hate the Greeks... wwwaaauugggghhh!... (GUARD hold him back. He continues to rage SOTTO VOCE)

OLD JASON: As a matter of fact the bit about the leak was true - at a critical point the helmsman had suddenly got an idea for a poem, and that moment of inspired inattention was enough to get us caught between a couple of icebergs, so we'd have had to lay up for repairs at some point, though the leak wasnae that critical...

AEETES: ... Smash their skulls with rocks and big sticks!... (continues to rave sotto voce)

OLD JASON: However, I canna say that your man the King looked as if he was gonny roll out the red carpet. I didn't feel that anything we could say or do would convince him that we HADN'T come for his wee Golden Fleece.

AEETES... put their eyes out with red hot pokers!!...

OLD JASON: I thought he was gonna burst a blood vessel, and he began telling us in minute detail what parts of our anatomy he was going to cut off and in what order... But just then his daughter, yon Medea, appeared and...

(MEDEA appears from STAGE LEFT and goes to AEETES)

MEDEA: Father, father whatever's the matter...

AEETES:... Them, them!!! Smash their kneecaps...

MEDEA: Why, father?

AEETES: Because they're GREEKS, and you know how much I hate the Greeks –
aaaaarrggghh....

MEDEA: Why, father, they're (catches sight of YOUNG JASON)... Ohh! HeLLLO!
(forgets all about her father and starts making eyes at YOUNG JASON)

OLD JASON: Whoa! I tell YOU, I never believed in Love at First Sight and I still
fuckin' don't, but Lust at First Sight had us both bang to rights from the word Go!

ACASTUS (similarly smitten with MEDEA): HE-LLLLOOOO yourself! I'm Acastus,
and this is...(MEDEA ignore him)

YOUNG JASON: Hi! I'm sorry if we've upset your father, we only came ashore...

MEDEA: Ashore? You're sailors?

ACASTUS: Yes, fearless explorers from Far Hellas, the land of -

MEDEA (leaving the GUARD to continue restraining AEETES and going over towards
YOUNG JASON, brushing ACASTUS aside) Ooohh, how interesting...!!!

AEETES: I'll give you bloody Hellas, I'll give you BOTTOMS!

YOUNG JASON (meeting MEDEA halfway and also brushing ACASTUS aside): Is he
always like this?

MEDEA: Oh no, well, not always... sometimes he's just a bit grumpy...

AEETES (grabbing hold of MEDEA by the arm): Daughter, what do I hate more than
Greeks?

MEDEA: More than Greeks? Well, I don't know... Cats? Tuesdays?

AEETES: Cats! Yes, cats... NO! No, I like cats... there's something else, something
almost as loathsome as Greeks... (lurches toward YOUNG JASON but is restrained by
the GUARD and MEDEA)

MEDEA: Very well, father (taking YOUNG JASON over away from her father to
STAGE RIGHT and starting to canoodle with him, while ACASTUS stays in front of
AEETES and makes friendly gestures to YOUNG JASON and MEDEA, all the while
trying to catch MEDEA's eye)

YOUNG JASON (to MEDEA): Why is he so consumed with hatred?

MEDEA: Oh, it's just his little foible, he likes hating things... last week it was Wednesdays and the week before that the Square Root of Two... next week it'll probably be -

ACASTUS: But why us Greeks especially? What did we ever do to him?

MEDEA (getting annoyed with ACASTUS): Well, every Greek who's ever come here has tried to steal the Golden Fleece... I expect that's got a lot to do with it.

AEETES: Singapore Noodles...!!! That's what I hate more than Greeks!... (MEDEA waves him away and the GUARD takes AEETES OFF STAGE LEFT, leaving ACASTUS to gaze longingly at MEDEA and shuffle slowly up to YOUNG JASON and MEDEA)

MEDEA: So, why DID you come here?

OLD JASON: Now she had me on the spot? What the fuck was I gonna say?

YOUNG JASON: Why? Well, err...

ACASTUS: We had heard of your great beauty, and wanted to see for ourselves what -

MEDEA (to YOUNG JASON, cutting off ACASTUS): Have you come for the Golden Fleece?

YOUNG JASON: The fleece? Why, no, er...

MEDEA: It's quite all right... no-one ever comes here for anything else – why would they? I mean, look at the place.. nothing but sun, sand and olive trees... it's not exactly Periclean Athens, is it?

ACASTUS (joining MEDEA and YOUNG JASON, but being ignored by both): It has things far more lovely than Golden Fleeces...

MEDEA (to ACASTUS): See that boiling cauldron over there (pointing OFFSTAGE LEFT)

ACASTUS (taking a quick look): Yes?

MEDEA: Go and jump in it (ACASTUS is affronted, and stands fuming silently)

YOUNG JASON: I've never been to Athens...

MEDEA: And I've always wanted to go! OH! If I take you to the Fleece will you take me away from here?

OLD JASON: For once in my wee life I was speechless!

YOUNG JASON: Take you away??? But... why?

MEDEA: Ohhh! I can't STAND another day here with him and his never-ending tantrums... And he wants me to marry a man who looks like a goat!... I'll show you where the Fleece is if you'll take me away from here.

ACASTUS: Take you away??? Well, that's all very well, but there's the little matter of the monster...

MEDEA: The Monster? (laughs in ACASTUS's face)... (to YOUNG JASON) Don't you worry your beautiful head about that, everything will be fine, I promise...

YOUNG JASON: But King Pelias said...

MEDEA (putting an amorous finger to his lips): I. Promise.

YOUNG JASON: Oh.. all right then... come on, Acastus!...

ACASTUS (as the three of them EXIT STAGE RIGHT): So what about this monster?...

OLD JASON: She started out with us following her down a coastal path, but then she turned and led us inland, to where the fleece was. She said again she couldn't wait to get away from fucking Colchis and her fucking faether, and if she let us take the fleece would we take her and her wee brother as well? I'm sure you don't need me tae supply you with the answer to THAT.

Well... excuse me for a moment while I take a wee aperitif... when we got to the Fleece we had our hearts in our mouths. All around, as far as you could see, lay the bodies of dead men, propped up on pyres and draped over trees, just left out to rot and with the birds pecking away at them to their hearts' content

(SOUND of crows and vultures. FLEECE is illuminated STAGE RIGHT. In awe, YOUNG JASON and ACASTUS, entering from STAGE LEFT, move towards it, but hesitantly, looking around in fear for the monster).

OLD JASON: Must have been some terrific fucking monster, we all thought, and if we'd had boots on we'd have been quailing in them. But Medea said not to worry...

MEDEA (to YOUNG JASON):... in Colchis we don't bury our male dead, we only bury the women... we believe in leaving our menfolk out for the wild animals of the earth and sky, so their souls will travel heavenward if they have been good, but down to Hades with the dogs if they've been bad... and, as it happens, it helps to boost the reputation of the monster that guards the fleece... Look, there he is! (pointing to the base of a nearby tree)

(YOUNG JASON and ACASTUS jump into each others' arms with fear)

YOUNG JASON and ACASTUS (severally): Where? Where is it? Is it close??? Can it fly? Does it breathe flame?

OLD JASON: The Dragon? Ahhh, that was just a fat old python who was curled up asleep under the Fleece, and I didnae have the heart to cut its harmless old head off, so we just let it be and helped ourselves.

(YOUNG JASON and ACASTUS laugh with relief and pull each other's legs as they collect the FLEECE. Then they all look OFFSTAGE LEFT as if seeing AEETES coming after them, gather everything up, and run off STAGE RIGHT)

OLD JASON: Anyway... it didnae take her faether long to twig that Medea and her brother had taken off with us and the Fleece, and before long he was after us. Ordinarily the old Argo here would have shown any other ship a clean pair of heels, but with that leak she was slowing down and taking on water, and it didnae take us long to realise he was gaining on us.

YOUNG JASON (to AUDIENCE, returning to STAGE from STAGE LEFT): Now, up to this point I'd wondered quite why Medea had been so keen to bring her young brother along for the ride, he was only a lad of seven or eight, but given the speed at which things happened and what was at stake I hadn't given the matter my deepest attention.

OLD JASON: However, before very long I quickly began to realize just why he was there, as Medea, my sweet bird of youth, the Lust of my Life, illustrated why she'd brought him along...

(YOUNG JASON and MEDEA move forward to stand STAGE FRONT, facing the AUDIENCE and swaying from side to side as it at sea. LIGHTS illuminate them. YOUNG JASON looks round to AEETES' supposed SHIP at STAGE REAR, and sees AEETES' ship pursuing them).

YOUNG JASON: He's gaining on us...

MEDEA: Is he going to catch us?

YOUNG JASON: If we don't do something he'll be level with us in about twenty minutes...

MEDEA: What can we do?

YOUNG JASON: I don't know... the boys are bailing water out as fast as they can...

.MEDEA: Perhaps we should join them...

YOUNG JASON: It's pretty confined down there, we'd just be in the way...

MEDEA: It's OK, I'm on it! (calls to STAGE LEFT) Brother! Sweetie... Come over here... We're going to play...! (YOUNG BROTHER appears from STAGE LEFT and stands by MEDEA)

YOUNG JASON: What are you doing? This is no time for play...

MEDEA: Don't worry, my love, this'll help us show him a clean pair of heels (MEDEA turns and quickly takes YOUNG JASON's SWORD from his belt)

YOUNG JASON (to MEDEA): What... what...???...

MEDEA (to YOUNG BROTHER): We're going to play hospitals!

(YOUNG BROTHER screams in terror and runs OFF-STAGE STAGE RIGHT)

YOUNG JASON (to MEDEA as she chases YOUNG BROTHER OFF-STAGE): But... My sword!!! What are you going to do?

(SFX of child's screams and the "plop" of something falling in the water, repeated two or three times)

MEDEA (coming back ON-STAGE briefly from STAGE RIGHT, with blood-spattered dress, hands and arms): Look, I think it's working... he's slowing down to pick up the pieces...

