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Finding Our Way Back Home: Reintroducing Mythology into the Lives of Children

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Abstract: Mythology is present in almost all aspects of modern life. Though many books, movies, video games and advertisements make reference to ancient myths, the myths themselves are no longer readily accessible to children. This thesis provides a rationale for writing a children's book which retells an ancient Greek myth. An outline for the book, entitled *Perseus*, as well as two sample chapters, are included. The thesis deals with mythology's relevance to the modern child asserting that it can help him/her deal with issues such as step-parents, separation anxiety and the need for individuation. The thesis also discusses the ways in which mythology appears in modern culture such as Nike shoes, the "God of War" video game and books like *Harry Potter*. Sources where children *can* access Greek mythology today are also discussed and compared to *Perseus*. Finally, the thesis discusses how, and why, *Perseus* was written and compares it to other worthwhile books for children.

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Introduction

Folktale plots are the basis for all literature; they provide the basic ideas for all modern storytelling. Just as with any art form, what comes before greatly influences what comes after and literature is no exception. The folktales told by ancient people are present, whether consciously or unconsciously, in all aspects of our culture today. For us, as Americans, we are constantly drawing from the civilization from which we are most closely modeled: ancient Greece. It stands to reason, then, that the folkloric influence present in our culture comes from ancient Greek myths. Though I would wager that the average American cannot recall the plot of an ancient Greek myth, I would also claim that elements of these myths are deeply ingrained within the experience of that same average American. The shame of it is that, though we are exposed to remnants of these myths every day, we are not familiar with the myths themselves. Children, who are being taught elements of literature and modern culture in school, are often the recipient of this deficit. Unable to gain entry into the stories that shape their experience, children are not given the opportunity to see the larger picture – the purpose behind what they are being asked to learn.

The way that myths are handed down to us, through such sources as Bullfinch or Ovid's metamorphosis for example, is spare and requires us to use our imagination to bring the characters and plots to life. We come to love them because they are compelling stories that speak to issues in our own lives so that, through repetition, we come to understand and appreciate them

beyond their spare retelling. Schools today do not honor the folktale tradition, hardly ever mentioning these myths that captivated past generation. Believing, as I do, that mythology must have a place in the education of the modern child we must find a way to help children gain entry back into the mythology that is the basis for all that they read. "Until recently, those in charge of setting standards for children's literature have given insufficient thought to children's demonstrated preference for fairy tales and to the value of such tales in developing, strengthening, enriching, and directing children's capacity for creative thinking and imaginative responses – a value that has been tested by classic works produced over the centuries" (Chukovsky p.214). This is my purpose for novelizing the myth of Perseus. By breathing life into the plot and characters of the myth I hope to give children a way back into mythology that both portrays the myth without cheapening it and captures the imaginations of my readers. With the ability to understand and relive these stories, children will come to understand them in a way that will allow them to connect understand their relevance modern life.

It is clear that ancient Greek mythology holds an innate appeal for children. One doesn't have to look far to realize why. Though mythology is not a part of the average school-child's classroom study it has clearly endured in many media that children have access to today. Mythological references and themes show up in all aspects of our culture. One only has to read fairy tales to track the emergence of myth onto the modern stage. Though mythology and fairy tales can be easily linked there are many more unlikely

places that Greek mythology lurks. Modern literature is full of references to Greek mythology as are movies, video games and advertising campaigns. What is missing, of course, are the myths themselves. It is as if our culture has removed the building blocks upon which it has stood for centuries and is somehow able to remain aloft. It exists but cannot reference the rich history that placed it where it is today. Without that foundation much is unexplained and, for children, much is confusing or even boring.

Without inspiring sources of mythology accessible to children it becomes important to find places where mythological themes are apparent today. With these as a starting point educators can help children to regain entry to the mythology that shapes their experience. Though children's experience of mythology is limited to a few bland sources, the fairy tale provides a bastion of mythological references at a level accessible to children. Fairy tales are the closest "modern" equivalent to mythology. Both are examples of folklore - tales with a moral that offer vignette like episodes in which the characters and plots are boiled down to their essence. As I will demonstrate in just a moment, our fairy tales are rife with the themes of ancient Greek mythology. Including fairy tales in the definition of mythology is a natural and helpful way to understand how and why mythology is important to children.

