

Perseus and the Gorgon - A Hero's Headhunt

The Story of Perseus and the Gorgon told in a series of short scenes with optional connective narration

by **Nicholas Richards**

Characters:

Athene

Hermes

Envoy

Voice of the Oracle

Priest

Acrisius

Dictys

Danaë

Perseus

Polydectes

Enyo

Pemphredo

Deino

Styx

Orphne

Gorgyra

Medusa

Stheno

Euryale

Cepheus

Cassiopeia

Andromeda

Phineas

Steward

(24 separate characters/ could be played by separate groups of 2 - 5)

Who's who

Athene and **Hermes** – deities who play the part of Narrators, as well as descending to Earth in scene 4 to give aid to Perseus

Envoy – sent by Acrisius to consult the Oracle

Voice of the Oracle – in the head of...

Priest – who interprets the message from the Oracle

Acrisius – King of Argos

Danaë [pron. *Dan-a-ee*]– ill-treated daughter of Acrisius

Dictys – fisherman, brother of Polydectes, King of Seriphos

Perseus – Danaë's son

Polydectes [-ees] – King of Seriphos

Enyo}

Deino} [Day-no]

Pemphredo [Pem-free-do}
– The Graeae [pron. Gray-ee] The Grey Sisters
Styx [Sticks}
Orphne [Orf-nee}
Gorgyra
- Stygian Nymphs
Medusa
Stheno [Stheeno}
Euryale [You-ree-ay-lee}
the three Gorgons
Cepheus [See-fyoos] – King of Joppa
Cassiopeia [Cassio-pey-a] – wife of Cepheus, mother of...
Andromeda – daughter of Cepheus and Cassiopeia
Phineas [Fih-nee-us]– arrogant youth, betrothed to Andromeda
Steward – games official

Scene 1 – *The Oracle*

The envoy of King Acrisius consults the oracle

Scene 2 – *Breaking news in Argos*

The Envoy tells Acrisius what the Oracle foretold

Scene 3 – *Dark Memories*

Danae recalls her dreadful time in Argos

Scene 4 – *A Present for Polydectes*

Perseus agrees to fetch King Polydectes the Gorgon's head

Scene 5 – *Help from Hermes and Athene*

Hermes and Athene come to Perseus' aid

Scene 6 - *Eye Spy*

Perseus visits the Grey Sisters

Scene 7 – *Equipping a hero*

The Nymphs provide useful equipment

Scene 8 - *Getting a head*

Perseus meets the Gorgons

Scene 9 – *Asking about Andromeda*

Perseus shows concern for a sacrificial maid

Scene 10 – *Air-Sea Rescue*

Perseus rescues Andromeda

Scene 11 – *Wedding Plans*

Objections are raised to Perseus marrying Andromeda

Scene 12 – *Polydectes gets what he asked for*

Polydectes gets what he asked for

Scene 13 – *Funeral Games at Larissa*

Perseus makes contact with the grandfather he never knew

The story of Perseus is told with a mixture of narration and brief, dramatised scenes. The narration is delivered by Athene and Hermes - who also take part in Scene 4.

1 The Oracle

ATHENE: The oracle!

HERMES: The oracle!

ATHENE: } (Together)

HERMES: } Let us start our tale with the oracle.

ATHENE That gave a king unwelcome news...

HERMES: A message unequivocal.

(An envoy of King Acrisius stands centre stage. He has come to consult the oracle. The elderly priest of the oracle sits on a tripod and interprets the voice of the oracle as it booms from the back. Evidently the oracle's voice is heard in the priest's head as the priest needs to speak before the Envoy hears it.)

ENVOY: Greetings, o priest of the oracle!

(Pause. The priest seems not to register the presence of the Envoy.)

ENVOY: I come from Argos...

(Pause)

ENVOY: From King Acrisius himself.

(Pause)

ENVOY: The king wishes to know whether...

ORACLE: KING ACRISIUS WILL HAVE NO SON!

(Pause)

ENVOY: ...whether he will have a son. His sonlessness is troubling him greatly.

ORACLE: KING ACRISIUS WILL HAVE NO SON!

(Pause. The Envoy looks inquiringly at the priest.)

ENVOY: What says the oracle?

PRIEST: King Acrisius will have no son.

(Pause)

ENVOY: King Acrisius will be disappointed.

PRIEST: And he will be killed by his grandson.

ENVOY: Did the oracle say that?

PRIEST: Yes. *(Casually)* Earlier – before you came.

ENVOY: It never rains but it pours. Does the oracle have any good news for my master?

ORACLE: *(Booming from Off as before)* NO.

PRIEST: No.

ENVOY: Thank you, priest of the oracle.

PRIEST: You are welcome. Come again.

ORACLE: BEGONE! FLEE! SCRAM!
(As the disappointed envoy leaves, he notices the narrating deities.)

ENVOY: Who might you be?

ATHENE: *(Grandly)* I am wearing a helmet, a tasselled aegis, I have a spear, I wear an imperious
and all-knowing countenance, I look forty foot tall ...

ENVOY: *(Tapping chin wit forefinger)* I should know...

ATHENE: The owl beside me is a clue...

ENVOY: *(Doubtfully)* Mm...

HERMES: And *I* have winged sandals and a winged helmet, a herald's staff, a lively, boyish
countenance...

ENVOY: Of course!

ATHENE: You recognise us now?

ENVOY: *(Reverently)* I do!

HERMES: *(Dubiously)* And...?

ENVOY: *(With confidence and gravity)* You are Athene the Wise One, and Hermes, the impish
messenger god! *(With a little doubt)* I think.

ATHENE: Of course we are, miserable envoy.

HERMES: And perhaps you ask why we are here?

ENVOY: I do. *(Pause)* Why are you here?

ATHENE: Know then that we are come to narrate...

HERMES: And even ourselves participate...

ATHENE: In journeys heroic...

HERMES: Adventures terrific...

ATHENE: Now be on your way, Acrisius waits...

HERMES: Imagine how cross he'll be if you're late!

ENVOY: *(Backing away, picking up their portentous tones)*
I go, o Narrating Ones, my news to relate
To my master, the king – Acrisius the Irate!
(Envoy hastens on his way.)

2 Breaking news in Argos

(The Envoy runs around the stage, as if trekking along winding goat paths to Argos. Acrisius strides on to meet him.)

ATHENE: The Envoy took his news so cheerless to the dusty town of Argos
HERMES: To his hot-tempered master, Acrisius – a mission grim and thankless.
ACRISIUS: *(Brusquely)* What said the oracle?
ENVOY: Oh, this and that... You know how these oracles go on.
ACRISIUS: Anything I should worry about?
ENVOY: *(Evasively)* No. Not really.
ACRISIUS: Not really?
ENVOY: Only if you had a grandson.
ACRISIUS: I have no grandson.
ENVOY: Then there is no cause for concern.
ACRISIUS: Good.
ENVOY: If you did have a grandson you would have a great deal to worry about.
ACRISIUS: I have a daughter...
ENVOY: But not a grandson.
ACRISIUS: Daughters can bring grandsons.
ENVOY: Only if they are free to marry, and not locked away safe in the dank solitude of a bleak, merciless dungeon.
ACRISIUS: True.
ENVOY: If your daughter were free and had a son, then your future would look black indeed.
ACRISIUS: You speak darkly, man. Tell me exactly what the oracle said.
ENVOY: *(After a pause)* Acrisius, King of Argos, will have no sons.
ACRISIUS: *(With furious frustration)* Agh!
(Acrisius swipes at the Envoy with his fist. The Envoy ducks as if this is routine.)
ACRISIUS: Did the oracle go on - as oracles do?
ENVOY: Yes: it went on – as oracles do - to say that you would be killed by your grandson.
ACRISIUS: But was it expressed in preposterously florid and enigmatic verse, vague and ambiguous, as oracles are?
ENVOY: The actual words were: *Acrisius, King of Argos, will be killed by his own grandson.*
ACRISIUS: ‘Acrisius, King of Argos, will be killed by his own grandson’?
ENVOY: ‘Acrisius, King of Argos, will be killed by his own grandson.’ Word for unhappy word.

ACRISIUS: Hence your baffling suggestion that I should lock my daughter up in a dungeon.

ENVOY: Yes.

ACRISIUS: No room for doubt.

ENVOY: Not really. But as long as your young and beautiful daughter Danaë does not have a son...

ACRISIUS: I shall have no grandson...and things will be fine. *(Strokes his beard or chin)* Mm. Then I need to make...*arrangements*. *(Claps hands and begins to leave)* Danaë! Where are you, my dear Danaë? We need to talk – father to daughter. *(Leaves stage, still speaking)* Danaë...? I have plans for you – for your future safety and comfort.

ENVOY: Will Acrisius be the first man to confound an oracle? Will he stop his daughter bearing him a grandson? Will I have anything more to say? Let us watch the next scene and see. And I can tell the Narrators have something to narrate.

ATHENE: Acrisius arranged his daughter's incarceration...

HERMES: In a dungeon of bronze, solitude, desolation.

ATHENE: How grim and hopeless, how woebegone...!