YOUNG JASON: But... but... What have you done? I thought he was your brother...???

MEDEA: Yes, of course he is! (MEDEA looks to STAGE REAR as if at AEETES' ship) you see, my father's a frightfully old-fashioned old stick... I knew that if I cut his son up and threw the bits overboard he'd have to slow down to pick them up, so he could give him a decent burial...Oops! Gaining on us again, I think. Oh well!... (runs OFF-STAGE RIGHT again, and the SFX of screams and plops are repeated. Eventually they stop and MEDEA, comprehensively BLOOD-STAINED, returns from STAGE RIGHT to stand by YOUNG JASON)

MEDEA: There, that did the trick (YOUNG JASON and MEDEA glance quickly to STAGE REAR) He'll never catch us now!

YOUNG JASON: But... but... I wouldn't treat a slave like that...

MEDEA: Oh, I have, loads of times...

YOUNG JASON: But... but... he was your brother!

MEDEA: Yes... came in useful after all, didn't he? Why d'you think I brought him along?

YOUNG JASON: He was your brother!!!

MEDEA: Yes, I know... You ARE a sentimental old sausage...

YOUNG JASON: Did you intend to do this all along?

MEDEA: Only if it was necessary... insurance... good job I'd kept the premiums up, what??? Ha ha ha...

YOUNG JASON: So, your father... he wasn't all bad...

MEDEA: No, of course he isn't... but everyone's got an Achilles Heel... silly old sod!

YOUNG JASON (backing away from MEDEA): You must be mad...

(MEDEA instantly drops her jolly demeanour. Her face becomes a mask of fury. She grabs YOUNG JASON by the tunic with her free hand, and with the other holds the sword to his throat)

MEDEA: DON'T. EVER . CALL. ME. MAD!!!

YOUNG JASON: (in a thin and tremulous voice): OK...

(MEDEA lets YOUNG JASON go and backs off, wiping her hands and the sword on her dress again and giving YJ his sword back. Then, suddenly, she goes back to her old loving demeanour and embraces him)

MEDEA: Oh, darling... we're going to be SOOOO happy...

OLD JASON:... And this her fucking brother!! Imagine what she'd do to someone she didn't like! After that, I began to get the slightest, wee little bit of an inkling that maybe I was about to marry a five-star, silk-lined, ocean-going psychopath. What was she going to end up doing to me one day if I looked at her the wrong way, or if she just felt like rearranging bits of me because she was in a rearranging sort of a mood?

Well, since I was sharing the same bed on the same ship as her and wouldn't be getting home for a while, when we stopped for water and found a local priest she suggested we get married there and then, and I was too fond of my various body parts remaining where they'd always been to risk incurring her wrath by a refusal. So, thinking that getting married would buy me a bit of time to plan my escape, I agreed. When we got home...

(TABLEAU of YOUNG JASON and ACASTUS giving PELIAS the Golden FLEECE at STAGE REAR and all three of them laughing and joking and admiring the FLEECE)

YOUNG JASON:... we were met by Pelias, who was delighted with the Fleece...

(TABLEAU of YOUNG JASON and ACASTUS giving PELIAS the Golden FLEECE at STAGE REAR and all three of them laughing and joking and admiring the FLEECE)

OLD JASON: ...but Medea suspected that he wasnae going to give me the Kingdom as agreed but was gonna go back on his word. Privately I agreed with her...

(TABLEAU of MEDEA reaching for PELIAS's CROWN and PELIAS's GUARD and ACASTUS barring the path to PELIAS. PELIAS and ACASTUS LEAVE STAGE LEFT, clutching the CROWN and making it clear that he has no intention of relinquishing it to YOUNG JASON and MEDEA. ACASTUS stops for a moment before following PELIAS OFFSTAGE and looks triumphantly at MEDEA and YOUNG JASON, finally leaving STAGE LEFT with an insulting gesture. YOUNG JASON and MEDEA look at each other while the GUARD stands watching them. YOUNG JASON just shrugs and turns to go STAGE RIGHT, but stops as he spies MEDEA crosses her arms together, raises her chin and stands looking after PELIAS with a calculating, vengeful expression on her face. Then she turns to YOUNG JASON and whispers something in his ear. YOUNG JASON looks perturbed and remonstrates with her, but MEDEA shoo's YOUNG JASON off and approaches the GUARD. She speaks to him briefly. The GUARD turns to STAGE LEFT and calls PELIAS back. PELIAS comes back onto STAGE REAR from STAGE LEFT and approaches MEDEA, who starts canoodling with him and making very exaggerated seductive gestures)

OLD JASON: ... but I didnae mind so much because I'd never much seen mysel' as a King anyway - all that being carried around in a palanquin and standing around being saluted and worshipped and given flowers and shit and people trying tae poison you in your sleep and all the rest - really I just wanted to stay a sailor. I had salt water coursing through my veins and that suited me fine, I didnae want fucking poison coursing through them as well. But anyway, yon Medea decided she wanted me to have the throne, so she got onto Pelias's case, making with the big soppy eyes an fluttering her eyelashes just like she had at me, until she got him to drink some wine she'd spiked wi' a roofy. Guess what she did then? Eh? EH??? Go on, take a wild guess... that's right, she cut him to bits and boiled him up in a bloody great cauldron, then fed him to the dogs, just for a laugh. I tell ye, there's a girl who'd found her vocation in life. I wondered how long it would take before it was my turn...

(TABLEAU of YOUNG JASON remonstrating with the TOWN COUNCIL and ACASTUS as to his innocence and MEDEA's guilt. YOUNG JASON tries to embrace ACASTUS to remind him of their old friendship, but ACASTUS pushes him away and grandly points to YOUNG JASON's EXIT at STAGE RIGHT)

OLD JASON:... Anyway, yon town council decided that I was to blame for your man the King getting turned into Bonio, and my best buddy Acastus was of the same opinion. So, even though I pleaded my innocence, and even though Acastus'd been one o' my best Argonauts and had seen what Medea was capable of, he and yon council announced

forthwith that I was banished from the Kingdom, so I said “Aye aye, that’s all right wi’ me boys, I’ll just be off, and I’ll take the old Argo wi’ me if it’s all the same tae ye”. So off I went, trying not to whistle and show how de-fucking-lighted I was wi’ my good fortune. I’d be away in no time, leaving my evil fucking wife at hame to slice-and-dice some other poor fucker, and sailing the sea like I was born tae it. So I called out ahead of me -

YOUNG JASON (entering STAGE from STAGE RIGHT): Away there, boys, weigh the anchor and break the oars out, we’re off again!

OLD JASON: But no sooner had we got underway when up from below-decks came none other than my dear fucking wife...

(MEDEA enters from STAGE LEFT)

YOUNG JASON: What on Earth are you doing here? I thought...

MEDEA (Embracing YOUNG JASON): Oh, Jason, you are the rightful King of Iolchus, but if you stay here you will be murdered by your treacherous friend Acastus, who has plotted against you and has taken the throne for himself –

OLD JASON: Aye, that he did, though under the circumstances I can’t say I blame him...

MEDEA: ... and you have no heir to succeed to the throne which rightly belongs to you. We will sail far away to some far distant shore...

OLD JASON: She was very poetic, yon Medea, when she had a mind for it...

MEDEA: - and raise an army, and return to take vengeance upon those who have wronged you, and place you on the throne where you rightly belong!... And those who have tried to cheat us of what rightly belongs to you...!!!

OLD JASON: You should have seen the way her eyes lit up when she uses words like “Vengeance”, “Axe” and “Skull”. So, off we went ageen. This time we ended up in Corinth...

(TABLEAU of YOUNG JASON and MEDEA being welcomed by the KING OF CORINTH. KING gets up off THRONE STAGE CENTRE. They all shake hands and make exaggerated gestures indicating conversation relating to tales of derring-do, the power of the Kingdom, etc. A SERVANT brings a tray with goblets of wine. They all take one. MEDEA takes the KING aside and, turning back to give YOUNG JASON a broad wink, produces a nostrum which she ostentatiously mixes into KING’ goblet whilst he is occupied talking to someone else)

OLD JASON: ... where, shortly after the arrival of Medea, the King mysteriously died (KING drains goblet then clutches at his throat and falls dead).

As it turned out, by a strange concatenation of family trees, this meant that SHE was next in line for the throne and, as her husband, I was entitled to be King.

(TABLEAU of MEDEA placing CROWN from dead KING's head and placing it on YOUNG JASON's head. He sits there being praised by everyone and looking extremely disgruntled. MEDEA goes OFFSTAGE)

OLD JASON: This time I couldnae talk my way out of it, so I found myself sitting there on the throne of Corinth with a crown on my heed and more fucking pissed off than I'd ever been in my life. I stuck it out for a while, and yon Medea gave me a brood of fine wee bairns...

(MEDEA returns to STAGE holding a selection of BABIES in each arm)

... However, having seen what happened to Brothers and Kings when Medea was around, I decided to flee the moment an opportunity presented itself. Eventually it did. We were having a grand banquet in the palace one evening...

(BANQUET; GUESTS, FOOD etc)

OLD JASON:... and somebody must have looked at her the wrong way...

(MEDEA turns into a fury as everyone else is occupied elsewhere and not giving her any attention - or something else that makes her angry - so she goes OFFSTAGE. Moments later FLAMES appear projected onto STAGE BACK)

OLD JASON: ... because she turned the other cheek in her own inimitable way by going round and bolting every fucking window and door in the place and then setting fire to the whole bloody palace, killing everybody in it including the bairns - everyone except me, as I had the presence of mind and the sheer good luck to jump out of a fucking window that she'd omitted to bar.

For many years I wandered alone, back where I'd started, as a jobbing seaman...

