

The Adventures of Perseus



Acrisius summoned his guards and ordered them to lock his daughter and her infant son, Perseus, in a chest and drop them into the sea. What else could he do? He had just returned from a visit to an oracle. His grandson, the oracle had said, would be the cause of his death.

The chest bobbed in the water like a small boat, but it didn't sink. A boatman, on his way to

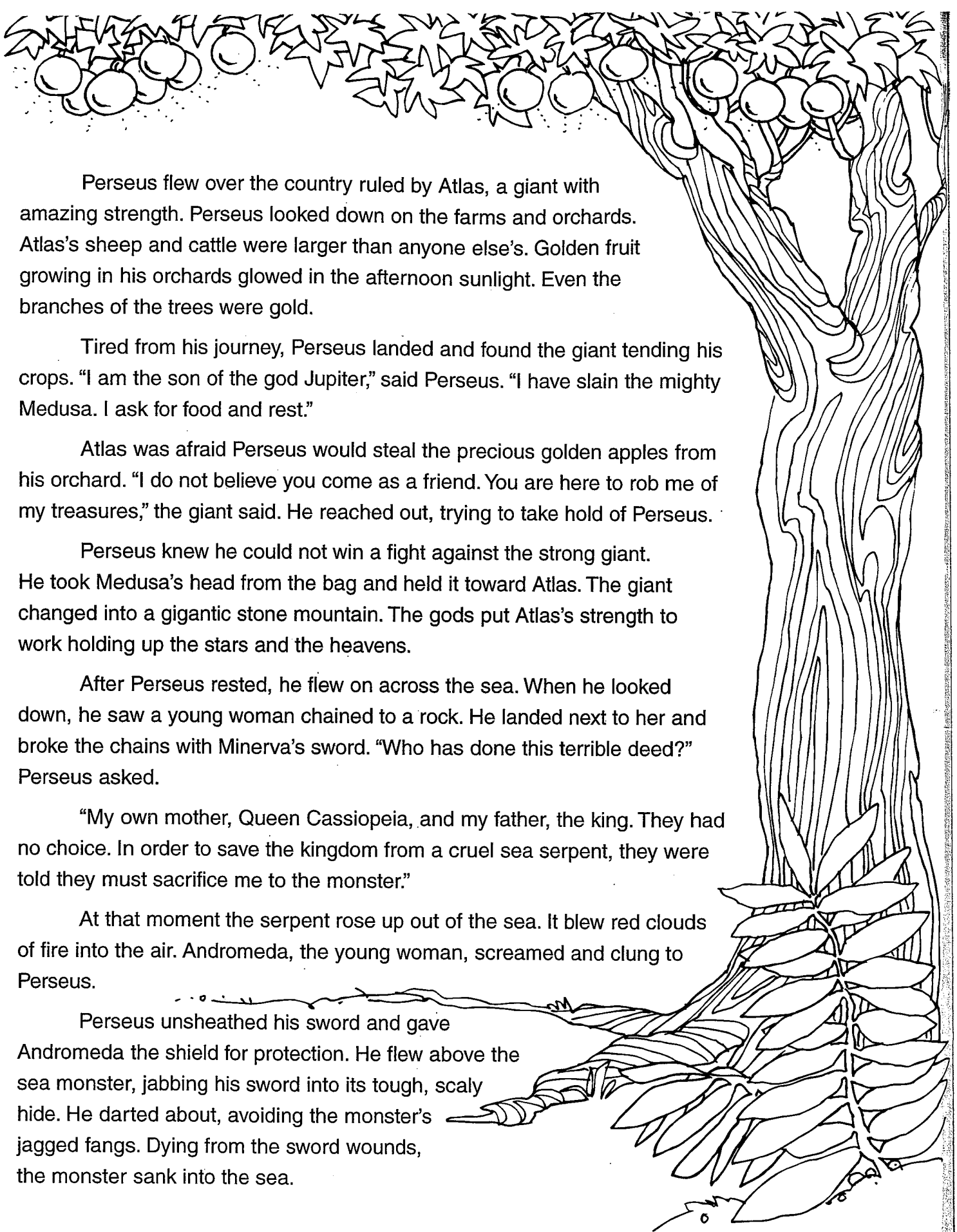
Seriphus, pulled the chest from the water. He freed the mother and son and took them to Polydectes, the king of that country. The kindly king cared for them until Perseus was a young man.