HERMES: Until Zeus took a shine to her, gave her a son!

ATHENE: Let us catch up with her now transported from Argos...

HERMES: With her fisherman friend on the island of Seriphos.

3 Dark Memories

(Outside Dictys' cottage by the shore on the island of Seriphos. Danaë is busy with nets, fish etc. Dictys watches her with sympathy.)

DICTYS: Poor Danaë! There you are, day after day, working yourself to the bone, cleaning clothes, mending nets, gutting fish... And you a one-time princess.

DANAË: No, Dictys: I'm happy, I'm free... And I'm alive! And luckily I quite like fish. Do you imagine that I miss my old life for one minute?

DICTYS: Well...

DANAË: Locked up in a dungeon of brass by my own father ...?

DICTYS: No, it can't have been ...

DANAË: My only companions the rats and the spiders ...

DICTYS: Mmm... A terrible... !

DANAË: ...and the ghosts of my imagination.
(There is a faraway look in Danaë's eyes as she is possessed by dark memories.)

DICTYS: Do not be tormented by your imagination, you poor girl! Not again...!

(Acrisius appears at the other side of the stage. Danaë moves dreamily across to join him. Acrisius sets about shutting her up in a dungeon. This is the recurring nightmare of Danaë.)

DANAË: Father, why are you putting me here?

ACRISIUS: It's for your own good, Danaë.

DANAË: For *my* good?

ACRISIUS: It's safer in here. Good strong brazen walls to keep out villains.

DANAË: *(Looking around)* What villains?

ACRISIUS: Exactly! It works. Anyhow, must go. A king's life is ever busy: have to reign over Argos, you know. *(Exit Acrisius.)*

DANAË: Reign over Argos ...! *(She then looks at the window in amazement.)*

Rain over Argos! It's raining – it's raining gold through the window! *(She catches the gold as it falls.)* Someone up there likes me.

(Danaë swirls her way happily back to Dictys' hut and resumes work.)

DICTYS: And someone up there did.

DANAË: Zeus, no less. And that's how little Perseus came to be. *(She picks up a little swaddled bundle lovingly.)* But imagine how Acrisius roared and raged when he found the baby! *(They imagine. Acrisius reappears at the other side of the stage and briefly mimes rabid rage.)*

DICTYS: And that's why you and your son were put to sea in a wooden chest. What a cruel father!

(Acrisius shakes his fist and leaves.)

DANAË: *(Shaking her head)* The oracle. Blame the oracle.

DICTYS: And will the oracle come true? Will Perseus be the death of his grandfather?

DANAË: Who knows? Who knows what the gods have in store for any of us? *(Looking at the swaddled bundle)* For my baby boy...? *(Danaë unwraps the bundle, revealing it to be empty)*

DICTYS: Now a youth of sixteen, let's remember...

DANAË: Who knows what the Fates have planned? *(Looking around with sudden concern)*
Who knows where he is right now?

DICTYS: He's at my brother's palace.

DANAË: Oh? He hates your brother.

DICTYS: It's a party.

DANAË: He hates parties.

DICTYS: An engagement party.

DANAË: He hates *any* kind of party.

DICTYS: Free food. And not just fish.

DANAË: Ah. Who's getting engaged?

DICTYS: My brother.

DANAË: That's what *he* thinks. I'll never agree to marry that monster! Go to the palace, Dictys – tell your brother that I will not marry him, let him do what he may!

DICTYS: He may do what he will.

DANAË: Let him! Actually, no, don't let him.

DICTYS: I'll do my best.

DANAË: And tell Perseus he's late for his tea.

DICTYS: I'll do my best. (*He leaves.*)

DANAË: (*Watching Dictys fondly*) There goes Greece's kindest fisherman! (*Looking around*)
Now, where was I? Oh yes: the fish.
(*She resumes her fishy chores.*)

ATHENE: The fisherman's brother was king of the island...

HERMES: King Polydectes – who was thoroughly bad!

ATHENE: He wanted to make poor Danaë his wife...

HERMES: Force her to wed him, the villainous cad!

ATHENE: But he first had to get her son off the scene

HERMES: Pretended he had another fish to fry.

ATHENE: A lady with the horsey name Hippodameia...

HERMES: Was to be his fiancée – an arrant lie!

ATHENE: He invited all the island's youth ...

HERMES: To come to a party – with good food and wine.

ATHENE: And he asked the young men to bring if they would...

HERMES: ... a marriage gift – a horse would do fine!

ATHENE: Perseus himself, poor as he was,

HERMES: Had nothing to give – yet went all the same.

ATHENE: That was the plan – the evil king's plan

HERMES: To master the headstrong young Perseus with shame!

ATHENE: And trick him into making a promise too far...

HERMES: A pledge he never could meet;

ATHENE: A quest that would mean he never came back...

HERMES: A mission he could never complete.

4 A Present for Polydectes

(Perseus dashes on.)

ATHENE: Hot-foot ran Perseus back from the palace

HERMES: ...to tell his mother the welcome news.

ATHENE: ...that cruel Polydectes was to marry another.

HERMES: Poor simple boy,

ATHENE: Guiled by the ploy,

HERMES: Quite taken in by the scheming king's ruse!

(Danaë at home preparing fish. Perseus enters with energy.)

PERSEUS: Good news, mother: you're safe!

DANAË: Safe?

PERSEUS: Safe from that vile scoundrel Polydectes. He's going to marry someone else. Aren't you pleased?

DANAË: Before I give way to hysterical delight...are you quite sure?

PERSEUS: Certain. He's realised he won't get his filthy hands on you while *I'm* around.

DANAË: So who's he going to marry? Who's the unlucky lady?

PERSEUS: Erm ...What's her name ...? Hippo ...Hippo ...

DANAË: Hippopotamus?

PERSEUS: Hippodameia. And he wants us all to bring him a contribution to his wedding gift.

DANAË: Such as?

PERSEUS: He suggested a horse.

DANAË: But we're too poor for that sort of gift.

PERSEUS: Don't suppose Dictys would...?

DANAË: Dictys is a fisherman. He could possibly spare an old boat, perhaps – or a net. But the only kind of horse he could provide would be a tiny seahorse.

PERSEUS: Mm. I don't think a seahorse would do. Hardly a royal wedding present.

DANAË: So what did you say you'd contribute?

PERSEUS: I said I'd bring him anything he wanted ... if it meant he would leave you alone.

DANAË: Anything?

PERSEUS: Yes... And off the top of his head Polydectes suggested I fetch him...

(Perseus stops, as if losing his train of thought. A pregnant pause.)

DANAË: Finish the sentence, darling – like a good boy!

PERSEUS: What, Mother?

DANAË: What did Polydectes ask for?

PERSEUS: If I tell you, you promise you won't be all melodramatic, will you...?

DANAË: Depends what you tell me...

PERSEUS: And start pulling out your hair and saying (*in histrionically hysterical falsetto – with optional hand dance*) 'Not the head of the Gorgon!' ...?
(*Each time the Gorgon is mentioned ominous music is heard.*)

DANAË: (*After a pause*) It all depends what he wants you to get.

PERSEUS: (*Flatly, a little puzzled at the question*) The head of the Gorgon. (*Gorgon motif again*)

DANAË: The Gorgon?! (*Gorgon motif*) Medusa? (*Gorgon motif plus*) A creature so hideous that anyone who looks at her ...

PERSEUS: That Medusa, yes. No need to spell it out.

DANAË: But Perseus, I can't see Medusa letting you have her head. Not without objection.

PERSEUS: Well it won't come to that, will it?
(*Meanwhile Polydectes enters.*)

PERSEUS: I can hardly imagine that arrogant, wicked, vile, ugly bullying (*with an abrupt change of tone as he notices Polydectes*) ... Polydectes!

DANAË: My lord!

POLYDECTES: (*Slimily ingratiating*) My dear Danaë...! Perseus!

DANAË: To what do we owe the... *pleasure*? – if that's the word I'm looking for.

POLYDECTES: It is.

DANAË: I hear you're ...

POLYDECTES: Getting married, yes. Isn't it exciting?! (*With a patronising show of regret*) Not to you, I'm afraid, Danaë: another lady has captured my tender heart. But don't be forlorn! I don't need to tell you (*picking up a fish skeleton with distaste*) that there are many more fish in the sea.

DANAË: I'll get over it. I expect it will be quite a wedding.

POLYDECTES: Indeed. No expense spared! And all the nobles of the island – Just imagine! – all the nobles of Seriphos will each bring me a fine horse. Picture the collection of majestic steeds in the palace stables! Quite a sight! (*Aside*) Quite a mess, I guess!

PERSEUS: How fortunate you are, Polydectes!

POLYDECTES: Yes, how even more fortunate I shall be when I have my gift from little Perseus here.
(*He pats Perseus' head condescendingly.*)

PERSEUS: Ah...

POLYDECTES: And so I'm just taking a break from my royal regime to remind your son of the *very* generous gift he promised me and my fiancée – sorry, Danaë: this must be torment for you - my bride-to-be, Hippodameia.