(YOUNG JASON passes from one side of the STAGE to the other, passing people going the other way, occasionally trying to stop one to ask for assistance, an getting indifferent responses)

OLD JASON:... But by then Medea's publicity machine had got going. Fucking Euripedes, the Rupert Murdoch of his day. Most of my auld comrades from the Argo had disappeared or died. Acastus was still around in Iolchus, so I went there and tried to make it up with him. But he wouldnae believe my version of events and drove me away

(ACASTUS reappears from STAGE SIDE dressed in opulent robes and ?crown?. YOUNG JASON approaches him as a friend...

YOUNG JASON: “Dear old pals, Jolly old pals...”

(ACASTUS drives him away with his GUARDS)

OLD JASON: Wherever I went I got the full fury of Medea’s propaganda machine. Eventually, long after she’d run out of people to cut up in Corinth, disembowel in Delphi, murder in Mycaenae and assassinate in Athens and had worked her way across the archipelago, I went back to the only friend I had left, and the only one who’d never let me down - the auld Argo here. She’d been beached when we first got to Corinth and had never moved since. Now she was rotting away, stripped of all her timbers and fittings, and she was in a desperate fucking state to behold, it near broke my fucking heart. But still, we were back together.

Aye, we’ve been through some things in our time, eh, old girl? And ye never let me down once. We’ll see each other out, I reckon, rotting away a day at a time...

(to audience) You still here? Still avid for stories of heroism and derring-do? Well... gaze upon a real hero and despair, ‘cos I’ll tell you what’s in store for ye if by any wee chance you ever find yersel’ becoming a Hero... fucking ridicule... defamation of character... lies, invention, calumny... people walking by... you see some drunken wreck lying in the gutter, you walk on by and, Aye, he might be just some bum... but then again, he might be some bloke who’s seen and dealt with things ye couldn’t even imagine... so remember that the next time ye walk past some bastard lying in his own private reservoir of shite and vomit in the gutter...

Aye... whether you meet fair winds or foul, you’ll find your own way to harbour, in the end... it’s been a dream... and in the morning, and in the years after, you’ll only remember it as a dream... and it’ll die, as all dreams must die... But Aye! How you’d have loved to see the North Cape and the fjords in the midnight sun, and sail across the reef at Barbados where the blue water turns to green – to the Falklands, where the southerly gales rip the whole sea white! Aye.. what you’ve missed...*

(waves hand in dismissive disgust at audience)

Ach, away wi’ ye... Go on, away... (turns away. Lights go down)

2) PENELOPE SLEEPWALKS

ORATOR: Jason, OHHH Jason! Sic Transit Gloria indeed! But... Did you meet great Odysseus in your travels? He who toppled the Topless Towers of Ilium, and brought shame to Troy and Glory to Hellas? And all the while his faithful wife, Penelope, sitting at home in Ithaca, weaving her tapestry and waiting day upon day, year upon year, for her Lord to make safe landfall once again. Or are there now pearls that were his eyes? Does a current under sea pick his bones in whispers? Oh, Penelope, will the suitors overwhelm thee? And if Odysseus DOES return – what then??? (ORATOR EXITS)

(Penelope sits at her tapestry, weaving. The tapestry is in fact a mourning shroud, in case her 20-year-long wait for Odysseus ends with his body being brought home. He has been away, at the Trojan wars and then wandering the seas of the Earth, for twenty years. Suitors clamour OFF-STAGE RIGHT).

Various suitors (severally from OFF-STAGE RIGHT): Oh Penelope... I love you... I can't live without you... Look, Penelope, I've brought you gifts, Gold, Silver. Oxen... I don't want your money, all the others do but not me... OH, Penelope, think what we could do if your lands were united with mine... Oh, I'm going to die with longing for you... Penelopeeee... etc

(DOOR OFF- FRONT STAGE RIGHT opens. The volume of the clamour from the suitors increases in volume for a moment as MELANTHO forces her way OFF-STAGE past the suitors, through the DOOR and onto STAGE. As she does so a number of waving and grasping ARMS from the SUITORS are seen desperately trying to get in through the door to PENELOPE, before MELANTHO manages to shut the DOOR on them. She stands for a moment getting her breath back with her back against the DOOR as the SUITORS pound it with their fists)

PEN: I see the suitors are still there, then.

MEL: Still a few hanging about.

PEN: Yes, I thought I could here one or two whispering somewhere.

MEL: It can't go on like this. They're eating us out of House and Home...

PEN: Well, I can't see what else there is to do... they're entitled to press their suit.

MEL: Yes, but even so...

PEN: It's the price of stalling them with the tapestry... as long as they eat and drink they're too befuddled to twig that I'm unpicking it every night.

MEL: But one of them's bound to realise sooner or later...

PEN: Sufficient unto the day. Brush my hair.

(MELANTHO does as she's told)

MEL: Look, mistress, it's not my place to pry into your affairs, but why don't you just pick one and get married? Lord Odysseus has been gone twenty years...

PEN: Yes, but he could come back any day...

MEL: In theory, yes, but...

PEN: But what?

MEL: He was last seen twenty years ago before the walls of Troy... face it, mistress, he's probably been dead for all the time since then.

PEN: What about the stories that keep coming through, of his being spotted in one port or another... always a bit closer to Ithaca? He was seen in Corinth recently, so one of the suitors told me...

MEL: When you get to my age, mistress, you realise that stories are just that – stories. Everyone loves a Hero... my Lord's body hasn't been brought back so everyone wants to think he's still alive, slaying monsters and saving maidens from a fate worse than death... since he hasn't been laid on his pyre, and seen to be gone, people want to believe he's still here, and the taller the stories the more people believe them because if he's survived all this time there can't be anything he can't do...

PEN: I know you still think of me as the baby you used to dandle on your knee, Melantho, but I'm a forty year-old woman now, with a twenty year-old son... I know quite as much about the tales that people tell as you do. Yes, maybe he's lying dead somewhere, with his eyes being pecked out by crows and his flesh eaten by dogs... but my Lord was no common man... people do sometimes turn up out of the blue after decades away, and if anyone could, HE could.

MEL: Yes, mistress, of course, forgive my presumption... but...

PEN: But what?

MEL: But... don't you think you'd be better off with one of them out there?

PEN: Why? Why would I be better off?

MEL: Well, marry one and all the rest will go, you won't have to feed them every day...

PEN: And if my Lord came back suddenly, against all the odds...?

MEL: I need hardly tell your mistress that the law provides for a marriage, made in good faith that the husband has died, if he has been gone for many years.

PEN: Yes, I know, that's why they're all there.

MEL: And perhaps this time you might make a good marriage...

PEN: What do you mean, a good marriage? My husband is King of Ithaca, what could be better than that?

MEL:... to someone who doesn't...

PEN: Doesn't what?

MEL: Who doesn't... make you sleepwalk...

PEN: How Dare You! My husband did NOT make me sleepwalk! Remember your place, woman - say anything like that again and I'll have you flogged and banished.

MEL: I'm sorry, my mistress, I won't say it again, of course he didn't, the demon just got hold of my tongue.

PEN: Good. Well, make sure the demon doesn't get hold of your tongue again or I'll have it cut out and fed to the dogs.

MEL: Yes, my mistress... please forgive me...

(SILENCE for a while. PENELOPE continues with her tapestry and MELANTHO continues brushing her hair)

It's just that... you haven't sleep-walked since he left for Troy.

PEN: No, I haven't. Just coincidence, I expect... it's because one only sleepwalks when one is very happy. I'm am very unhappy without my lord... twenty years... twenty long, interminable years, with that pack of scoundrels just waiting...

MEL: OF course, my mistress. But I still remember that time that you came out of your sleepwalk with that terrible black eye and your lip all split open... that was the time you walked into the Parthenon...

PEN: Yes...

MEL: Those big heavy marble pillars... I expect if I sleepwalked into them I'd get the same sort of injuries...

PEN: Probably... sleepwalking is the sign of a very happy marriage. Almost all of the women I've known over the years has walked in her sleep, and they've all loved their husbands as much as I love my lord Odysseus...

MEL: I've seen quite a few women with similar injuries who've done the same thing... there was one I knew who used to sleepwalk right into the Colossus of Rhodes at least once a month...

PEN: And was she happily married?

MEL: Blissfully, I don't doubt, my lady.

PEN: ... There are so many pillars in Hellas... hard to avoid them if you're... sleepwalking.

MEL: Perhaps they ought to ban them, pull them down, as they're such a hazard.

PEN: Oh, I don't see how that could happen... they are one of the symbols of Hellas.

MEL: Yes, of course, my lady... (sotto voce) and I daresay if they were all pulled down, those who walk in their sleep would find something else to walk into...

(Ominous silence)

PEN: If he did come back he'd soon sort out that rabble out there.

MEL: Yes, another good reason not to marry one of them... not until you're sure, anyway... who knows what he might do...

PEN: I thought I... Oh look! What was that?

MEL: What, mistress?

PEN: A shadow suddenly crossed the tapestry... maybe it's one of the suitors trying to get in through the window – go and look!

MEL (doing as instructed): Oh, my word...

PEN: What? What is it?

MEL: Well, it's... it's...

PEN: Come on, woman, spit it out...

MEL: I've never seen anything like it before... it looks like someone flying across the sky, giving someone else a piggyback... heading for Corinth...

PEN (starting to get up): Really...

MEL: Oh, they've gone now, mistress...

PEN: Oh well... if pigs can fly, why can't humans?

MEL: Indeed, my lady... Oh, now there's something else...

PEN: What?

MEL: Someone crossing the courtyard...

PEN (rushing to the window in a state of sudden and high agitation): Is it my Lord? Has he come back?

MEL (surreptitiously comforting PENELOPE): I don't think so, my lady... it looks like some old tramp... probably after alms...

PEN (with a sigh of relief): Phew! Yes, I daresay... a vagrant...

MEL: I hope the suitors don't torment him...

PEN (quietly, almost *sotto voce*): He loves me really...

MEL: Pardon me, my mistress...?