Fairy tales endure because of their power to help children deal with the conflicts of growing up. In clear and simplistic terms that do not "speak down" to children, the readers of fairy tales are presented with examples of

good and evil, right and wrong and how each person, good or bad, deals with the issues raised in the story. Children inherently identify with the good character and want to be like him and through this identification learn to deal with the confusions of childhood. The simple way in which the scenarios are presented belies the complex nature of their effect. Though the story is told in a way the child can understand, the content of the episode is clearly chosen to mirror experiences and difficulties germane to childhood. "Whereas the initial attraction of a fairy tale may lie in its ability to enchant and entertain, its lasting value lies in its power to help children deal with the internal conflicts they face in the course of growing up. This is why fairy tales endure. It is the reason anniversary editions of Disney classics sell out year after year and movies such as *The Little Mermaid* and *Aladdin* break box office records." (Chashdan p.10). The very fact that Disney classics are so popular speaks to the underlying popularity of the myths themselves. Both mythology and fairy tales endure because they are relevant to the lives of children. The themes present in the stories are timeless and clearly resonate with children today. This is why fairy tales, and vicariously myths, survive.

One can clearly see the mythological origins in many classic fairy tales. In fact, the story of Perseus itself has many themes that are present in popular fairy tales. Perhaps the most obvious example is the theme of the evil step parent. In Perseus, Polydectes takes the role of wicked step father as he tries to coerce Danae to marry him. The interjection of Polydectes into the lives of Perseus and Danae changes their family structure as well as Perseus'

relationship with Danae. This theme is prominent in many well-known fairy tales, such as Cinderella and Snow White, and is clearly relevant to the modern child. Divorce is increasingly a factor in American families and the step-parent is becoming more and more prominent. Whether or not a child's step-parent is "evil" he or she will clearly alter the makeup of the family and cause confusion and turmoil in the life of the child.

Another element of fairy tale that appears in Perseus is abandonment. Danae is abandoned by Acrisius at the beginning of the story. Locked in a tower so that she will not conceive a child she is condemned to a life of loneliness. However, a man takes pity on her, entering her tower and impregnating her. Though some of the specific details are different, it is almost impossible to miss the resemblance to the popular fairy tale Rapunzel. Both are locked in a tower to hide them from the world and both defy odds by finding love. Perseus too is abandoned by Zeus, who is unable to care for him as a mortal father might. The theme of abandonment is certainly relevant for children today. So many children live in homes where one or both parents are absent or gone for long hours during the day. It may well feel like they are trapped inside a tower with no human contact. The desire for a savior in the form of a friend or love interest would loom large in the mind of children such as these. Thus, these stories might prove comforting and serve as wish-fulfillment or as the hope that they will one day be rescued.

The theme of an older woman's envy of a young girl's beauty also appears in the Perseus myth. In *Perseus* we see this in the boast of Casseopia

that she is more beautiful than Aphrodite, angering the goddess and causing Andromeda to be chained to a rock. It is a theme that is clearly depicted in such fairy tales as Snow White, Cinderella and Sleeping Beauty. It is also a theme that is present in other Greek myths, most notably Athena and Arachne, Cupid and Psyche and the interplay between Hera and Zeus' human lovers. Again, this is a theme that is relevant to children today. One of the things children must do in growing up is break away from their parents in some way. In doing so parents come to see their children as separate entities. Comparisons and, sometimes, jealousies may arise. Especially, as in the fairy tales, if the adult is not the biological parent of the child. The jealousy or comparison on the part of the parent can lead to many complicated feelings, or even a sense of danger, on the part of the child. These stories let the children see this type of relationship played out in a larger-than-life manner so that they can be comfortably removed from their own situation but still grasp the relevance. In these examples, the younger person is usually triumphant giving hope to the modern reader and a sense that this conflict will be resolved.

