

The Story of Perseus

Long ago, King Acrisius of Argos learned from an oracle that he would one day be killed by his grandson. Fearing that, he hid his daughter Danae in a chamber underground. But Zeus came down from Mt. Olympus in the form of a stream of gold, which poured through the roof of the chamber, and soon Danae had a baby named Perseus. When Acrisius learned of this, he put her with the child in a trunk and cast it into the sea. The chest washed ashore on the island of Seriphus, where a kind fisherman opened it and gave shelter to the mother and child.



The king of the island, Polydectes, was the fisherman's brother. As Perseus grew up, King Polydectes fell in love with Danae. He wanted to get rid of Perseus before he married Danae, so he asked Perseus to slay the Gorgon Medusa and bring back her head as a trophy. This would be quite a challenge, since anyone who looked into her eyes was instantly turned into stone. After months of searching for the Gorgons, Perseus received help from Athena and Hermes. They led him to the lair of the Graeae, who knew where the Gorgons were to be found.

The Graeae were three old witches who shared a single eye and tooth: Perseus stole these from them, and refused to give them back until they told him where the Gorgons lived. As soon as he learned this and returned the eye and tooth, he received gifts from his divine guardians: Hermes gave him winged sandals, a cap of invisibility, and a magical bag that would grow to any size, and a sword that could cut through anything, and Athena gave him a shiny bronze shield.

From there, he flew to the island where the Gorgons lived. He held out the shield in which he saw only the reflection of Medusa, which could not turn him to stone. Perseus chopped off Medusa's head with Hermes' magical sword and put it in the magical bag. It is said that Pegasus, the magical flying horse, was born when blood dripped from Medusa's head into the ocean. The remaining two Gorgons tried to pursue Perseus, but his helmet made him invisible.

On his way back to Polydectes, Perseus found the princess of Ethiopia, Andromeda, chained to a cliff as a sacrifice to a sea monster so that it would no longer terrorize the country. When Perseus saw this girl in such distress, he promised the king that he would kill the monster if he could marry Andromeda. The king agreed and Perseus slew the monster with his magic weapons and released Andromeda. They were married soon after that.



Perseus came back to Seriphus only to discover that Polydectes had become a cruel ruler. He entered the palace and showed the head of Medusa to the evil king and his friends, and all who saw it were instantly turned into stone. After this he gave Medusa's head to Athena, who placed it on her shield, which she called the *aegis*.

Later, when Perseus was competing in an athletic event, he accidentally killed his grandfather Acrisius with the throw of a discus. Acrisius had happened to be visiting the king who was hosting the event, and the discus happened to swerve towards the audience away from the target. Thus the oracle from many years prior, before Perseus' birth, came true. Perseus, Danae, and Andromeda lived the rest of their lives in happiness.