ODYDDEUS (from OFF-STAGE RIGHT): Honey, I'm home...

PEN: Oh my God, it's him... he's back!

(Sound of screams of terror as ODYSSEUS starts massacring the suitors. One crawls onto stage from FRONT-STAGE RIGHT as if trying to escape, but an unseen pair of hands drag him back out of sight into the wings. Another tries to flee FRONT-STAGE RIGHT by running onto STAGE but a massive arm reaches out from the wings and drags him back by the neck. A moment later, bloody parts of human bodies – arms, legs, heads, hands – are thrown onto STAGE from FRONT-STAGE RIGHT. Eventually all the screams and throwing of body-parts onto STAGE stops, and silence falls. PENELOPE stands in mute terror as she looks at the DOOR FRONT-STAGE RIGHT. MELANTHO embraces her.)

MEL: Don't worry, my dear, I'll look after you...

ODD (from OFF-STAGE RIGHT): What's for tea, honey?

PEN: Ohh... err... what would you like?

ODD (menacingly): DON'T YOU KNOW?

3) THE BLACKSMITH'S WIFE

ORATOR: Fare thee well, oh gentle Penelope, serve thy Lord so that he may return your loyalty and love in ways that become you both. May the pillars of Hellas not obstruct your wayward nightly wanderings nor take the place of your noble husband.

OHHH! Think now upon the horror that is Medusa, the curse of mankind, she who has Evil for blood, arrows for eyes and talons for a heart. Bless the soul of Brave Perseus, son of Zeus and Beloved of the Gods, as he wings his way even now to end the nightmare of the Gorgon!!!
(ORATOR EXITS)

(STAGE is dark, with just the sound of waves and seagulls. LIGHTS slowly come up behind CYC. MEDUSA is shown in silhouette, snakes clearly visible on her head. She ties them up in a scarf. CYC LIGHTS go OFF.
MEDUSA comes onto STAGE from STAGE LEFT, standing motionless for a moment at STAGE FRONT LEFT, staring out over AUDIENCE. Then she produces a deck of CARDS and starts mechanically shuffling them.
She is in a CAVE. Suddenly there is a NOISE OFFSTAGE RIGHT. A SWOOSH, like a plane landing, and a raucous sound of things falling over like dustbins.
MEDUSA puts the CARDS away in a pouch, looks to STAGE FRONT RIGHT and advances across STAGE FRONT from LEFT to RIGHT, stopping in FRONT STAGE CENTRE and facing STAGE RIGHT).

MEDUSA: Who is there? Come forth into my cave, if you dare, I am waiting!

PERSEUS (entering BACKWARDS from OFFSTAGE RIGHT. He is dressed as a Greek warrior. In one hand he carries a bronze sword, and in the other he carries a bronze shield. He has winged sandals on his feet): I am Perseus, son of Zeus, beloved of the Gods!

MEDUSA: What do you seek in the lair of the Gorgon?

PERSEUS: I seek Medusa, hater of all mankind, unnatural monster! Loathed one!

MEDUSA: Know, Man - for it is always a Man - that your fate is already sealed. Strong may you be, sharp your sword, burnished your helm... all is folly, and you shall join the legions of the damned. Even now your life hangs by a thread, and in a moment Atropos shall cut it.

PERSEUS: Thou, incarnate fiend, are the one whose thread has run out. I –

MEDUSA: You of weakest flesh, of beating heart and pulsing blood, nought shall save you now. Come forth to me. I am known as Medusa. My name is Nemesis.

PERSEUS: Speak not one word more, fiend of hades, but prepare to meet thy doom.

MEDUSA: Empty words for one so strong and brave - but vanity wins no battles! All your courage and armour cannot save you now – MAN!

PERSEUS: Mock me as you might, noisome being, loathsome fiend, foul hellion -

MEDUSA: Look at me when you speak to me...

PERSEUS (starting to turn round, then remembers): Oh ho! I don't think so! (advancing backwards a few steps across STAGE FRONT toward MEDUSA)

MEDUSA: So how do you propose to destroy me? By talking me to death?

PERSEUS: I am Perseus, Son of Zeus, beloved of the Gods! I flew here on winged sandals, made for me by Hermes and given to me by my heavenly father, Zeus. I hold a sword forged by Titan and a burnished shield, polished to a shine like the sun on still water, so that I may see you in its reflection yet not be turned to stone!

MED: I see... someone got his thinking-cap on!

PER: Indeed! In that thought was the seed of thy doom!

MED: Well, that's all very well, O Noble and Fearless One, but how exactly do you expect to be able to catch me if you've got to walk backwards all the time? I can evade you easily... eventually the sun will set, and you will be blind as Tiresias... hadn't thought of THAT, had you?

PER: Doubt not, loathsome one, I will smite thy head from thy shoulders long ere then. As the sun sets I shall be winging my way back to Corinth - with your head in a bag!

MED: A bag!? Is that the bag, hanging from your belt?...

PER: Yes.

MED: Hmmmm... looks a bit small to me... I don't think you've taken the snakes into account, they take up a lot of room...

PER: I'm sure it'll be adequate for you, Hound of Hell...

MEDUSA: Well, why don't you take a look at me, size me up, just to be on the safe side?

PERSEUS: Yes, perhaps (starts to turn to look, then suddenly realizes) – AHH! AH HAAA! Good try! Good try... but you've got to get up a lot earlier in the morning to put one over on me!...

MEDUSA: Yes, I'm beginning to see that. Now I'm really worried!

PERSEUS: So you should be, demon! Now, let's see where you are (raises shield and scans the interior of the cave. MEDUSA moves about, evading his gaze) Where are you, damn you?

MEDUSA: Somewhere else, evidently.

PERSEUS: Strive to avoid thy fate as thy might, nought can save thee now, vile beast. I am Perseus, Son of Zeus, beloved of the Gods!

MEDUSA (having evaded PERSEUS's attempts to find her reflection in his shield): Coo-ee, I'm over here (PERSEUS swings his shield about to try and locate her. MEDUSA picks something up and throws it across the cave to distract PERSEUS; it lands by his feet)

PERSEUS: What was that?

MEDUSA: Oh, something I knocked over in my desperate attempts to escape your eagle-eyed gaze. Damn it, I think it's broken... it's right by your feet... I wonder if you could throw it back to me, I need to see if I can repair it...

PERSEUS: My hands are full with the weapons of thy doom!

MEDUSA: That's OK, you can just kick it over to me... it's just by your right foot, on the outside...

PERSEUS (feeling about with his foot and finding it): Ah, I've got it! (Starts to turn towards MEDUSA to kick it back)

MEDUSA: that's it.. I'm just over here...

PERSEUS (about to turn to look at MEDUSA): Here, I... Agghh! Cursed fiend! You nearly had me again! (Something catches in his throat and he coughs)

MEDUSA: Well, you can't blame a girl for trying.

PERSEUS (voice rasping): Girl? Hellion... (coughs).

MEDUSA: Are you thirsty? Is your throat dry?

PERSEUS: Yes, it's this dry air and the dust...

MEDUSA: And a long flight from Corinth...

PERSEUS: Yes, that too.

MEDUSA: Would you like some water?

PERSEUS: Water? You would succour me with water?

MEDUSA: Yes... can't deny a doomed man his last wish!

PERSEUS: Ha! We'll see who is doomed! You... (coughs again)

MEDUSA (pouring a glass of water): Here, take it (holding out her hand to PERSEUS)

PERSEUS (starting to turn to take the water): Yes, thank you... Agggghh.... NO! You won't catch me out like that, you Hell-Hound!...

MEDUSA (sarcastically): Curses! My cunning plan undone. Here... hold your hand out and look away ... (PERSEUS does so, his gaze averted, and raises it to his lips, then stops)

PERSEUS: You've poisoned it! I'll bet you've poisoned it...

MEDUSA: Oh, for Goodness' sake... I'm Medusa the Gorgon! What do I need poison for - you big booby.

PERSEUS (cautiously sipping, then finally drinking, the water): Hmmph!...Oh, that's better... I suppose I ought to thank you...

MEDUSA: Don't strain yourself. It's not like we're jolly old pals or anything...

PERSEUS: Well, thank you anyway. Though I don't know why you want to do anything for me, given that I've come here to destroy you.

MEDUSA: Well... it's nice to talk to someone again...

PERSEUS: Talk? You call exchanging blood-curdling threats and insults a conversation?

MEDUSA: It's the closest I've had to one for a long time...

PERSEUS: And what, pray, does conversation matter to a monster? A cold-blooded killer, such as thyself?

MEDUSA: And what are you?

PERSEUS: I slay in the service of the Gods, and of all mankind!

MEDUSA: You have a choice.

PERSEUS: A choice that any decent man would make.

MEDUSA: Of course... Do the Right Thing!

PERSEUS: Are you normally so chatty?

MEDUSA: I wouldn't know... it's the first time I've exchanged more than two or three words with anyone who's come here...

PERSEUS: Ha! I don't believe it. I'll bet you taunt your victims! Play with them like a cat with a mouse... as you're trying to play with me!

MEDUSA: No, actually it usually goes a bit like this. I say -

“Hello! DON'T LOOK AT ME!”

And they say “Are you M...”

Then that's the end of it.

PERSEUS: Well... I have to admit that I'm finding all this a bit strange... you seem so like a... well... a decent sort... the water and everything...

MEDUSA: Everything? Oh yes, of course, the water and calling you a big booby and trying to turn you to stone...

PERSEUS: Hah ha! Yes, all that...

MEDUSA: Of course, none of the others had the secret weapon.. but it won't make any difference... you're not the first to try and do away with me... and I expect you won't be the last...

PERSEUS: Ah, but I will be! I am (together with MEDUSA) Perseus, Son of Zeus, Beloved of the Gods!

MEDUSA: Yes, we know!

PERSEUS: I am destined to triumph, to vanquish Evil wheresoever I find it...