DANAË: I promise you I have suffered worse setbacks. But my lord, we are, as you well know, poor. What gift could my son afford you?

POLYDECTES: He said – and I quote: *(He takes out a clay tablet covered with letters.)* “I’ll bring you whatever you wish. Yes, if that’s what you want, your kingliness,” - and this bit’s in capitals – “*even the head of the gulp Gorgon*” (*Gorgon motif*) “- a creature so horrible gulp that anyone who gulp looks at her ...”

DANAË: That’s just boy’s talk... You can tell from the gulps.

PERSEUS: No, mother, that was a young man’s word – and a Hero’s Task! When you next see me I shall indeed have the head of the Gorgon! (*Gorgon motif*)
(Perseus leaves with resolve.)

POLYDECTES: *(Smirking at Danaë)* The confidence of youth! *(Aside)* The idiocy of the boy!

DANAË: Perseus, wait! You can’t go Gorgon-chopping in those clothes! And you’ll need a packed lunch ...? *(She rushes after Perseus.)*

POLYDECTES: He’ll need more than packed lunches and fresh clothes where he’s going, Danaë! Yes, he’ll need much more than that!
(Exit Polydectes with a laugh so evil it makes him cough.)

5 Help from Hermes and Athene

(Athene and Hermes come down from their narrating positions and make their way towards Perseus, unseen by him.)

PERSEUS: Fetch the head of the Gorgon. *(Gorgon motif – at which Perseus says:)* Enough - we get the point! Fetch the ... *(looking around as if challenging the music)* head of the...Gorgon. Easier said than done. Then again everything is easier said than done. Unless you’re dumb, of course. But if you had to think of things that are far and away easier to say than do, then getting Medusa’s head is a pretty good example. I don’t even know where the Gorgon lives. I need help – badly.
(Athene and Hermes now stand grandly behind him).

HERMES: Indeed you do, Perseus.

PERSEUS: *(Surprised)* Good lord! And lady!

ATHENE: And your need is why we are here.

PERSEUS: You look ... You look *divine!* Like statues come alive.

ATHENE: We *are* divine, Perseus. You've seen the sculptures, you've had the dreams; now here we are - for real!

PERSEUS: Athene!

ATHENE: Yes. And ...? (*Indicating Hermes*)

PERSEUS: And ... And Hermes, of course. Who else would wear sandals like that?

HERMES: We've come to bring help to our brother.

PERSEUS: Your brother? You mean Ares? Apollo?

ATHENE: No, Perseus: you. You are, like us, the child of Father Zeus.

PERSEUS: I thought my father was a shower of gold.

ATHENE: Actually that shower of gold was the most imaginative disguise of Father Zeus.

PERSEUS: That makes much more sense.

ATHENE: And makes you superhuman.

HERMES: And being superhuman you face a superhuman task.

PERSEUS: Too true: I must fetch the head of the Gorgon (*with a warning look aside to the motif-maker*) – a creature so terrible that all who behold her ...

ATHENE: No need to behold her – if you use this. (*Gives Perseus a shield*) Look in the shield, Perseus. What do you see?

PERSEUS: I see a fabulously handsome youth with golden curls and eyes of shimmering sky-blue. (*Athene takes and rubs the shield with a cloth, then hands it back to Perseus, who looks again at the shield and his reflection.*)

PERSEUS: Oh no, it's me.

ATHENE: This shield will serve you in the office of a mirror.

PERSEUS: So I can look my best?

HERMES: So you can stay alive!

PERSEUS: Right ho.

ATHENE: When you behead the Gorgon (*Gorgon motif* – now Athene is also irritated) ...look in the shield. That way you won't be...

PERSEUS: Won't be ...? Yes, I see: beheading without beholding.

HERMES: And for the task you couldn't have a better instrument than this. (*Hermes produces a sickle. Perseus reaches out admiringly.*)

HERMES: Careful: it's sharp. (*Perseus takes the handle.*)

HERMES: It's made of adamant: nothing cuts better than adamant.

PERSEUS: Thank you.

HERMES: Not for keeps ...

PERSEUS: No.

HERMES: I'll need it back.

PERSEUS: Of course. Now... I'd better be on my way. Erm, where *is* the Gorgon?

ATHENE: Before you seek the Gorgons you will need to...

PERSEUS: *Gorgons?* There's more than one?

ATHENE: Three. You must go to the Nymphs. The three Nymphs will tell you the way.

HERMES: And they will give you more help.

PERSEUS: Very well – off to the Nymphs then. *(Sets off purposefully, then realises he does not know which way to go.)* So where shall I find *them*?

ATHENE: The Graeae will tell you the way to the Nymphs.

PERSEUS: The ... Grae...

HERMES: The Grey Sisters – known to their friends as ... Actually they don't have any friends.

PERSEUS: And – don't tell me: there are three of them?

HERMES: There are three of them. But only one eye.

ATHENE: And they are notoriously unhelpful. You must persuade them to give you your necessary directions in whatever way you can.

HERMES: Remember: they only have one eye. It's a useful ice-breaker.

ATHENE: And one tooth.

HERMES: Yes; watch the tooth.

ATHENE: Now, Perseus, it is time to be on your way to the Grey Sisters: the heroic task is yours to accomplish; we have given you whatever help we can - and now we must leave you with unexpected suddenness.
(They leave suddenly – to resume their narration posts.)

PERSEUS: Very well. Farewell, o Helpful Ones! *(He turns round to see that they are already gone.)* And thank you for the shield. And the sickle. And the advice. Now: to the friendless Grey Sisters, wherever they be ... *(Begins to stride away, then turns in a quandary)* Actually, where are they...? Hermes ...? Athene ...? Which direction to the Grey Ones? Athene...? They could be...anywhere.
(The gods are now Olympianly detached at their narrating places. Exit Perseus at a loss.)

6 Eye Spy

(Enter the three Grey Sisters: Enyo, Deino and Pempfredo. Enyo is using their one eye and she leads on her blind sisters. All quiver and croak and whinge.)

ENYO: Here we are, sisters! Let us sit awhile and grumble on these black and jagged rocks.
(She sits.) They are comfortingly like unto all the many other black and jagged rocks that we Grey Ones have been sitting on since the dawn of time.

DEINO: I don't know much about rocks, sister – but I know what I like. *(She sits alongside Enyo.)*

PEMPFREDO: I want to see these black and jagged rocks before I sit painfully down. Give me the eye, sister Enyo.

ENYO: *(She is scanning the area.)* Patience, Pempfredo, patience.

DEINO: It is surely *my* turn by now.

ENYO: Wait: I can see something...

PEMPFREDO: Well of course you can! You have the eye. We don't and can't. Simple biology.

ENYO: I'll give it to you if you can answer this. I spy...with our little eye...something beginning with...P.

PEMPFREDO: Me! It's me!

ENYO: That begins with M.

DEINO: *Pempfredo!*

ENYO: Well done, Deino.

PEMPFREDO: That's what I meant! By *me* I meant my name, Pempfredo.

DEINO: But, Pempfredo, you didn't say so.

PEMPFREDO: So unfair!

ENYO: If you're going to quarrel perhaps it's best that I keep it. *(She spots something.)* Look!

PEMPFREDO: *(With questioning upturned hands)* How?

ENYO: I spy... another something beginning with P.

DEINO: A Person? I want to see! *(She claws and scrabbles for the eye, taking it off her sister.)*

ENYO: Manners: say please!

DEINO: Please let this something be somebody. *(She puts in the eye.)* Now let me see... It is a person...a human!

PEMPFREDO: We never have human visitors!

ENYO: Can you blame the human visitors we never have – with Deino and her bad manners and you looking such a fright?

DEINO: A man...!

ENYO: A man?

PEMPHREDO: Let *me* see!

DEINO: A young man.

ENYO: Young...? And handsome?

PEMPHREDO: It's my turn!

DEINO: Absurdly handsome! Irresponsibly handsome! Dangerously handsome!

ENYO: Perhaps it is the hero so long foretold who would come from afar and then go back to afar and...

PEMPHREDO: I must see this!

(Pemphredo scrabbles at Deino. Deino gives up the eye reluctantly. As the eye is being exchanged Perseus appears. He slips behind them.)

ENYO: Do you have the eye, Pemphredo?

PEMPHREDO: *(She puts in the eye and peers around hopefully)* I have the eye... but I see no young and handsome man.

PERSEUS: While I see old and ugly hags. It is an awful sight!

PEMPHREDO: I can *hear* a handsome young man, though...

ENYO: That is just the workings of our hopeful, hungry imaginations.

DEINO: I tell you there is a man. You must have put in the eye the wrong way. You know what you're like.

PEMPHREDO: I can see perfectly – there is no dangerously handsome young man in the vicinity.

ENYO: Let me have the eye, Pemphredo. I know how it should be used. Give it me now.

(Pemphredo takes out the eye. As she hands it over to Enyo, Perseus puts his hand in the way and takes it.)

PERSEUS: Thank you!

PEMPHREDO: What? You've never said *thank you* before now, Enyo.

DEINO: Nor has she ever spoken in such a deep, handsome voice.