It is not just the myth of Perseus that is rife with comparisons to fairy tales. Upon studying any fairy tale it becomes clear that the motifs can be traced to one, if not many, myths that are popular today. The list of references would fill a book, but take, for example, a theme such as being lost which appears in both ancient and more modern contexts such as the myth of Theseus, in which he must navigate his way through an enormous labyrinth, and the fairy tale Hansel and Gretel, where they must leave a trail of bread

crumbs in order to find their way out of the forest. In both cases danger lurks at the center of the maze (or forest) and it is only through skill and cunning that they are able to defeat the monster and escape to safety. This is a theme which clearly resonates with children. The idea of being lost or separated in some way from your guardian is a terrifying one for children. A story that depicts children who are able to overcome their fears and find a way out of the situation can be immensely helpful in building the confidence of the anxious child. Locating the places that mythological themes appear in modern life is the first step towards resurrecting the myths themselves. Because those building blocks have been torn out from under us, we must take the back door, so to speak, into the world of mythology. We must follow the trail of bread crumbs, the mythological references left behind, to reach the source and get back home.

Overview: Myth in Modern Culture

Fairytales are not the only place where mythological themes manifest themselves today. Whether we know it or not we are constantly confronted by concepts that originate from mythological motifs. These themes are so essential that they exist as part of our psyche, such that they appear in all realms of modern culture. It is not that mythology is lost to us, only that its origin has been hidden. Elements of mythology are present in countless modern structures, from movies to video games, advertisements to literature, but the original myths have somehow fallen by the wayside. One of the most prominent places to find mythological elements is the Harry Potter series by

J.K. Rowling. Drawing on folklore as well as mythology, Rowling creates a folklore all her own and a mythological world that jumps from the page into reality. The cast of characters which fill the pages of the six books in the series make reference to a host of folkloric traditions. Many of the characters present in these stories are taken directly from Greek mythology itself. The centaur, for example, is a character prominent in many myths, most notably as Chiron, the kind and gentle tutor of many Greek heroes. Thestrals, the winged horses that pull the carriages from the train station to Hogwarts, clearly mirror the winged Pegasus which appears in the Perseus myth. Fluffy, the three-headed dog that guards the door to the Sorcerer's Stone in the first book, is a direct reference to Cerberus, the hound of hell, who guards to gates to the underworld. Many other characters make reference to folkloric ideas that still resonate with us today. Professor Lupin, for example, is a werewolf, an age-old monster who continues to appear in modern movies and television shows. But most of all, it seems that much of the appeal of Harry Potter lies in its ability to make the mythic realistic, to present the idea that, perhaps, a world of magic really could exist. This is the beauty of a myth.

Though less in the media these days than Harry Potter, the Disney Classic movies are another source rife with folkloric references. Though Disney has veered off in new directions in terms of filmmaking, the classic retellings of fairytales are still popular with children today and it is no wonder. These movies retell classic fairy tales in ways that bring the stories to life as never before. Suddenly the characters have lives and concerns, problems and

desires. They are much more vivid than they might be in two pages of Grimm's Fairytales. Take, for example, the transformation of the evil queen in Snow White and the Seven Dwarves into the old beggar woman. The Grimm's version reads, "she dyed her face and clothed herself as a peddler woman, so that no one could recognize her" (Grimm p.182). Conversely, the movie transformation is etched on the memories of many grownups who watched it as children. Terrifying, and also somehow mesmerizing, the witch concocts a magic potion which causes her to turn from a beautiful queen into a terrifyingly ugly witch. Though both tellings of the story are captivating, the Disney version offers more details and accesses our emotions, thus appealing to a more modern audience. However, the popularity of Disney movies also resides in their ability to keep the essence of good and evil and a sense of justice, those key details that make folklore so important for children.

Mythological references are abundant in many sources of popular culture. Video games, for instance, often play on mythological characters and scenarios. God of War, for example, is a game which draws heavily on characters and locations from ancient Greek myths. In it Kratos, a Spartan warrior who has pledged his life to Ares, encounters many familiar mythic elements like the Hydra, Pandora's box and the oracle. Though it does not always stay true to one myth in particular, it is impossible to deny its close ties to the actual myths themselves. The fact that this game is widely popular and the winner of many awards including "Game of the Year" from the Academy of Interactive Arts and Sciences, implies the innate appeal of these mythic

elements. In fact, there are many games which market themselves as mythologically based, The Battle of Olympus, The Labyrinth of Time and Kid Icarus are just a few. Even more intriguing, the story of Perseus itself has been turned into a video game called Perseus and Andromeda although it is now out of print. This abundance of mythological reference in the popular medium of video games suggests a fascination with the characters and settings of this particular genre. Even though the video game itself may be the first time in which children are introduced to elements of these stories, the idea that they are intrigued by them speaks to the inherently appealing quality of myth.