MEDUSA: On a Mission from God, eh?

PERSEUS: Yes! Now, by the name of my Father and all the Gods of Olympus, I shall fulfil the sacred task entrusted to me! Prepare to meet thy destiny, Monster (raises SHIELD to look around for MEDUSA)

MEDUSA: Here I am! (stands up to let PERSEUS see her)

PERSEUS (averting his eyes before seeing her): Just a moment...

MEDUSA: What's the matter now?

PERSEUS: I have prepared myself over many a long day for this moment. I am merely bracing myself to gaze upon the unspeakable horror that is... Medusa!.... that monster, that obscenity, that... that...

MEDUSA: Fiend?

PERSEUS: Yes! That Fiend, that menace to the entire world... (he stands, taking deep breaths and gazing up into the air. Then he catches sight of himself in the shield and starts preening himself).

MEDUSA: Hey! Just who did you bring that mirror to look at?

PERSEUS: What? Oh, er... You, of course, loathsomeness personified!

MEDUSA: You're running out of expletives.

PERSEUS: What's an expletive?

MEDUSA: What you're saying to me.

PERSEUS: I will need no more!

MEDUSA: OK, but d'you think you could hurry things along a bit? I'm getting Gorgon's Cramp here.

PERSEUS: Very Well! (raises the SHIELD and finally seeing MEDUSA) But wait!... Who are you, child? Poor waif - fear not! I have come to rescue you... come to me, I shall protect thee! MEDUSA!!! Wheresoever you are hiding, come forth! Beast of Hades, hide not behind the frail body of this young maiden!...

MEDUSA (glancing behind her to see who PERSEUS is talking to, then returning to look at him): It's me! (waves her hand to a bemused PERSEUS)

PERSEUS: You? Medusa? But... but you CAN'T be Medusa!

MEDUSA: Why not?

PERSEUS: Well, you're... you're just a girl... you look so... normal!

MEDUSA: Well, for the most part I am... just a little matter of the snakes.

PERSEUS: But this is... They told me... I was expecting a loathsome thing hissing, spitting, all the signs of a being from Hell... a foul, crawling monster, the scourge of mankind, that excrescence, that hellion, that... that...

MEDUSA: Fiend?

PERSEUS: Yes! That Fiend... And now here YOU are... this isn't right at all... Are you SURE you're Medusa?

MEDUSA: What day is it?

PERSEUS: Monday - why?

MEDUSA: Oh, that's all right then... Monday, Wednesday and Fridays I'm sure I'm Medusa... Tuesdays, Thursdays and the weekend I think I'm the square root of two...

PERSEUS: Eh?

MEDUSA: (sotto voce) Oh Dear... never MIND!

PERSEUS: You're making fun of me! How dare you! I didn't come here to be insulted!!

MEDUSA: Where d'you normally go to be insulted?

PERSEUS: I will not put up with this relentless ridicule!

MEDUSA: Well, you can always go back to where you came from, I won't try and stop you...

PERSEUS (drawing himself up): No, much as it perplexes me I have a job to do, a mission to complete, a vocation to serve!...

MEDUSA: Well...

PERSEUS: Just a moment! You're wearing a headscarf...

MEDUSA : Yes.

PERSEUS : Why ?

MEDUSA : Errr... I'm having a bad hair day.

PERSEUS: But the snakes... they give you the power of death over all mankind – if they are concealed, can you still wreak your hellish doom?

MEDUSA: Hmmm... I don't know... No-one's ever caught me with the snakes all done up before...

PERSEUS (beginning to turn): So if I was to turn and look at you, I might NOT be turned to stone?!...

MEDUSA: Very possibly. But it would only take me a second to whip off the headscarf... I could have it off before you saw me...

PERSEUS: Hmmm...

MEDUSA: But maybe you'd be too fast for me... you're young, strong, virile... and you've got the secret weapon... I might jump, fumble it...

PERSEUS: I wonder (hesitating)

MEUSA: But then again, maybe I don't need the snakes to be invincible - maybe the fact of being The Gorgon is enough...

PERSEUS: Yessss....

MEDUSA (slowly approaching PERSEUS): Are you feeling lucky? Go on... make my day...

PERSEUS: NO! No, I dare not... It was made very clear in my risk assessment that the merest glimpse of you would turn me to stone. So - strive to avoid thy fate as thy might, nought can save thee now, vile beast. I am Perseus, Son of Zeus, beloved of the Gods! Ah HA! (as he spots her in the shield. M peers over his shoulder at her own reflection).

MEDUSA: Goodness... is my face really that bulbous?

PERSEUS: No, that's just the curvature of the metal. Actually... Now I look at you again, and taking the distortion into account, I can see that you're... you're so... I can scarcely believe my eyes....

MEDUSA: What can't you believe?

PERSEUS: I expected a loathsome thing, a beast, a monster... a... a...

MEDUSA: YES YES YES, we've been through all that...

PERSEUS: And... well... when all's said and done... you're just a girl... and... Well, you're really rather pretty...

MEDUSA (blushing and preening herself): Really? D'you really think so?

PERSEUS: Yes... yes I do... amazing!

MEDUSA: Goodness... nobody's looked at me twice in a long time.

PERSEUS: Yes... on that subject... though now it pains me, I must do what I came to do... I am Perseus, (MEDUSA joins mockingly in again) Son of Zeus, Beloved of the Gods!

MEDUSA: Just a minute, you're looking at me in the left-hand side of the shield...

PERSEUS: Yes?... So?...

MEDUSA: You DO realise that when you're looking at my reflection you're seeing the opposite of what you think you're looking at?

PERSEUS: What... what do you mean?

MEDUSA: Well, you're seeing me on your left, but in fact I'm on your right...

PERSEUS (Baffled): What? No I'm not...

MEDUSA: Look, if you stood on your head and looked at me in the shield then, I'd look as if I was upside down to you, right?

PERSEUS: Yes...?

MEDUSA: But I'D still be the right way up, YOU'RE the one who'd be upside down... do you get it? In a mirror, up is down and left is right...

PERSEUS: Hmmm... Yes, I see what you mean... I suppose...

MEDUSA (ASIDE to AUDIENCE): He bought it!

PERSEUS (moving backwards but round to his left, towards STAGE FRONT): Beast, you have sown the seeds of your own destruction... and you think YOU'RE the clever one!...

(PERSEUS draws his SWORD and moves towards M, who sidles round out of the way UPSTAGE, then rushes towards him from his right)...

PERSEUS: Where?... what are you doing? (M starts tickling him)... Owwww... stop it... what d'you think you're doing?

MEDUSA: Tickling you.

PERSEUS: No, you can't... I'm not ticklish!(trying not to squirm about)

MEDUSA: I think you are.

PERSEUS: No I'm not... I'm a hero, beloved of the Gods, son of Zeus! Owwww, stop it

(continues to squirm for a moment, then takes a wild swing behind him with the sword. M jumps back, out of the way. P takes a few more sweeps with the sword, then suddenly stops). OWWWWWWW! Oh, my God... my arm (drops the sword but leaves his arm behind him locked in position)

MEDUSA: What's the matter?

PERSEUS: I don't know... my arm... I can't move it... (drops his shield, which lands on his foot). OWWWWW! Oh, God, I've broken something (hops about trying to keep his balance, with his arm still stuck out).... Oh NO! (finally falls to the floor).

MEDUSA: Keep still for a moment... and DON'T LOOK AT ME, just stare at the floor and think of nice things for a moment (rushes to get a BLINDFOLD).

PERSEUS: You were supposed to be asleep when I arrived...

MEDUSA (returning with a BLINDFOLD and securing it over PERSEUS's eyes from behind him): Was I? Well, I'm a morning person, and anyway I'm a light sleeper... even if I had been asleep I would have woken the moment you came near the cave... the racket you made..

PERSEUS: Yes, I lost my footing coming in...

MEDUSA:... you're not the first to try and do away with me... and I expect you won't be the last...

Though I don't expect anyone else to do the walking-backwards business...

PERSEUS: Hmmph...

MEDUSA: I did wonder about that. I thought maybe it was a new battlefield tactic - move backwards towards the enemy so they think you're retreating...

PERSEUS: Yes, that turned out to be a bit of a bust... What are you doing now?

MEDUSA: Well, firstly I'm going to make sure this blindfold's on properly you so you don't inadvertently catch sight of me (does so). I've got enough statues out the back, I don't want one in here cluttering up my cave for me to trip over, it's small enough as it is...

PERSEUS: OH, my arm...!

MEDUSA: There (finishes tying the blindfold). Now, let's see about this arm of yours... I think you've dislocated your shoulder.

PERSEUS: How did I do that?

MEDUSA: Swinging that great heavy sword around behind your back I should imagine... what did you expect?

PERSEUS: I wasn't supposed to be swinging it about.

MEDUSA: No, I was supposed to be asleep.

PERSEUS: Well, yes...

MEDUSA: Didn't really think things through, did you? Sorry, I'll try to be more obliging next time (wrenches his arm suddenly).

PERSEUS: OWWWWW.

MEDUSA: There, I think it's back. Don't move it, or it'll just come straight back out again. Let me put it in a sling (does so). Now... how's this foot of yours?

PERSEUS: Sore. I don't think I can stand on it.

MEDUSA: Hmm.. you probably broke something, dropping that great big bronze shield...

PERSEUS: I think it's my second toe.

MEDUSA: Here. Let me strap it up (does so). There. Now. Let's see if you can stand up (helps him to do so. He wobbles about). Here, use this as a crutch (hands him a crutch-like stick. PERSEUS stands there, blindfolded, arm in sling and leaning on a crutch. MEDUSA stands back and regards him. She kneels as if in supplication)

MEDUSA: Hail Perseus, Son of Zeus, Beloved of the Gods!

PERSEUS: You're making fun of me again.

MEDUSA: Oh no, I'm not... really...

PERSEUS: Yes you are.