ENYO: I didn't say thank you.

PEMPHREDO: Then who did?

DEINO: *(With mounting excitement)* That handsome young man is near! He has travelled many leagues - by the smell of things! You have the eye, Enyo. Tell us what you see!

ENYO: I do not have the eye. Pemphredo has yet to pass me it.

PEMPHREDO: You lie: I gave you the eye!

DEINO: One of us must have it. Unless...

PERSEUS: The handsome young man has it.

ENYO: Yes – that’s a possibility. But why do *you* now speak in a voice disturbingly youthful and wholesome, Deino, and not in your usual crone tones.

DEINO: I said nothing. That must have been Pempredo.

PEMPHREDO: Not me.

PERSEUS: It was I.
(There is a stunned pause. Then the Graeae suddenly and simultaneously shriek.)

PERSEUS: Calm down, ladies! Has a handsome hero never caught your eye before?

ENYO: Give me the eye! Now! It’s my turn.

PERSEUS: If you want your eye... And there is good reason to think that you do – I want something in return.

DEINO: What?

PEMPHREDO: Anything!

ENYO: But give back the eye.

PERSEUS: I need...

GRAEAE: Yes?

PERSEUS: Directions.

PEMPHREDO: } *(Together)*

DEINO: } Directions?

ENYO: What...directions?

PERSEUS: Good, lucid, reliable directions. I need to find my way to your sisters the Nymphs.

PEMPHREDO: But you’ve only just got here. Stay and... take the weight off your feet.

PERSEUS: I’m on a mission.

DEINO: Clearly.

ENYO: And you think we’ll help you – you eye-thief?

PERSEUS: Yes. Yes I do. And if you don’t I’ll take your tooth.

GRAEAE: Not the tooth! Not the tooth!

PERSEUS: So...

ENYO: If you would find the Nymphs...

PERSEUS: Yes...?

DEINO: You need to know where they abide.

PERSEUS: Indeed. You tell me.

PEMPHREDO: *(Pointing randomly in several directions)* Beyond the West.

PERSEUS: Beyond the West? Who’d have guessed?

ENYO: Now give us back the eye!

(The Graeae wail and clamour and reach out imploringly.)

DEINO: The eye!

PEMPHREDO: The eye!

(He gives Deino the eye.)

DEINO: I have the eye!

ENYO: But it's my turn!

DEINO: *(Peering through the eye avidly at Perseus, forwardly)* Are you doing anything later?
After you've been beyond the West?

PERSEUS: I'm down to cut off an ugly hag's head.

DEINO: *(Disappointed)* Oh. After that, perhaps...?

PERSEUS: *(Briskly)* Must fly.

PEMPHREDO: It is a long way to the Nymphs...

ENYO: Too long to walk.

PERSEUS: Mmm. I could do with some winged sandals.

PEMPHREDO: Perhaps we could find some for you...

ENYO: ...if you stayed awhile...

DEINO: And made your handsome self at home.

PEMPHREDO: *(Whispering to Deino)* Give me the eye...!

ENYO: *(Also in whispers)* Give it me! I must see!

PERSEUS: I cannot linger longer. For your help I thank you. Which way is west?

PEMPHREDO: There is no way of telling.

ENYO: Nor Sun nor star – for our skies are ever grey.

DEINO: So you will have to wait with us...

PERSEUS: *(Picking a direction randomly)* My guess is...that way. *(With jocular finger wagging)*
And keep your eye out – or should I say *in* - for any strange men. *(After a few paces he steps on something sharp.)* Yow! *(He bends down and pulls something from his foot.)*
What *is* this?

ENYO: The tooth!

DEINO: The tooth!

PEMPHREDO: Give us the tooth!

(Perseus throws the tooth over their heads, and the Graeae scramble off stage after it. Perseus goes on his way with a chuckle.)

7 Equipping a Hero

ATHENE: Next stop the Nymphs,
HERMES: The *Stygian Nymphs*,
ATHENE: In their enchanted bower...
HERMES: Beyond the West;
ATHENE: Prettier than the Grey Ones,
HERMES: By Fortune more blessed;
ATHENE: And to help their hero...
HERMES: They'd pull out the best!
(The Nymphs are busy boxing and wrapping presents – one each.)

STYX: Quick! He'll be here soon.
ORPHNE: *(Tying a bow on her wrapped present)* Hope he likes it.
GORGYRA: He'd better: *(holding present box)* I've been to Hades and back for this!
STYX: All this wonderful wrapping! I bet he doesn't even notice...
ORPHNE: He's a man!
GORGYRA: A hero, I hope – or all these gifts will be wasted.
ORPHNE: When exactly did the Oracle say he would come?
GORGYRA: *(Reading from a tattered parchment she has about her)*
Stygian Nymphs, be ready!
The hero of your dreams will arrive,
Seeking your aid and advice,
A little after half past five.

STYX: That's about *(looking up at the sun)* ...now!
GORGYRA: But it doesn't specify the month, year...or century.
(Punctually Perseus appears panting.)

ORPHNE: This could be he. Welcome, stranger from the East!
PERSEUS: How do you know I am a stranger from the East?
STYX: Everyone comes here from the East.
ORPHNE: And we've never seen you before...
GORGYRA: Ergo, you are a stranger from the East.
PERSEUS: Brilliant!
STYX: You seek the Nymphs...?
PERSEUS: I do. I am come to these lands beyond the West...
GORGYRA: The Hyperhesperides.

PERSEUS: The *Hyperhesperides* – as you call them...

ORPHNE: We do – for here we are wester than west!

PERSEUS: The Hyperhesperides... For I was told that I would find the Nymphs here. (*He looks around.*) Are you they?

STYX: We are they.

PERSEUS: Then you are even more beautiful than the legends claimed?
(*The Nymphs giggle coyly.*)

PERSEUS: And I humbly ask your help.

GORGYRA: You'll need it.

PERSEUS: You know what I am about?

STYX: Yes, Perseus...

PERSEUS: And you know my name?

STYX: (*Ironically*) Or it was a lucky guess.

PERSEUS: And you know what I need?

ORPHNE: We have it all here.

PERSEUS: And you know I am poor and cannot give you...

GORGYRA: We do not charge.

STYX: It is enough that you have come bravely and handsomely to visit us.

ORPHNE: Your presence for our presents.

PERSEUS: I can't wait!

STYX: Here is something I prepared earlier.
(*She gives Perseus her present. He unwraps it. It is a satchel.*)

PERSEUS: Oh you shouldn't have...! (*Uncertainly*) What is it?

STYX: It's a satchel.

PERSEUS: (*A little disappointed*) Oh.

STYX: We call it the *kibisis*.

PERSEUS: (*Still disappointed*) Do you?

STYX: Made of prime goatskin.

PERSEUS: (*Handling it listlessly*) Interesting.

STYX: You put things in it.

PERSEUS: Such as ...?

STYX: Heads.

PERSEUS: (*More brightly*) Oh, I see. Most useful! How did you know?

STYX: We're nymphs: we're in the loop.

PERSEUS: So I guess you also know...

ORPHNE: *(Looking at Perseus' footwear)* That you need new sandals, yes.
(Orphne presents Perseus with a shoebox. He unwraps it eagerly and takes out a pair of winged sandals.)

PERSEUS: Sandals!

ORPHNE: *(Proudly pointing out the wings)* And look: they're no ordinary sandals.

PERSEUS: *(Holding them up)* They have wings attached! *(He puts them on.)*

ORPHNE: *(Nodding proudly)* Real wings!

PERSEUS: You've thought of everything!

GORGYRA: You haven't seen the best. *(Proffers a hatbox.)* Open!
(Perseus finishes putting on the winged sandals and then sets about the hatbox.)

GORGYRA: Hope you like it.

PERSEUS: It's a cap.

GORGYRA: It's no ordinary cap.

PERSEUS: Of course not.

GORGYRA: It's real dogskin.

PERSEUS: Eew!

STYX: Try it on.
(Perseus puts it on uncertainly.)

PERSEUS: How do I look? Does it give me an heroic aspect?
(The Nymphs giggle; Perseus is puzzled and discomfited.)

PERSEUS: Why the girlish giggles?
(More giggles)

GORGYRA: You see, Perseus: wearing that cap you won't look anything.
(More puzzlement from Perseus.)

STYX: You can't be seen.

ORPHNE: Wearing the legendary Cap of Darkness makes you invisible to everyone...

PERSEUS: *(With mischievous interest)* Really? Mm...
(Perseus does a silly jig, dancing around the Nymphs and generally being awfully and unheroically embarrassing.)

GORGYRA: Except us.

PERSEUS: *(Still clowning around)* What?

STYX: We can see you, Perseus.
(Perseus stops mid-silliness.)