The themes of mythology are so appealing that elements of mythological characters can even be found in the popular toys that children play with. Barbie, for example, is a classic Aphrodite figure. Aphrodite, the goddess of love, is the ideal of the feminine form. One has only to conjure to mind Botticelli's Birth of Venus to see the connection between the love goddess and the popular toy. Action heroes also mimic qualities in ancient Greek heroes. The overly muscular He-Man calls to mind images of the inhumanly strong Hercules. Batman's lack of super powers causes him to call on his intellect to aid him just as Odysseus, lacking in physical prowess, makes up for his deficit with brains. Superman is immortal except in the face of kryptonite, just as Achilles cannot die unless struck in the tendon just above his heel. The remnants of these mythological characters live on in the toys that incorporate them even though the references they clearly embody are not

apparent to the children who play with them. Again, the myth is lost, but its impact remains.

One of the most striking examples of this phenomenon is advertising. Many advertising campaigns make direct reference to mythological themes. The makers of the Venus razor, for example, seek to convince women that, by using this razor, they will have visibly sexy legs. Their slogan runs, "I'm your Venus, I'm your power." Drawing on the Roman name for the goddess of love, this company holds women up to this ideal of beauty, promising it to them if they buy this razor. Another example of this is Nike shoes. Nike was the Greek goddess of Victory. Arguably the most famous statue of her is Rhodian's Winged Victory which shows the goddess with a pair of enormous wings. In essence, Nike wants you to think that wearing their shoes will make you victorious in whatever sport you play and allow you to run like the wind. The list of references is endless ranging from hugely well-known products to more obscure ones. Many car manufacturers have named their cars after Greek gods and goddesses. Mercury, Ares and Aurora are all gods that have lent their names to cars. Trident gum features the trident of Poseidon. The FTD flower delivery company features Hermes, the messenger god, as its logo. The mighty Trojan warriors have lent their name to a line of birth control products. Vulcan, the Roman god of metallurgy lends his name to an international steel manufacturer. Ajax, a Greek warrior is immortalized by the popular household cleaner. Advertising is full of references to the myths and the list is much longer than what I have chosen to include here. The point is,

however, that these ideas and themes still resonate with the American public, causing them to understand something about the product even if they know nothing about the myth itself. This is, again, an example of the references outliving the myths themselves.

Literature Review

The loss of the myths themselves stems, in part, from a lack accessible mythology for children. In spite of the mythological underpinnings present in contemporary children's literature and experience, children are hard-pressed to find engaging and fulfilling tellings of the myths themselves. The problem is twofold. First, "The preprimers and primers from which [the student] is taught to read in school are designed to teach the necessary skills, irrespective of meaning. The overwhelming bulk of the rest of so-called 'children's literature' attempts to entertain or to inform, or both. But most of these books are so shallow in substance that little of significance can be gained from them. The acquisition of skills including the ability to read becomes devalued when what one has learned to read adds nothing of importance to one's life"(Bettelheim p.4). Many children are not being offered quality books to read which causes them to become discouraged with reading rather than searching out more interesting books. Second, the quality of the books of mythology written for children leaves much to be desired. These problems are related. If children do not know about mythology and are not interested in seeking it out, quality authors will rarely retell the myths, preferring to use

mythological elements to tell stories that they feel will become more immediately popular. Thus the myths die and their legacy remains.

Though other authors have tackled the task of novelizing a Greek myth, the literary quality is not what I would like to share with my children. *Perseus*, for example, is a relatively recent novel by Geraldine McCaughrean and the only other novel of the Perseus myth, besides my own, that I could discover. Though the book has its strong points, such as an intriguing cover and some interesting descriptions of mythological beasts such as the Medusa, the prose is largely flat and the characters are only marginally fleshed out. The author does not capture the tone of the time and the characters seem silly instead of mythic and heroic. For example, this excerpt which is of Perseus speaking to Andromeda and she lies chained to a rock about to be eaten by a sea monster: "No. No time. I just want to be sure they'll let me marry you if I kill this sea monster . . .You wouldn't mind, would you? Marrying me, I mean? Only I've been in love with you ever since I laid eyes on you, and my mother said that if I ever loved a woman I ought to marry her before anything else. Unlike my father, you know" (McCaughrean p.77). It seems that, in an attempt to make the myth accessible to a modern audience, McCaughrean wrote dialogue for her characters that is overly colloquial, losing the essence of the time. This is a common downfall among novelizations of other Greek myths as well.