MEDUSA: Well, maybe just a little bit.

PERSEUS: I'd like to sit down.

MEDUSA (helping him to do so): There, how's that?

PERSEUS: Better.

MEDUSA: Is that blindfold tight enough? It looks like it might be slipping.

PERSEUS: I think it's all right, though there is a bit of light coming in from underneath.

MEDUSA: Hmm, thought so. Stay there just a moment and I'll get a smaller one (Gets up and selects another from those hanging at the back of the cave).

PERSEUS: How many blindfolds have you got?

MEDUSA: Oh, quite a few.

PERSEUS: Why?

MEDUSA: Well, sometimes people arrive who AREN'T out to do away with me... sometimes they're just curious, or they're ship-wrecked or lost... I don't wish them any harm... and they're all different shapes and sizes, and maybe they'd be good to talk to, find out what's going on in the world outside, so -

PERSEUS: I didn't know you did that! That's really considerate. On Olympus they told me...

MEDUSA: ... of course, most of them just come to gawk at me or try and chop my head off, like you.

PERSEUS: Well... wouldn't it be easier just to turn them all to stone? You'd save yourself a lot of trouble.

MEDUSA: Yes, I suppose I would... but I'm not just an indiscriminate killer... Well, I am, but that's because everyone insists on looking at me before I can get a word in edgeways...

PERSEUS: But I thought you hated ALL mankind?

MEDUSA: Who told you that?

PERSEUS: My heavenly father Zeus, Athene, Poseidon...

MEDUSA: The Ministry of Truth, in other words...

PERSEUS: So you don't hate everyone?

MEDUSA: You're still alive, aren't you?

PERSEUS: Yes... WHY am I still alive? I was helpless... you could have...

MEDUSA: You're such a witty raconteur!

PERSEUS: Do you think so?

MEDUSA (stifling a laugh): You're very literal-minded, aren't you?

PERSEUS: Yes, I suppose I am... But what about the other ones who come here deliberately to kill you... ? Surely they must KNOW what you can do?

MEDUSA: Well, mostly the ones who come here deliberately are either cynics or stoics. The cynics don't believe I can turn them to stone. The stoics know I can, but they don't mind.

PERSEUS: So how many have come here?

MEDUSA: Oh, I don't know... dozens. I've got them all out the back there (nodding to STAGE LEFT), all lined up. That's the real reason I didn't kill you – I didn't want to have to drag another great heavy statue out the back again...

PERSEUS: You're pulling my leg again, aren't you? Aren't you?

MEDUSA: I'll let you know in an hour or two!

PERSEUS: So you've assembled them all out in the back? I wonder if I might know of some of them...

MEDUSA: Yes, I'm sure you might. Sometimes I get... Sometimes I go and talk to them... I run my hands over them and wonder what they were like, what we might have talked about... There's one old guy with a really, REALLY bad-tempered frown, I'll bet he's never smiled at anything in his life - I'll bet he was a stoic... And there's another one with the biggest poppy-out eyes you've ever seen, he's just amazing. I'll bet he could win a staring contest with a tree. Then there's...

PERSEUS: Is there no-one else here? No helpmeet, no servant, no...

MEDUSA: No, just me and the pigeons...

PERSEUS: How long have you been alone here?

MEDUSA: Oh, I don't know... ever since I came here... I've lost count of the years...

PERSEUS (after a pause): You must be very lonely. (M looks down and smooths out her skirt and says nothing for a moment)

MEDUSA: Hey! Have you heard the one about the man who walks into a tailor's shop and drops a great pile of old torn clothes on the counter? The tailor looks at the man, then picks up the torn rags and inspects them, then he looks back at the man and says "Euripedes?" And the man nods and says "Yes. Eumenides?" (M falls back laughing).

Oh Goodness... I love that joke... I always crack up whenever I think about it, it's great to be able to tell it to someone.

PERSEUS(remaining unmoved): Hmm...

MEDUSA: You don't like it?

PERSEUS: Errr...

MEDUSA: It's a play on words...OK.... So what exactly were you going to do once you'd chopped my head off?

PERSEUS: Well, the plan was that a winged horse would spring from the blood flowing from your neck, and I would fly back on it.

MEDUSA: A winged horse?

PERSEUS: Yes... I was going to call it "Pegasus"...

MEDUSA: Hmm...

PERSEUS:... and I was to fly back to Corinth on Pegasus and wait for the multitudes to assemble. Then I would pull your head from the bag and cry out "Behold! The head of the Gorgon". And they would all fall to their knees in gratitude and hail me as a hero.

MEDUSA: And where are you now on that plan? Do you still intend to decapitate me?

PERSEUS: No, not at all. They told me a lot of fibs. You're a splendid girl and I wouldn't harm a hair on your head.

MEDUSA: Well, I haven't actually got any hair on my head now, but I appreciate the thought.

PERSEUS: Yes, how did that happen? Were you born with snakes on your head?

MEDUSA: No, I was just an ordinary girl..... I had beautiful hair... long and thick and lustrous... I suppose I was quite vain, really...

PERSEUS: Why have you got them tied up in a headscarf?

MEDUSA: Oh, I often do that... sometimes they can get a bit fractious.

PERSEUS: Fractious?

MEDUSA: Yes, they fight among themselves. There's a particular one on the right, just over my ear, which always picks fights with the others. If I try and separate them they bite me, and it stings like a bitch.

PERSEUS: And tying them up helps to calm them down?

MEDUSA: Yes... you know, same principle as when you put a sheet over a birdcage...

PERSEUS: So what happened? How did you end up with snakes instead of hair?

MEDUSA: Oh... let's talk about it some other time.

PERSEUS: No, go on, I want to know what happened. You've ignited my curiosity.

MEDUSA: Well, it involved Poseidon...

PERSEUS: Poseidon? Oh, that's funny.

MEDUSA: Why? What's funny about it?

PERSEUS: Oh, nothing, just something to do with someone else.

MEDUSA: That someone-else wouldn't be a pretty young woman, I suppose?

PERSEUS: Well, yes, as a matter of fact she is. How did you know that?

MEDUSA: Just an educated guess. What's her name?

PERSEUS: Andromeda.

MEDUSA: Oh? And what's she done to attract his attention?

PERSEUS: She hasn't done anything herself. Her father's upset him, though.

MEDUSA: What did he do?

PERSEUS: Oh, I don't know, didn't make a big enough sacrifice in his honour or used the wrong sort of bull or something.

MEDUSA: Hmmm... touchy, aren't they?

PERSEUS: Yes, Prima Donnas, the lot of them. Sometimes it's like walking on eggshells. I'd hate to be an ordinary mortal. Spend half your life propitiating them and hoping you don't offend them... The amount of time you have to waste...

MEDUSA: So what's this Andromeda's part in it? Does Poseidon want to... have her?

PERSEUS: What, eat her?

MEDUSA: No no, I meant... you know... take her... against her will...

PERSEUS: Oh!... No, not this time. He's got an eye for a pretty girl, but on this occasion he's tied her to a rock and sent a sea monster to devour her.

MEDUSA: Oh... how gentlemanly...

PERSEUS: Yes, she's my next job. I've got to go and rescue her.

MEDUSA: Oh! Well, don't you think you ought to get a move on?

PERSEUS: No, she'll be fine. I've dealt with sea monsters before... see one you've seen them all.

MEDUSA: But what if you're too late to rescue her?

PERSEUS: I won't be, sea monsters take ages to arrive. They're quite slow and you've got to book them well in advance. Anyway, enough about her, let's get back to you. I want to know why you ended up with a headful of snakes.

MEDUSA: No, let's hear more about Andromeda, doesn't she...

PERSEUS: Oh blow Andromeda, tell me what happened to you...

MEDUSA: I don't really want to...

PERSEUS: Go on!

MEDUSA: Look, can't we...

PERSEUS (playfully): Are YOU ticklish? (starts trying to tickle her. She angrily knocks his hands away)

MEDUSA (losing her temper): Stop it!

PERSEUS: Oh... Sorry... I was only trying to -

MEDUSA: I WAS RAPED. OK? You satisfied now?

PERSEUS: Raped!?!?

MEDUSA: Yes...

PERSEUS: Oh, my God... I'm so sorry... why couldn't I keep my big mouth shut?

MEDUSA (after a pause): It's all right. It would have had to come out sometime.

PERSEUS: I'm so sorry I kept on at you. I had no right... I am a big booby, aren't I?

MEDUSA: You're not so bad...

PERSEUS: Who did it?

MEDUSA: Poseidon. He became obsessed with my long lovely locks and was determined to have me. I tried to flee, but it's hard to outrun a God. After he'd finished with me Athene found out what he'd done. She had a big pash on him back then.

PERSEUS: Athene!... that figures... she wears the trousers on Olympus...

MEDUSA: Yeah... Well, she was so furious that she turned my hair into snakes, and whomsoever looked at me was turned into stone, so I was driven from home and ended up here, where no-one could see me.

PERSEUS: So you were raped by Poseidon, and then Athene blamed you for being raped and turned you into a monster?

MEDUSA: That's about the size of it. It wasn't just because of the snakes I had to leave home, though. At first I didn't even know what the snakes did... they didn't come with instructions. After it happened everyone blamed me. I just hid away. All my neighbours and friends, all my family... they all turned against me, like it was my fault. They said I must have led him on... Huh! Like you can lead on a God. After that it was like I didn't exist... People who'd promised to be my friend for life just... I became a non-person, I was dirty and unclean, not fit company for decent people. So I left...

PERSEUS: That's terrible... (feels for her hand. She takes his after a moment). And now they've sent me to chop your head off.

MEDUSA: And now they've sent you to chop my head off.

PERSEUS: And they said you're the monster! When this is all over I'm going to take you up to Olympus and show all the rest of the Gods what Athene's done to you, an innocent young girl... She needs to be taught a lesson... And I'll tell them about Poseidon as well...