STYX: We are Nymphs: our eyesight is preternaturally good.
 PERSEUS: Oh.
 ORPHNE: Embarrassed?
 PERSEUS: Yes.
 GORGYRA: Only we Nymphs saw you in your silliness. Still: we do talk.
 PERSEUS: Will... the Gorgon see me?
 STYX: No. You'll be able to fly down to her lair where she will be asleep...
 ORPHNE: She's always asleep!
 GORGYRA: I think she's unhappy.
 STYX: Swoop down softly and invisibly so she doesn't awake, chop off her head – and she won't have the faintest idea who did it.
 PERSEUS: Neat.
 ORPHNE: And she won't talk.
 GORGYRA: Unlike us. We'll talk.
(Giggles)
 PERSEUS: *(A little embarrassed)* Well ...I'd better be on my way. *(He starts to leave, then stops, realising he does not know where to go.)* Whithersoever that be! *(To Nymphs)* Whithersoever is it?
 GORGYRA: To the Hyperboreans!
 ORPHNE: Beyond the North Wind.
 STYX: *(Pointing)* That way.
 PERSEUS: *(Flying away)* Thank you, fair Nymphs! I feel very well equipped!
(Giggles)
 ATHENE: And off he flew on his sandals new...
 HERMES: Upwards...
 ATHENE: Supernally northwards...
 HERMES: Hyperboreanly Gorgonwards!

8 Getting a head

ATHENE: Now as for the Gorgons – that nightmarish trio...
 HERMES: Medusa, Euryale and ghastly old Stheno!
 ATHENE: So terrifying their visages, so horrible their glance...!
 HERMES: Their killer looks gave no second chance!

(Stheno hisses her horrid way on and sits down.)

ATHENE: Stheno, you'd say, was the ugliest of the ill-favoured three...

(Stheno raises her snaky head proudly.)

HERMES: Until you glimpsed the ghastly mien...

(Euryale hisses on and crumples beside her sister.)

HERMES: ...of her sister Euryale!

EURYALE: *(To the wings)* Come join us, sister!

STHENO: Yes, sister, come...

ATHENE: But those who saw Medusa would say she stood in a class of her own!

HERMES: At least they would, if they hadn't irremediably turned to speechless stone.

ATHENE: We do not wish gratuitously to abuse her...

HERMES: But she really is a horror, that hideous...

(Medusa enters. She is ghastly. The snakes on her head do nothing for her. In fact the actor playing her is wearing a false head – which will become important shortly.)

STHENO: } *(Together, welcoming their sister)*

EURYALE: } MEDUSA!

(Medusa hisses in acknowledgement and settles beside her sisters.)

EURYALE: Medusa, dear sister – you are looking tired...

STHENO: You need your beauty sleep.

(The Gorgons cackle at this irony.)

EURYALE: Let us three rest our snaky heads, here on the stony ground...

STHENO: But keep watch lest some handsome hero descend from the skies on an unexplained quest to make a trophy of one of our heads!

EURYALE: What a strange and detailed thing to say, sister Stheno!

STHENO: You never know. I'm sure I once read an oracle to that effect...

EURYALE: Stuff and nonsense!

STHENO: It went something like:

Keep ever open, ever watchful your eyes

Or one of you Gorgons will lose your head

When a dashing hero comes from the skies

To surprise you when you are vulnerably a-bed.

EURYALE: Don't be silly, Stheno! We're tough immortals: we don't use beds – and we're not the sort to lose our head over handsome heroes dropping out of the sky.

STHENO: *Medusa's not...immortal. (She looks with sisterly concern at Medusa.)*

EURYALE: Well you and Medusa can keep watch just in case of the flying head-hunting hero. Euryale here is going to get some shut-eye. *(She gets comfortable.)* Horrid dreams, sisters!

(Stheno shrugs at Medusa, who shrugs back.)

STHENO: Horrid dreams, Euryale. *(To Medusa)* We'll be all right, Medusa, I guess. No hero will give us a second look.

(They too settle down for some Gorgon repose. Gorgon snores punctuate the hissing of their hair.)

ATHENE: } *(Together, like indulgent parents)*

HERMES: } Aahh!

(Perseus lands on the stage and looks around warily, clearly puzzled by the hissing and rasping sounds. Remembering the danger of petrification he finds his way by looking in his shield. This causes a few trips and falls.)

PERSEUS: It's not so easy. Wish I'd practised before coming here... *(Edges closer to the recumbent Gorgons.)* Everything's in reverse: left turns right, right turns left, legend turns real... Don't know whether I'm coming or going. *(Vaguely describes the Gorgons' forms in the shield. Becomes inappropriately ruminative.)* Or is life just a beguiling yet misleading reflection of the real – as philosophers will one day claim? Which of us truly knows anything for sure? Eh?

ATHENE: Perseus, Perseus... Be mindful of your mission!

HERMES: Away with cogitations metaphysical!

ATHENE: Philosophy never got the decapitation done!

HERMES: Back to the here and now!

ATHENE: } *(Together)*

HERMES: } A hero must be practical!

(This divine advice works subliminally on Perseus, who returns to the here and now.)

PERSEUS: And what's more this shield needs polishing... *(Takes out a cloth and begins to wipe the shield)* There! I can see my face now. *(Peers with concern into the shield.)* Gods, all this heroic travelling hasn't done my looks any favours... *(Gives the shield another rub)* By Hecate! What a fright! I'd better put my own head in the kibisis! *(Starts at a loud hiss)* What...? *(Realises that he is looking at the face of Medusa)* The Gorgon! *(Gorgon motif. Medusa stirs.)* Quick...! *(He is all a-tremble)* Get a grip, Perseus! This calls for truly masterful dexterity and... *(He gingerly backs towards Medusa. Opportunity for pantomimic business as the three Gorgons snuffle and snort)*

dangerously close to wakefulness.) ... the cool head of a her-OH! (He trips over a loose wing on his sandal and drops the shield. Trying to recover his balance he grabs hold of the nearest Gorgon's head with his left hand, while the sickle accidentally slices through Medusa's false neck.) Oh! Is that your head? (Genuinely apologetic.) I am so very sorry! Still, it was going to happen, wasn't it? Now this is where this (indicating the kibisis) comes in...and where this (the head) goes in. (Pops the head into the kibisis, picks up the shield and prepares to depart.)

(Headless, Medusa totters around the stage. The other Gorgons wake, yawn, then shriek as they see their headless sister stumbling off. Perseus flies off.)

PERSEUS: *(Looking into the shield)* Sorry...! Not my idea. Blame that unfeeling monster of a man, King Polydectes! See you!

(Exit pursued by Gorgons.)

ATHENE: And off flew Perseus with the head in the kibisis...

HERMES: Shooting with eagle style, mile after aerial mile.

ATHENE: Past the sands of Libya...

HERMES: And the busy land of the Nile.

ATHENE: Invisible to all...

HERMES: In his magic cap.

ATHENE: Looking for home...

HERMES: Yearning for a map.

9 Asking about Andromeda

(Cepheus and Cassiopeia, King and Queen of Joppa on the coast of Philistia, are looking out to sea. Sound of waves and wind, mew of gulls. Perseus wings into view.)

ATHENE: And on his roundabout return as he flew past a rocky shore...

HERMES: Below him, chained to a rock, a beautiful girl he saw.

(We see Perseus miming puzzlement as he flies.)

ATHENE: Down he swooped for a closer look

HERMES: And wondered who and why.

ATHENE: All intrigued...

HERMES: And weak at the knees...

(Perseus is so engrossed he neglects to fly and begins to tumble.)

ATHENE: *(At Perseus' tumbling)* Whoah...!

HERMES: He quite forgot to fly.

(As Perseus recovers, Cepheus and Cassiopeia appear at one side.)

ATHENE: Then he saw two black-clad forms on the cliff above the maid.

HERMES: ‘Hey!’ he cried, ‘Bestir yourselves - and bring the girl some aid?’

(Cepheus and Cassiopeia look around, puzzled, unable to see Perseus.)

ATHENE: Remembering then to doff his cap, ‘Now tell me if you know...’

(Perseus mimes the question said by Hermes.)

HERMES: He asked as he alighted: ‘Who is the girl below?’

CEPHEUS: *(As if in mundane mid-conversation)* Andromeda. Her name is Andromeda. And you are...?

PERSEUS: Perseus. *(With a touch of pardonable pride)* You may have heard of me as the doughty hero who has just slain the most terrifying...

(The royal couple shake their heads.)

CASSIOPEIA: No.

CEPHEUS: We haven’t.

PERSEUS: *(Put in his place)* Ah.

CASSIOPEIA: We have not been listening to the news much lately.

CEPHEUS: Our thoughts in recent days have been largely with the condemned girl below.

PERSEUS: Understandable: I guess she’s a local.

CASSIOPEIA: She is.

PERSEUS: So why is she chained to a rock? By the sea? And in this weather?

CEPHEUS: Well it’s all a bit involved... It’s to do with Poseidon, you understand ...

PERSEUS: No.

CEPHEUS: You explain, dear.

CASSIOPEIA: She, er ...

PERSEUS: She must have done something terrible!

CASSIOPEIA: Mm ...

PERSEUS: Well *what?* What did she do?

CASSIOPEIA: Andromeda’s very beautiful, you see.

PERSEUS: *(Looking down from the cliff)* I do see. Hardly a crime!

CASSIOPEIA: Human beauty can annoy the gods – if they hear too much about it.