Though I have not encountered other retellings of Perseus, there are other attempts to novelize Greek myths. Unfortunately, many of these novels

are old and out of date, using language that is no longer accessible to children today. *The Golden Fleece* by Padraic Colum is a good example of this type of novel. The book, written in 1921, tells the tale of Jason and the Golden Fleece through the stories of many of the characters in the myth encompassing many familiar Greek myths including Perseus. The book jumps around a lot and can be very confusing. Its language is also dated and difficult to understand: "Perseus ceased speaking, and she who was the youngest and fairest of the nymphs came nearer to him. She knew that he spoke truthfully, and besides she had pity for the youth" (Colum p.180). This type of inaccessible plot and dated language is indicative of the attempts to novelize the Greek myths.

What is much more common than novelizations are collections of Greek myths for children. These are books which retell, in simple and direct terms, a number of different Greek myths. Arguably the best collection for children is *D'Aulaire's Book of Greed Myths*. The book is divided into three sections: Zeus and his Family, Minor Gods and Mortal Descendants of Zeus. Within these are most of the familiar Greek myths as well as some of the lesser-known ones. These stories are told in child-friendly language that does not "speak-down" to the reader: "Athena lent him her shield, polished as brightly as a mirror. Hermes lent him his sword, which was so sharp that it could cut through the hardest metal, and he also needed three magic things owned by the nymphs of the north, they told him, but even the gods did not know where these nymphs lived" (D'Aulaire p.117). The illustrations are vivid and colorful also, lending to the appeal of the book. This collection

gives a clear and simple retelling of the myth which allows children access to the stories.

Though the D'Aulaire's collection is probably the most famous and the most extensive collection for children, there are many others. *Favorite Greek Myths* by Mary Pope Osborne is an example of a collection which has fewer myths, each told very briefly. The language in this collection is still child-friendly though more advanced than the D'Aulaire. Another type of collection of myths is the "mythology dictionary" which is basically an encyclopedia of the characters and events in Greek mythology. *Greek and Roman Mythology A to Z* is an example of this kind of collection. This type of book is comprised of short entries for each character in the mythology. The entry usually chronicles the family ties of the particular character as well as the myths in which he/she appears. There are also collections of myths aimed at older children which look more like chapter books than picture books and use slightly more complicated language. *Tales the Muses Told* is an example of this type of collection. Each story is about five pages long and retells the myth without adding to it. These five page stories are generally spare and do not offer much detail. The trouble, of course, with any collection of myths is that the stories are told very briefly, usually offering little to no character details and simply outlining the plot of the myth. While this treatment is extremely interesting to children already excited about mythology, it can be off-putting to those who have never been exposed to it before.

The final place where mythology can be found for children is in the picture book. There are countless picture books retelling ancient Greek myths. Many of these are beautifully illustrated and well-written. Because each book contains only one myth, there is a little more room for character interpretation and these picture books often offer more insight into the minds of their characters. They are still limited though in that they are very short books and seem to be trying to stick very closely to the myth itself. *Cupid and Psyche* by M. Charlotte Craft is an example of this type of picture book. The illustrations are beautiful and the writing offers small glimpses of the protagonist's character: "Miserable, Psyche returned to her sisters, who consoled her while secretly rejoicing at her ill fortune. Day after day, Psyche made offerings and prayed to the gods to be reunited with Cupid" (Craft p.21). There are many other picture books that achieve a similar goal: *The Hero and the Minotaur* by Robert Byrd and *King Midas and the Golden Touch* by Charlotte Craft, are just two others.