MEDUSA: I wonder if a Gorgon can turn a God to stone?

PERSEUS: Hmmm... be interesting to find out, wouldn't it? I've got a good mind to go up there and tell them what I think of them right now... in fact, that's just what I'm going to do - here, help me up (starts to hobble to his feet).

MEDUSA (reluctantly helping him): Look, shouldn't you think about this a bit more carefully? You're in no condition to travel.

PERSEUS: Oh, I'll manage... where are my sandals? (starts to move around in search of them but begins to lose his balance. M catches him).

MEDUSA: See what I mean?

PERSEUS (hastily): I just lost my balance because of the stick and the sling...

MEDUSA: Yes... but what happens if you lose your balance at 5000 feet over Thessaly?

PERSEUS: Hmm... perhaps you're right. In that case I'll tell them from right here (looks up)

PATER? ATHENE? I KNOW YOU CAN HEAR ME! I THINK YOU'RE A BUNCH OF TOTAL ROTTERS. I'M HERE WITH MEDUSA AND SHE'S AN ABSOLUTE BRICK. YOU TOLD ME A LOT OF LIES ABOUT HER AND I'M NOT GOING TO CHOP HER HEAD OFF FOR ANYTHING AND YOU CAN DO WHAT YOU LIKE ABOUT IT. OH, AND POSEIDON? MEDUSA'S TOLD ME WHAT YOU DID TO HER, SO I'M GOING TO RESCUE ANDROMEDA AND I'M GOING TO KILL YOUR SEA MONSTER, AND THEN I'M GOING TO COME UP THERE AND STICK YOUR TRIDENT RIGHT UP YOUR BOTTOM. SEE HOW YOU LIKE BEING VIOLATED!

MEDUSA: My Goodness, that's telling them.

PERSEUS: Too right it is. (Sound of something fast and heavy, like an artillery shell, whooshing by at close range, then a colossal bang which shakes the cave)

MEDUSA: What was that?

PERSEUS: Thunderbolt... Poseidon, most likely... he always was a lousy shot (to the sky again) I'M IN AN AIR-RAID SHELTER YOU IDIOT (another one lands nearby, shaking the cave again. PERSEUS looks up at the ceiling and blows a big raspberry)

(They both sit back down, PERSEUS assisted by MEDUSA)

MEDUSA: So... do you get time to... SEE anybody in between whizzing around being a hero and saving everybody?

PERSEUS: See anybody? What do you mean?

MEDUSA: You know... Is there anyone... Special back home?

PERSEUS: Special?

MEDUSA: Come on... have you got a girlfriend tucked away somewhere?

PERSEUS: Well... There's somebody everyone expects me to marry.

MEDUSA (crestfallen): Oh. I bet she's really pretty...

PERSEUS: Yes, she's a real beauty. A knockout.

MEDUSA: Hmmm... What's her name?

PERSEUS: Andromeda.

MEDUSA: ANDROMEDA?

PERSEUS: Yes.

MEDUSA: What, the same Andromeda who's waiting to be devoured by a sea monster???

PERSEUS: Yes.

MEDUSA: So this is how you treat the girl you love??

PERSEUS: Oh, I don't love her! I never said I did, did I? I'm sure I didn't.

MEDUSA: But I thought...

PERSEUS: I said everybody expects me to marry her. Doesn't mean I love her. Different thing altogether.

MEDUSA: Oh!

PERSEUS: I mean, she's very NICE, and I'm sure we'd make a very handsome couple, me a hero, she a great beauty and all that, but...

MEDUSA: But what?

PERSEUS: Well, she's like... she's like a Grecian Urn - beautiful but empty. Good Gracious - I never thought of it like that before... but it's quite true...

MEDUSA: So you're not so hot on the idea of getting hitched?

PERSEUS: Not to her, no. We'd be bored stiff and throwing pots at each other after a few weeks. There's no spark between us, not like between... (shuts up suddenly and starts playing with his sandals)

MEDUSA: D'you mean...

PERSEUS: Could you pass me my shield? I think I might have dented it when I dropped it on my foot.

MEDUSA (passing him the shield): Here...

PERSEUS: Thank you (feels around the rim)

MEDUSA: Yes, look, just there... a tiny little dent, right on the edge.

PERSEUS: Oh yes, I thought so... should be able to beat it back into shape again without too much trouble.

MEDUSA: D'you think you're going to need it again?

PERSEUS: No, at least, not for what I brought it for.

MEDUSA: It is a very nice shield.

PERSEUS: Yes, it is.

MEDUSA: Very well-made, very artistic... love all those guys in sandals and things with wings

PERSEUS: It is... very pretty... very well made...

MEDUSA: Yes. Makes a nice mirror too... (Pauses). That still leaves the matter of what you're going to do about taking my head back to Corinth.

PERSEUS: If I go back there I'll take your head all right, but with the rest of you attached.

MEDUSA: IF you go back? What'll you do if you don't?

PERSEUS: Oh, I don't know... quite frankly, I don't care... not now.

MEDUSA: You don't? Why not?

PERSEUS: Because I'm fed up with it all! When you're a Hero everyone expects you to be heroic all the time. Sometimes I just want to go for a walk, or sit down and listen to some music or read the paper. But whenever I do, it's "Oh Perseus! Go and rescue Andromeda, Oh Perseus! Go and destroy that fearsome monster...". Half the time they just want a bit of entertainment, and if I hesitate they all go

“Perseus, you’re the son of Zeus, beloved of the Gods... don’t just sit there, DO something.” You’re only as good as your last great deed...

MEDUSA: Hmmm... I can see how that would get on your nerves after a while.

PERSEUS: Of course, it’s not just me, there’s Odysseus and Ajax and Achilles... Mind, some of them love all the attention... look at Hercules, he can’t get enough of it... but then he’s got the body of a God and the IQ of the things that grow on your shower-curtain.

MEDUSA: Really?

PERSEUS: Oh, yes... ask him to do anything and he just goes “DUH Ohh... OK...”. D’you know, Themistocles is running a book on whether they can get him to go and clean the Augean stables.

MEDUSA: Never?!?!

PERSEUS: Yes... but I don’t think he’ll fall for it... he’s dense, but not even Hercules is that gullible.

MEDUSA: So what would you do instead? It’s hard to cap being a hero.

PERSEUS: D’you know what I’d really like to do?

MEDUSA: No.

PERSEUS: Well, I’d... oh... No, no... you’d laugh..

MEDUSA: Oh go on, tell me...

PERSEUS: No, you’ll poke fun at me... I know you’re a lot brighter than me, and you can make me feel really stupid.

MEDUSA: Promise not to.

PERSEUS: No...

MEDUSA: Pretty please...

PERSEUS: Oh all right... if you promise you won’t laugh...

MEDUSA: Cross my heart and hope not to be beheaded.

PERSEUS: All right... I’d really like to be a Blacksmith.

MEDUSA: A BLACKSMITH??? (laughs).

PERSEUS: I knew you'd laugh!

MEDUSA: I'm not laughing, really... it's just so... so... surprising! Of all the things...

PERSEUS: Yes, a Blacksmith... I love horses, you see... there's nothing I'd like better than to work with them, shoeing them and generally looking after them, making bridle bits and brasses...

MEDUSA: If you love them that much why don't you breed them? That's a noble thing to be doing - breaking them in, training them and that...

PERSEUS: Yes, I'd love to... but the truth is, I've got a terrible sense of balance... whenever I get on one I keep falling off.

MEDUSA: OH! So is that why you made such a racket coming here?

PERSEUS: Yes... lost my balance trying to land.

MEDUSA: And when you tried to stand up just now... all that business about the stick and sling unbalancing you...

PERSEUS: Hmm, I didn't want to let on, but it's out now

MEDUSA: And they expected you to ride a flying horse all the way back to Corinth?

PERSEUS: Yes... I must admit, I was quite apprehensive about that.

MEDUSA: I'm not surprised... "Hey, who's that dangling from the neck of that flying horse up there?" "Oh, it must be Perseus again... wish he'd learn to ride that thing properly... they ought to strap him in or give him a parachute". You'll end up like Icarus.

PERSEUS: Well, at least I can swim.

MEDUSA: Hmmm... so, Blacksmith it is.

PERSEUS: But of course they won't let me... they're determined that I must be a Hero, and being a blacksmith would be beneath my dignity.

MEDUSA: Well, Vulcan does it and nobody laughs at him.

PERSEUS: Vulcan was born to it... and back then, people weren't so hoity-toity about what you did. There wasn't so much snobbery. But now, people are so status-conscious... you notice how everyone worships my Dad, but nobody worships Vulcan.

MEDUSA: You ever met him?

PERSEUS: Vulcan? Oh, Yes, I know him very well. I used to play around his smithy when I was a lad, that's where I got the idea from in the first place. He used to let me stroke the horses while he shod them.

MEDUSA: What's he like?

PERSEUS: Oh, he's actually very nice for a Titan, once you get to know him. He can be a bit gruff and taciturn, doesn't suffer fools easily, but take him as you find him and he'll do the same for you.

MEDUSA: That's nice... my experience of the Gods hasn't been so great.

PERSEUS: Mmmm, I know. That's why I'm here.

MEDUSA: Hmm... for now.

PERSEUS: Yes, for now...

MEDUSA (looking down and playing with her dress): Ah Well... you'll be off soon rescuing Andromeda... I guess I won't see you again.

PERSEUS (sitting up and starting to prepare to leave): Yes... that is, No (with a sigh)... I'd better get all this tackle off (starts removing sling, etc)

MEDUSA: DON'T TAKE THE BLINDFOLD OFF!

PERSEUS: No, of course not...

MEDUSA: You know, that arm could pop out again at any moment, and then there's your toe... don't you think you ought to stay here... for a while... maybe...

PERSEUS: Oh, it's OK, I'm half-Olympian, I heal really quickly!

MEDUSA (deflated but resolute): You'd better get going...