PERSEUS: Did she boast?

CASSIOPEIA: Not as such.

CEPHEUS: Her mother did. Her mother said that Andromeda was more beautiful than the Sea Nymphs.

PERSEUS: The Nereids?

CEPHEUS: The same. You know them?

PERSEUS: Not as such. But I know they are hot jealous of their beauty.

CEPHEUS: Her mother also claimed...

CASSIOPEIA: That's enough, Cepheus!

CEPHEUS: *(With asperity, giving vent to his anger)* Her foolish mother had the temerity to claim that she *herself* was more beautiful than the Nereids. That really *was* outrageous ...

CASSIOPEIA: Cepheus!

CEPHEUS: So the Nereids complain to their father Poseidon, he sends a sea monster to ravage the land – and boy, does it ravage! I go to the oracle to see what's to be done... We have a flood... It's all go!

PERSEUS: And what *is* to be done?

CEPHEUS: Andromeda ... *(He begins to sob.)* Andromeda must be sacrificed ... to the monster!

PERSEUS: How dreadful! And the poor parents of this girl...?

CEPHEUS: Cepheus and Cassiopeia, the legendary King and Queen of Joppa.
(Perseus looks blank.)

CEPHEUS: The very important and wealthy city *(pointing)* over there.

PERSEUS: *(Shaking his head sadly, looking towards Joppa)* They must be in an agony of grief!

CASSIOPEIA: We are!

PERSEUS: You ...? *You* are her parents? So it was *you* who boasted...!

CASSIOPEIA: Don't go on about it!

CEPHEUS: The important thing is to save our daughter. No time to lose. We need a young hero with ... *(eyeing Perseus)* winged sandals, a good sharp weapon, possibly a proven record of monster slaying ...

CASSIOPEIA: Do you know anyone like that, Perseus?

PERSEUS: Well... I myself have just slain the Gorgon.

CEPHEUS: I was wondering about the blood dripping from your bag...

CASSIOPEIA: And the snakes pullulating on the ground as we speak...

CEPHEUS: But I didn't like to ask.

PERSEUS: So I could perhaps help you out.

CEPHEUS: You're hired! Now: the monster is due very shortly...

PERSEUS: Does it have a name?

CASSIOPEIA: Cetus, I think. Cetus the sea monster. Why?

PERSEUS: I like to put a name to a monster's face. How shortly is Cetus due then?

CEPHEUS: The oracle said he'd be in with the tide...

PERSEUS: Very precise for an oracle.

CASSIOPEIA: But didn't say which

CEPHEUS: *(Wearily)* We've already had seven tides. It's a lot of waiting around for our daughter.

CASSIOPEIA: It's rather like when you wait in the palace for a delivery, you know? And you keep looking from the tower and checking the water-clock... *(Revealing her first real emotion)* If only they'd say if they were going to be late...!

PERSEUS: Yes – very tiresome. Er, Cepheus?

CEPHEUS: Yes?

PERSEUS: *(Awkwardly)* Is ... Is Andromeda ... Does she happen to be ... spoken for?

CEPHEUS: Spoken for? She's *done* for if you don't get your sandals winging!

PERSEUS: I mean... Is she married? Engaged? Tied up... *(Realises that is a poor choice of phrase)* Sorry.

CEPHEUS: What are you getting at?

CASSIOPEIA: We're thinking about her future, obviously, but... is it relevant?
(A pregnant pause)

CEPHEUS: Oh I see! Of course, Perseus. Of course. We'd be delighted.

CASSIOPEIA: Better save her first, eh?

CEPHEUS: *(Hinting histrionically)* Are those her keening cries of grief I hear on the air?

PERSEUS: I'm off!

(Perseus puts on the Cap of Darkness. He is now invisible to everyone bar the audience. Cepheus and Cassiopeia look around puzzled.)

CEPHEUS: No sooner said than gone!

CASSIOPEIA: Joppa's first air-sea rescue service.

CEPHEUS: Do you think Phineas will be upset we've just promised away his betrothed?

CASSIOPEIA: Phineas is a man of wealth, virility and good family. Ideal marriage material!

CEPHEUS: And of high temper. Do you think he'll let Andromeda go quietly.

CASSIOPEIA: A sea monster's heading towards our daughter and you're worried about hurting a boy's feelings!

CEPHEUS: Point taken.

CASSIOPEIA: Time to go back on our word later. Now let's get out of this wind.

CEPHEUS: Shouldn't we stay to see ...?

CASSIOPEIA: You do fuss, Cepheus! They'll tell us the highlights. No point in standing gawping any longer on this windy cliff top. *(She sets off.)* There's a wedding to prepare!

CEPHEUS: But...

CASSIOPEIA: Or perhaps a funeral. Either way: work to do.
(Exeunt Cepheus and Cassiopeia.)

10 Saving Princess Andromeda

(Andromeda is chained to a rock, as already described. She wears jewels. Sound of waves louder than before.)

ATHENE: Behold Andromeda, trembling with fear!

HERMES: Or perhaps with cold – for she has little on.

ATHENE: The devouring sea-monster is drawing near.

HERMES: There's no time to lose! Where's Perseus gone?

ANDROMEDA: Will no one save me from this cruel, unjust fate? Must I perish for the hubris of my mother? Ye gods, will you have no pity...?

PERSEUS: *(Offstage)* I'm coming. Just hang in there.

ANDROMEDA: Who speaks?
(Perseus appears. He is still invisible to Andromeda for he is wearing the Cap of Darkness.)

PERSEUS: *(Grandly)* It is I, Perseus, who speak. And I also fight – for I am a hero!

ANDROMEDA: I see no one.

PERSEUS: *(Realises he is invisible)* Oh yes. *(Takes off the Cap)* There.

ANDROMEDA: I still see no one.

PERSEUS: I'm aloft.

ANDROMEDA: A what?

PERSEUS: Up in the air.

ANDROMEDA: *(Looks up and sees him)* Oh yes. *(Admiringly)* Like the sandals! Where did you get them?

PERSEUS: The Nymphs. Where else?

ANDROMEDA: Nice. Erm, are you any good with chains? Cruel chains of iron?

PERSEUS: I'll give it a go. But first I should introduce myself.

ANDROMEDA: You already have sufficiently. Excessively long-winded introductions are a luxury we cannot really afford as things are. You're Perseus: that's enough for me.

PERSEUS: And you are the poor Princess Andromeda, condemned to die because of your mother's foolish boast.

ANDROMEDA: Yes.

PERSEUS: She said that you and she were more beautiful than the nymphs of the sea.

ANDROMEDA: She did.

PERSEUS: The first part of the boast I can believe!

ANDROMEDA: Thanks. I'm afraid I can't shake your hand.

PERSEUS: Your father has forbidden such intimacies, I imagine?

ANDROMEDA: (*Indicating her chains*) The chains.

PERSEUS: Oh yes, of course. (*He sets about untying the chains.*) Mmm... Whoever fastened these certainly knew what he was doing. Know any good blacksmiths around here?

ANDROMEDA: Barzil. Has a workshop in the market in Joppa. But he shuts at noon. There is little time.

PERSEUS: (*Indicating the sandals*) I can move fast on these. And Joppa's just over the cliff.

ANDROMEDA: (*Looking behind Perseus*) The monster...!

PERSEUS: (*Following her gaze*) Oh yes. Right, avert your gaze, lovely maiden – before I let the head out of the bag.

ANDROMEDA: Don't worry – I've seen it all.

PERSEUS: (*Showing off*) Not this, you haven't! (*He is about to bring the Gorgon's head out of the bag, then thinks better of it.*) No seriously, you don't want to see this, trust me!

ANDROMEDA: All right, you're the boss. (*Looking off with a little concern*) The monster...?

PERSEUS: Yes. Now you stay here. You can shriek, as is only natural for a beautiful young maiden in grave and terrifying peril; but don't stray.

ANDROMEDA: (*Indicating with her eyes and some urgency the danger from the sea*) The monster? The huge sea creature that is even now cresting the near waves and rearing up, its horrid jaws armed with serrated rows of sharp teeth ready to snatch us both from this life...?

PERSEUS: Of course. Be back before you can say *telergic teratological petrification*.

ANDROMEDA: (*Averting her gaze*) Tell...er teller-logical... Terry-toe... What was it again? Perseus...?
(*Lights or curtain down.*)

11 Wedding Talk

ATHENE: Perseus used the Gorgon's head against the monster of the sea.

HERMES: The monster's bones are now huge stones...

ATHENE: But it took a rather longer while...

HERMES: ...to set the poor girl free.

(Enter Cepheus with Perseus, Cassiopeia with Andromeda.)

CEPHEUS: *(To Perseus, as future father-in-law to future son-in-law)* So then you had to look for a blacksmith?

PERSEUS: Yes. Found a chap called Barzil. Has a workshop in the market in town.

CEPHEUS: Took a long time!

PERSEUS: Had to wait for a day. He closes at noon.

CEPHEUS: Tch!

PERSEUS: Bit of an anticlimax for Andromeda, having to wait another chilly night under the cliff!