To repay Polydectes for his care, Perseus vowed to kill the monster Medusa who threatened Polydectes' kingdom. Once a beautiful woman, Medusa had bragged that she was more beautiful than the goddess Minerva. Minerva changed Medusa's flowing hair into a halo of poisonous serpents. No living creature could look at Medusa's head without turning to stone.

Minerva decided to help the young hero. She gave Perseus a shield, a sword, and a bag. "When you find Medusa," she said, "look at her reflection in my shield. If you look directly at her, you will be turned to stone. Carry her head in this bag so no innocent people will see her."

The god Mercury gave Perseus his winged shoes so he could travel to Medusa's cave by air.

When Perseus reached Medusa's cave, he waited until the monster was resting. He searched the cave until he saw her image reflected in Minerva's shield. When the snakes saw him they made a loud hissing sound, waking Medusa. Perseus kept his eyes on Medusa's reflection in the shield. When she lunged toward him, he struck with Minerva's sword, cutting off Medusa's head. Without looking directly at Medusa, Perseus dropped her head into the bag.



Perseus flew over the country ruled by Atlas, a giant with amazing strength. Perseus looked down on the farms and orchards. Atlas's sheep and cattle were larger than anyone else's. Golden fruit growing in his orchards glowed in the afternoon sunlight. Even the branches of the trees were gold.

Tired from his journey, Perseus landed and found the giant tending his crops. "I am the son of the god Jupiter," said Perseus. "I have slain the mighty Medusa. I ask for food and rest."

Atlas was afraid Perseus would steal the precious golden apples from his orchard. "I do not believe you come as a friend. You are here to rob me of my treasures," the giant said. He reached out, trying to take hold of Perseus.

Perseus knew he could not win a fight against the strong giant. He took Medusa's head from the bag and held it toward Atlas. The giant changed into a gigantic stone mountain. The gods put Atlas's strength to work holding up the stars and the heavens.

After Perseus rested, he flew on across the sea. When he looked down, he saw a young woman chained to a rock. He landed next to her and broke the chains with Minerva's sword. "Who has done this terrible deed?" Perseus asked.

"My own mother, Queen Cassiopeia, and my father, the king. They had no choice. In order to save the kingdom from a cruel sea serpent, they were told they must sacrifice me to the monster."

At that moment the serpent rose up out of the sea. It blew red clouds of fire into the air. Andromeda, the young woman, screamed and clung to Perseus.

Perseus unsheathed his sword and gave Andromeda the shield for protection. He flew above the sea monster, jabbing his sword into its tough, scaly hide. He darted about, avoiding the monster's jagged fangs. Dying from the sword wounds, the monster sank into the sea.

The king and queen embraced their daughter and Perseus when they reached the castle. Because Perseus had rescued Andromeda, her parents offered her hand in marriage. The wedding and banquet were held the following day.

During the feast, the uninvited Phineus and his friends entered the banquet hall. "Andromeda was promised to me," Phineus said. "Perseus shall not take my bride."

"You gave up all rights to my daughter when you didn't rescue her from the sea monster," the king said. "Be gone!"

Phineus and his friends attacked Perseus and the other guests. At first, Perseus was able to defend Andromeda, but Phineus and his friends outnumbered the wedding party. They surrounded the bride and fought off Perseus and others who tried to rescue her.

Perseus grabbed Minerva's bag and called to all around him. "If you are a friend, close your eyes and look away. Don't be afraid. I will stop Phineus."

Perseus held up Medusa's head. Instantly Phineus and his friends became statues. With the fighting ended, the wedding feast continued. Andromeda and Perseus danced around the statues to celebrate their marriage.