PERSEUS (after a pause): I suppose... can you show me the way out?

MEDUSA: Yes... give me your hand... (PERSEUS does so, and they walk slowly towards STAGE RIGHT)

PERSEUS (taking MEDUSA's hands): Well.... Bye then... (turns to go, then turns back to MEDUSA for a moment)... I...

MEDUSA: YES???

PERSEUS: This has been... very interesting...

MEDUSA: Yes, it has... very.

PERSEUS: Yes, very. Very, very interesting. I'll... I'll... you've got me thinking about all sorts of things...

MEDUSA: Have I?

PERSEUS: Yes... I'm not used to it... and –

MEDUSA: And what?

PERSEUS: Oh, nothing... I can't...

MEDUSA: Can't what?

PERSEUS: I can't... OH, I don't know... you tie me in knots...

MEDUSA: Well let me help you untie them!...

PERSEUS: I... I can't - I've got to go! (Turns and leaves suddenly, then comes back) I need the sandals...

MEDUSA: Oh, yes, of course.. (hands them to him. PERSEUS puts them on, then turns to leave STAGE RIGHT)

PERSEUS: And could you take the blind off, please?

MEDUSA: Of courses (does so)

PERSEUS: I am a big booby, aren't I?

MEDUSA: Sometimes... sometimes so am I...

PERSEUS: Part of the Human Condition...

MEDUSA: Do I still count as Human?

PERSEUS: Yes, of course... if I do then so do you... more than -

MEDUSA: More than what?

PERSEUS: More than... Oh, I wish I could look into your eyes... but if I turned back to you I don't think I'd ever be able to turn round this way again... and I have to face this way... I've got to do my duty... I must go (turns and leaves abruptly. WHOOSH).

MEDUSA (watching him as he exits STAGE LEFT, then starts): Hey, you forgot your...

(MEDUSA stands there for a while, watching PERSEUS go off. Then she turns and returns to STAGE FRONT CENTRE. She takes out the pack of cards and prepares to play solitaire.

Suddenly there is a cacophony of birds screeching and squawking OFFSTAGE RIGHT. MEDUSA rushes to STAGE RIGHT, hoping it's PERSEUS returning. But the cacophony fades. Then she moves back towards STAGE LEFT, as if to go out to the stone figures)

MEDUSA: Hey guys!...

(MEDUSA, with a disconsolate shrug, returns to STAGE CENTRE, sits down and gets the cards out again to start playing solitaire)

MEDUSA: Easy come, easy go... (She gets the deck of cards out, sits down and prepares to start playing solitaire).

(After a while there is a sudden SWOOSH, a clatter of dustbins, etc outside STAGE RIGHT. MEDUSA drops her cards and gets up, starting to rush towards STAGE RIGHT. PERSEUS returns, entering from STAGE RIGHT, walking backwards)

MEDUSA: Perseus!

PERSEUS: I came back!

MEDUSA: Really?

PERSEUS: Yes. I'm an idiot!...

MEDUSA: Not entirely...

PERSEUS: Could you do the blindfold please?

MEDUSA: Yes, of course (does so). Are you ok? What happened?

PERSEUS: Ah, that's better (turns round to face MEDUSA)

MEDUSA (looking around): Why did you come back? Did you leave something? The shield?...

PERSEUS: No - Yes!

MEDUSA: Well, here's the shield – I thought you might -

PERSEUS: Oh BLOW the bloody shield... I didn't come back for that...

MEDUSA (Hopefully): Then what DID you come back for?

PERSEUS: You know what they say about experience...

MEDUSA: What do they say?

PERSEUS: That it's what you get when you're looking for something else...

MEDUSA: YES???...

PERSEUS: ... When I came here I was looking for something, and...

MEDUSA: Yes?

PERSEUS: ... and I found it... but not what I was expecting... something else... that I was looking for, except that I didn't know I was... something I wasn't expecting at all... and never hoped to find...

MEDUSA: And what might that be, Son of Zeus, beloved of the Gods? ...

PERSEUS: Fiddlesticks to the Gods!... Right now, I'm just a Hero, standing in front of a Monster, asking her to love him...

MEDUSA (taking P's hands in hers): I'll see what I can do.

PERSEUS: Because I –

MEDUSA: I know. It's ok, we've got time... we don't need to start measuring up for curtains just yet...

PERSEUS: Oh let's!

MEDUSA: You don't want to find you've exchanged one empty Grecian urn for another...

PERSEUS: I haven't... I KNOW I haven't!... You're full to the brim with...

MEDUSA: With what?

PERSEUS: With... with... stuff!...

MEDUSA: You sure know how to flatter a girl!

PERSEUS:... ideas... thoughts... when I got here I was so certain of what I was supposed to do... I'd never really thought about it... I'd never had to... and within half-an-hour you'd turned everything upside down, shaken everything loose and sent all my certainties rolling in all directions, like a bag of marbles emptied onto the floor!

MEDUSA: Sorry to rain on your parade...

PERSEUS: I'm not sorry... rain makes things grow, seeds you didn't know were there bursting up into life and colour... Listen to me!!!

MEDUSA: You're turning into something else... something different.

PERSEUS: Turning into something else? What?

MEDUSA: Yourself... (They embrace, then MEDUSA holds PERSEUS away at arm's length) Why don't you go and sort out Andromeda and the sea monster... Do your duty... then you could come back and we could –

PERSEUS: I could be away for ages... I don't know how long Poseidon's lease on the monster's got to run...

MEDUSA: I can wait... I've done it before...

PERSEUS (gently breaking free of the embrace): You've spent enough time alone... So have I, if it comes to that... We could go somewhere, away from here... (they sit down, STAGE CENTRE)

MEDUSA: But I can't go anywhere!

PERSEUS: Not on your own, no, but... if you had somebody with you, to look after you...

MEDUSA: Someone who has to wear a blindfold all the time? I wonder who'd be looking after who...

PERSEUS: Yes... I said you're brighter than me...

MEDUSA: It's ok, worse things happen at sea, we'll manage!

PERSEUS: That still leaves the business of what to do about taking your head back to Corinth.

MEDUSA: Yes...

PERSEUS: Hmmm...

(They both sit, heads in hands, looking despondent. Then suddenly M gets an idea)

MEDUSA: I've got it!

PERSEUS: What?

MEDUSA: You don't have to have anyone's head in the bag.

PERSEUS: But...

MEDUSA: Don't you see? You can put ANYTHING in it, I don't know, a, a coconut or a rock, big bunch of bananas, it doesn't matter...

PERSEUS: But they'll see...

MEDUSA: No they won't! Don't you get it? You go back to Corinth, stand up in front of the gathered multitudes, hold the bag up and reach into it and say "Behold, the head of the Gorgon!"

And they'll all go

"NO, DON'T SHOW US THE HEAD OF THE GORGON!!! WE'LL TAKE YOUR WORD FOR IT!"

PERSEUS (starts laughing and rocks back helplessly): Oh, my Goodness, that's funny!

MEDUSA (looking bewildered): It's not that funny...

PERSEUS: No... Euripedes... Eumenides... Oh, my Goodness...

MEDUSA (half to herself): Uh Huh...

PERSEUS: Actually, that's a very good idea. About the head in the bag....

MEDUSA: Or the bananas or whatever...

PERSEUS: Come on, let's go and get it out of the way...

MEDUSA: But what about Andromeda?

PERSEUS: Oh dash it, yes... but... Wait a minute... I've got it!

MEDUSA: Got what?

PERSEUS: I can get my twin brother to rescue her.

MEDUSA: You've got a twin brother?

PERSEUS: Yes... he's a bit of a black sheep... a guilty secret, really, he's nuts about Andromeda... in fact he tried to pinch her from under my nose... got himself banished... nobody's supposed to know about him!

MEDUSA: Oh! And where is he now?

PERSEUS: They packed him off to the far frozen North, among the Picts... but I can get him back in a trice.

MEDUSA: What's his name?

PERSEUS: Hamish. He'd like nothing better to take my place, rescue Andromeda and settle down with her. He's the spitting image of me, nobody'll twig that he's not me. He can take the banana-bag to Corinth and... oh Dear (starts laughing again)... Euripedes...I'll get on to it straight away! I know - I'll write a message and send it by Hermes.

MEDUSA: Hermes? Will it get there in time?

PERSEUS: Oh, I should think so... unless he can't find the place, or there's nobody in when he gets there... no! It'll be fine!

MEDUSA: And then what?

PERSEUS: We'll go off somewhere, somewhere nobody knows us... find a smithy for sale and set up in business...

MEDUSA: But what about my snakes? Someone's bound to find out!

PERSEUS: Not if we're careful. We'll live out in the country... in a house with lots of mirrors... and I'll wear a blindfold when I'm not being a Smith!

MEDUSA: D'you think we could really do it?

PERSEUS: We'll find a way. Come on, bunk up... (pats his bottom)... piggy-back!

MEDUSA (getting onto his back): Will those things carry two of us?

PERSEUS: Oh yes, they're rated at twenty brake horse-power each.

MEDUSA: How will you see where we're going?

PERSEUS: I won't, but you can give me directions.

MEDUSA: Oh... OK.

(PERSEUS & MEDUSA leave STAGE RIGHT)

PERSEUS (voice-off): OK, here we go... (WHOOSH!) ...

(STAGE goes dark. Then a SPOTLIGHT comes up STAGE LEFT. ANDROMEDA is kneeling, chained to a ROCK and bemoaning her fate. One of the CHORUS comes on and stands next to ANDROMEDA with a sign saying “ANDROMEDA”. Suddenly there is a SWOOSH and HAMISH appears, looking identical to PERSEUS, armour, etc)

ANDROMEDA: Oh, Perseus, you’ve come to rescue me!

HAMISH: Och Aye! (STAGE GOES DARK)

FIN

* Quoted from the film THE GHOST AND MRS MUIR (Twentieth Century Fox, 1947)