ANDROMEDA: I'm still cold!

CASSIOPEIA: Saved from the jaws of the sea monster – and you're still complaining! You should thank your lucky stars that it all ended so well.

(Perseus comes over to Andromeda and puts his arm around her.)

CEPHEUS: Have you thought about where you're going to live?

PERSEUS: Well I thought we'd join my mother. She lives in a fisherman's cottage on Seriphos.

CEPHEUS: *(Doubtfully)* A fisherman's cottage?

CASSIOPEIA: Not quite what we imagined for our daughter.

ANDROMEDA: Shall I go back to the rocks and wait for another sea monster then, mother?

PERSEUS: *(Hugging her)* It's a nice fisherman's cottage. She'll be fine.

(Phineas, Andromeda's bypassed betrothed, enters angrily.)

PHINEAS: What's all this I hear about Andromeda? *(To Perseus)* Who are you? And why are you all over my fiancée? Take your grubby hands off my princess!

CASSIOPEIA: Ah Phineas! How are you, your manly wealthiness?

PHINEAS: Furious!

CEPHEUS: I don't think you've met Perseus.

PHINEAS: Just now – and I'm about to hit him!

CASSIOPEIA: He's just a poor, simple traveller who happened to be passing by and helped a little with certain issues we've been having with our daughter.

PHINEAS: Am I supposed to be impressed?

CEPHEUS: Perseus, this is Phineas...

CASSIOPEIA: Phineas is the handsome and breathtakingly rich young man we were going to tell you about who was to marry Andromeda before all the... unpleasantness.

CEPHEUS: *(Admiringly)* He has his own palace and a new chariot!

CASSIOPEIA: With gold fittings!

PERSEUS: *(To Phineas)* How do you do? I'm Andromeda's new bridegroom.

PHINEAS: Wrong. Clear out of Joppa and we'll say no more of your mistake.

CASSIOPEIA: *(With admiration)* Now that's man's talk!

PERSEUS: I saved Andromeda – and I intend to marry Andromeda!

PHINEAS: You and whose army?

PERSEUS: Just me. Andromeda doesn't want more than one husband.

PHINEAS: I won't let you.

PERSEUS: You and whose army?
(Phineas looks behind him and gives a nod as a signal.)

PHINEAS: Ready, lads?

PERSEUS: *(Looking beyond Phineas)* Oh I see: your own army.

PHINEAS: *(To his unseen gang)* Yes, boys: spears and swords today.

PERSEUS: We could settle this in single combat, man to man.

PHINEAS: But we'll sort it out twenty tough men versus a single scrawny kid.

CASSIOPEIA: More man's talk!

CEPHEUS: Drinks first?

ANDROMEDA: Do I have a say in this battle for my hand?

CASSIOPEIA: } *(Together)*

CEPHEUS: } No.

PERSEUS: Then if you won't fight fair, Phineas, you leave me with only one choice. *(Looks around)* Have you seen the kibisis?

ANDROMEDA: The what?

PERSEUS: The satchel with the head of the Gorgon. *(Gorgon motif)*

ANDROMEDA: Which turns all who see it to stone?

PERSEUS: Yes, that Gorgon.

ANDROMEDA: No. Do you need it right now?

PERSEUS: Pretty much.

CASSIOPEIA: I put it in the pantry; it was in the way. And dripping blood.

PERSEUS: Back before you can say 'in the pantry'. *(He scampers off.)*

ANDROMEDA: In the pantry? Is that hygienic?

CEPHEUS: That could explain all the snakes in the olive jars.
(Awkward pause. Phineas stands like a statue with sword poised, looking in the direction where Perseus left. The royal family makes conversation.)

CEPHEUS: Not just snakes that have been a nuisance recently. These thunderbugs. Get in your hair, so they do!

ANDROMEDA: It's the hot weather, father.

CASSIOPEIA: You just said you were cold.

CEPHEUS: *(To Phineas)* Huh, women! Never know their own minds, eh?
(Perseus returns with the kibisis.)

PERSEUS: Right – sorry about that. Now where were we?

PHINEAS: I've been standing here like a statue, waiting to fight with you for the hand of Andromeda, you rude hobbledehoy. So has my band of tough young fighters just outside the door.

CASSIOPEIA: I know who has the better manners.

ANDROMEDA: Don't be so bourgeois, mother.

CEPHEUS: Don't call the queen *bourgeois*, dear!

ANDROMEDA: You should hear the words in my head!

CASSIOPEIA: You'll change your tune if you get married to this uncouth pauper.

PHINEAS: Enough of words! Action!
*(On the word **Action** Perseus takes out the Gorgon's head, and Phineas freezes – as do, it is to be assumed, his toughs just outside the door.)*

PERSEUS: *(Coolly)* Now we can get on with the wedding.

CASSIOPEIA: Where am I to put all these statues?

ANDROMEDA: In the pantry?

CEPHEUS: Come on. Let's accept the disappointing son-in-law Fate has thrown at us and get this place clear for the wedding.
(Cepheus and Perseus drag the pertified Phineas off. Cassiopeia gives Andromeda a meaningful look as they follow.)

ANDROMEDA: And no, mother, I'm not going to marry a statue.

CASSIOPEIA: Wouldn't cause a mess, or drink or fight, or get old and ugly...

ANDROMEDA: No!
(Exeunt omnes.)

12 Polydectes gets what he asked for

ATHENE: Perseus then took Andromeda to see...

HERMES: ...his mother, the ill-treated Danaë.

ATHENE: Polydectes wanted her for his wife.

HERMES: If he couldn't have that, then he'd ruin her life.

ATHENE: He tormented the woman by day and by night...

HERMES: With relentless cruelty, mockery and spite.

ATHENE: But when he learned that her son had returned...

HERMES: He felt uneasy – rather concerned...
(Polydectes on a throne. Enter Perseus without any accoutrements or the kibisis.)

POLYDECTES: Ah, Perseus! You've been a while. So... Did you...er.... You know... Have you got the, er ...

PERSEUS: The head of the Gorgon? *(Gorgon motif. Perseus frowns in disapproval at the music.)*
(Polydectes nods.)

PERSEUS: The head of Medusa herself? A head that is so terrifyingly ugly it literally - so we understand - turns men to stone?

POLYDECTES: Yup. Yes, that's the one.

PERSEUS: With snakes for hair, the tusks of a boar, claws of bronze...?

POLYDECTES: Yes, yes ... Let's cut to the quick! Have you...?

PERSEUS: No.

POLYDECTES: *(With evident relief)* Of course you haven't! How could you anyhow? You, a mere stripling of big words but little deeds. *(He chuckles.)* Yes, how could you fetch the Gorgon's head? You must be so embarrassed!

PERSEUS: Well, when I said 'no'...

POLYDECTES: You would have been crying for your mummy before you'd finished packing your lunch. *(His chuckling develops into a cackle...)* Danaë did send you off to the Gorgon with a packed lunch, I trust? Wouldn't want you to go hungry...

PERSEUS: Just a moment. *(He leaves.)* I'll be back before you can say *Perseus' Patent Petrification*.

POLYDECTES: I can see you now: blubbing like a baby...! *(Apparently not noticing Perseus' absence)* Sobbing like the silly cissy you are! *(With incapacitating guffaws)* I bet you're even scared of the fish heads my wet brother Dictys throws over his stinky shoulder...
(Perseus returns with the kibisis.)

POLYDECTES: Poor Perseus, the pusillanimous puppy!

PERSEUS: When I said *no*...

POLYDECTES: Yes?

PERSEUS: I meant that I hadn't got it with me just then.

POLYDECTES: *(Dabbing away tears of laughter)* What are you on about?

PERSEUS: I'd come into the palace without the bag.

POLYDECTES: *(Obtusely)* Get to the point!
(Perseus puts his hand into the bag and with a flourish pulls out...)

POLYDECTES: *(Wiping his eyes to see clearly)* Don't tell me that's the Gorgon's ... *(He turns briskly to stone.)*

PERSEUS: Head.
(Perseus puts the head back.)

PERSEUS: Yes, it is. Sorry – but you really did ask for it!
(He then takes the sickle and shield and gives them back gratefully to Hermes and Athene.)

PERSEUS: Thank you, brother Hermes! Thank you, sister Athene! And I'll take the Nymphs back their presents, don't worry. Oh, and... *(Goes back to fetch the head-bearing kibisis, which he presents to Athene.)* This is for you.
(Athene takes it with a gracious smile. Perseus has one last look at Polydectes, and begins to leave. Just before he goes...)

PERSEUS: You look quite sweet as a statue. Who would ever have thought...? *(Shrugs. Calls as he leaves)* Mother...! Dictys...! Have I got news for you! And have you got fish for me? Being a hero is hungry work!

ATHENE: Polydectes got his head and received a punishment fair.

HERMES: *(Holding up the shield)* And we got back our arms.

ATHENE: *(Teasingly pulling Medusa a little way out of the kibisis)* And I now have a face to scare!

HERMES: The king and his wicked court, now turned to harmless stone,

ATHENE: Still stand atop a hill...

HERMES: Stark, unmoving, forlornly wind-blown.

ATHENE: Dictys became the Seriphian king – a great improvement on his brother!

HERMES: While Perseus went to his native Argos with Andromeda and his mother.

13 Funeral Games

ATHENE: Anxious in Argos King Acrisius heard that his grandson was heading his way.

HERMES: He took a fast coach to a town in the north called Larissa to stay well out of harm's way.

ATHENE: By extraordinary coincidence Perseus too was invited to games in that very same town.

HERMES: And here he is...

ATHENE: ...mid-pentathlon and panting...

HERMES: ...competing for prizes...

ATHENE: ...of worth...

HERMES: ...and renown.
(Perseus is jogging around sportily. An enthusiastic Steward comes up with a discus.)

STEWARD: Fantastic performances! You jumped as if you had wings on your feet – virtually flew through the air! And when you threw that javelin I swear I saw the sun blink in terror!

PERSEUS: All the fun of battle – but no one gets hurt!

STEWARD: And now for the discus. *(He hands Perseus a discus.)*

PERSEUS: *(Handling the discus)* So this is a discus. I just throw it, do I?

STEWARD: Not discus'd before? Never been to the Olympic Games?

PERSEUS: I didn't used to get out much. Spent my childhood amongst fish.

STEWARD: Well it's straightforward enough. *(Takes back discus to demonstrate.)* Just coil your body like a spring, then swing round with all your weight, release at the right moment... Knowing your prowess I wager your throw will take no prisoners!

PERSEUS: Very well – let's give it a go. I've tried most things in the last few months...
(He coils, balances, throws. They show by their faces the awesome trajectory of the discus.)

STEWARD: By the gods, man! Is that really your first time?

PERSEUS: Is it a good throw?
(They turn full circle as they follow its flight.)

STEWARD: It's a throw to die for!
(Their expressions suddenly show horror as the discus evidently comes to land. A loud cry of pain could be heard from Off.)

STEWARD: Ouch! That will have hurt!

PERSEUS: Good gods, say I haven't...! Oh no! Who is that man? He looks important... royal, even.

STEWARD: Yes, I believe that's the king of Argos, no less. Not a nice man, by all accounts. And he's not going to turn over a new leaf now.

PERSEUS: The king of Argos? What's he doing *here*?

STEWARD: Lying on the ground, looking very poorly. We'd better go and see to him. *(Striding off, making incongruous casual conversation)* Ever been to Argos yourself?

PERSEUS: *(Poignantly)* Not that I remember.
(Steward leaves. Perseus pauses to reflect.)

PERSEUS: Of all the stadiums in all the towns in all of Greece, my grandfather gets in the way of my discus! *(Running off, distressed)* Oracles, oracles, oracles! They always get you in the end!

ATHENE: The oracle!
HERMES: The oracle!
ATHENE: } (*Together*)
HERMES: } Let us end our tale with the oracle.
ATHENE: That forecast for a king an unwelcome end...
HERMES: A doom...quite...ineluctable!

FINIS

Production Notes

This was originally conceived as a set of short scenes for a class to use as kindling for improvisation. They would have learned (or already know) the story of Perseus, and this would be a fun (perhaps end-of-term) way of finishing off the theme. A class of around, say, twenty, can divide in groups of two to five and pick out a scene they would like to play. The teacher could put them in order and with judicious narration introduce each scene, and fill in any gaps if desired. No one would have a lot of lines to learn (Perseus would be acted by a different actor in each group); and the whole set could be prepared and gone through in one or two lessons. If the scenes added up to an enjoyable presentation it could be performed more formally.

It is therefore intended as informal classroom drama. Certain scenes, such as the Grey Sisters, could be lifted and worked up as self-standing skits for performance. It is intended to answer the besetting problem of school plays: the leads have a lot to learn and do; the supporting cast wait around a good deal.

In scene 4 (and in a few other places) every time the Gorgon is mentioned a musical theme or a noise could be heard. The Gorgon motif, played off, could be as simple as all the cast going *Duh-duh-duh!* or something more imaginative played offstage – anything from a tinny mobile phone signature to a few massively orchestral bars, depending on resources and wit. Instead of the obvious horror-type pantomime cliché, for instance, it could be something fluty, fruity and jolly.

Scene 9 particularly is a parody of Greek dramatic dialogue – especially as it appears in translation.

Mythological Remarks

Perseus is an ancient myth cycle with many variants (which children will often assert vehemently as being the *true* version). It is possible that the name Perseus (the slayer) was originally an epithet of Hermes (hence the winged sandals) rather than the proper name of a hero. One later accretion (used by Ovid) that is not included here is the incongruous episode in which Atlas is turned to stone. Since Atlas long afterwards takes a critical part in the 11th Labour of Perseus' great-grandson, Heracles, he would need his few wits and large limbs about him for that. Another later addition is the story that Medusa had once been beautiful but was punished with ugliness by Athene whom she offended by making love to Poseidon in one of her temples.

The locations of the Graeae, the Nymphs and the Gorgons are variable. Here the Stygian Nymphs are set beyond the West – the *Hyperhesperides*: a donnishly jokey allusion to *Hyperborean* (beyond the North wind) where the Gorgons have been placed. The Stygian Nymphs have authentic nymph names – but they are all names of the same nymph. I am not aware of any individual names for the Stygian Nymphs in classical authors.

There are details and turns omitted. For instance: the chest afloat on the water, Athene showing Perseus how to recognise Medusa, and Perseus swopping kingdoms with his cousin. *Ars longa, vita brevis...*

Costumes

The Narrators, if used, could be made up and attired as the gods they are.

Athene says: *I am wearing a helmet, a tasselled aegis, I have a spear, I have an imperious and all-knowing countenance, I look forty foot tall... The owl beside me should be a clue.*

Hermes: *And I have winged sandals and a winged helmet, a herald's staff, a lively, boyish expression.*

The mortals could have the usual complement of Greek tunic, chiton, petasus etc. – whatever is in the handy cupboard.

The Graeae could have old, faded rags; the Nymphs diaphanous dresses; the Gorgons could boast wings. Alternatively modern dress could be used.

The Gorgons provide a good opportunity for grotesque and amusing costume and make-up if time affords. In a full-scale production Medusa could have a false head which can be removed slickly as Perseus stumbles into her.

(See the innumerable classical and renaissance depictions of these gods and heroes.)

Props

As these scenes are meant to be simple classroom drama there may be no call or opportunity for many props. If it were put on as a play, however, more elaborate costumes and props would enhance the show.

- 1 Tripod (for the priest)
- 3 Objects to suggest the work of a fisherman: a net, fish heads, a buoy etc. (Danaë)
A baby doll (Danaë)
Possibly: Planks or panels to suggest building of the dungeon (Acrisius)
Shower of gold – paper, glitter? (somehow falling onto the stage)
- 4 Fish skeleton (on ground)
Clay tablet (Polydectes)
- 5 Shield (Athene)
Sickle (Hermes)
- 6 An eye (Enyo)
A tooth (on the floor)
- 7 Wrapped satchel (Kibisis) (Styx)
Shoebbox containing winged sandals (Orphne)
Hatbox containing Cap of Darkness (Gorgyra)
Parchment (Gorgyra)
- 8 Kibisis, winged sandals, cap of Darkness, sickle, shield (Perseus)
False head (Medusa)
- 9 Kibisis, winged sandals, cap of Darkness, sickle, shield (Perseus)
- 10 Chains, perhaps jewels (Andromeda)
Kibisis, winged sandals, cap of Darkness, sickle, shield (Perseus)
- 11 Kibisis (Off – collected by Perseus)
Sword (Phineas)
- 12 Throne (Polydectes)
Kibisis, sickle, shield (Perseus)
Gorgon's head (Off, for collection by Perseus)
- 13 Discus (Perseus)

Appendix - Breakdown of characters in each scene

Athene}
Hermes} (passim)

Scene 1 – *The Oracle*
Envoy
Voice of the Oracle
Priest

Scene 2 – *Breaking news in Argos*
Acrisius
Envoy

Scene 3 – *Dark Memories*
Dictys
Danaë
Acrisius

Scene 4 – *A Present for Polydectes*
Perseus
Danaë
Polydectes

Scene 5 – *Help from Hermes and Athene*
Perseus
Athene}
Hermes} (as themselves)

Scene 6 - *Eye Spy*
Enyo}
Pempredo}
Deino} – The Three Grey Sisters
Perseus

Scene 7 – *Equipping a hero*
Styx}
Orphne}
Gorgyra} - Stygian Nymphs
Perseus

Scene 8 - *Getting a head*
Perseus
Medusa
Stheno
Euryale

Scene 9 – *Asking about Andromeda*
Cepheus
Cassiopeia
Perseus

Scene 10 – *Air-Sea Rescue*
Andromeda
Perseus

Scene 11 – *Wedding Plans*
Cepheus
Perseus
Cassiopeia
Andromeda
Phineas

Scene 12 – *Polydectes gets what he asked for*
Polydectes
Perseus

Scene 13 – *Funeral Games at Larissa*
Perseus
Steward