Though there are many places to find mythology for children, there are very few which give it the life and clarity that it needs in the modern world. The picture books and mythology collections are a wonderful addition to the literary cannon, however the do not breath life into the characters and settings as a novel could. Of course, the novels that are available at present do not do this either. It seems that, though authors attempted to novelize Greek myths during the early 1900s, their attempts waned and died. Now, renewed attempts are not staying true to the mythic quality of the story. Through this

lack of accessible novels about Greek mythology for children, the myths themselves are getting lost. Though there are children who read D'Aulaire's and other mythology collections and love them, many children are missing out on these stories for want of a compelling retelling of them. It is clear that Greek mythology needs to be presented in a way that is accessible to the modern child if it is to be reintroduced into the common knowledge of today's reader.

Rationale

Believing that children would be captivated by a more life-like retelling of this myth I decided to test out my theory in my own classroom before writing the novel. Working with a group of three third graders I began by orally telling them the story of Perseus. By using the method through which these myths were passed down in ancient Greece I hoped to engage and captivate the children in a way similar to the way in which I envision my novel captivating its readers. It took three sessions to tell the story. The three children were highly engaged. In fact one of them, who had never heard of Greek mythology before, began to research it outside of class. When it was done, the children were able to ask questions and discuss the myth with one another. We brainstormed ways to communicate this myth and what we had learned about it to our classmates. The three children decided to perform the myth as a play. Their instinct to portray this myth through dramatic performance unconsciously made reference to the Greek way of storytelling and speaks to the timelessness of this art form. The children themselves wrote

the script, brought in clothing for costumes, decided who should play which characters and how they should visually represent different events in the story. It was clear to me, upon introducing this myth to these children, that it spoke to something innate within them because each child—and they were very different from one another—was interested and excited about this story. After many weeks of preparation the children presented their play to their classmates. Afterwards they answered their classmate's questions. It was exciting to see the children take ownership over this myth and breathe life into the characters in a way that they had never done before this year. Their knowledge in answering the questions far surpassed what I imagined they would retain and exceeded my expectations.

In choosing which myth to begin with I wanted to make sure its themes were immediately relevant to modern children. I chose Perseus because I felt that the family dynamic represented in the tale and the emotions that go with it were similar to those of many children today. I felt that boys especially might see themselves in the same situation and feel comforted by Perseus' ability to take charge and diffuse the situation. Mythology and fairy tales have been proven to have the power to help "the child orients himself to the surrounding world, [enrich] his spiritual life, [make] him regard himself as a fearless participant in imaginary struggles for justice, goodness and freedom" (Chukovsky p.216). Unfortunately, many families today, especially in inner cities, are broken and many fathers are absent. In fact, "Almost fifty percent of all children are expected to experience the divorce of their parents

and to spend about five years in a single-parent household. Of young adolescents in stepfamilies, twenty-eight percent will experience the end of that family within five years due to divorce" (Bracki, Dolson and Maurice p.4). Family life is then often disrupted by men who are not the child's father and strain the relationship between mother and son. Though there are obviously many healthy and happy blended families, it is a trend among inner city families that the men women choose as their second husbands or boyfriends are not sympathetic to the children or, often, to the mother herself. One study found "a high prevalence of maltreatment in [an] urban sample of boys. Almost one fifth of the boys had been involved in substantiated maltreatment" (Stouthamer-Loeber, Wei, Homish and Loeber p.268). Even biological fathers can be untrustworthy and viewed as "uncaring, unreliable sources of love and support" (Bracki, Dolson and Maurice p.5). This is clearly the main theme of Perseus and the one that I wanted to depict as the force which Perseus is eventually able to overcome.

Perseus' father is obviously absent, Zeus does not stick around after an encounter with a mortal woman, and Danae is in a vulnerable situation. Though she has Dictys to protect her, a fisherman is no match for a king and Polydectes is able to insert himself into Danae's life and, through her, into Perseus'. Polydectes is dominant and has power over Danae and, though Danae has no wish to marry him, she cannot see a way out of her situation. Though Dictys loves Danae and Perseus, he is powerless to intervene on Danae's behalf. Compare this to the home situation of many inner city boys:

the father is absent and held up on a pedestal because he is unknown (what higher pedestal is there than being a god?), the mother, unsure of her footing on her own is taken in by a dominant but badly moraled man. The child, unable to get his mother out of this situation, wishes she could be in the arms of some kinder, gentler man. In this situation the child watches his world change and is unable to stop it. In the lives of many modern boys there is a feeling of pressure to "assume the role of family protector and father figure at home and cope with all the pressures these roles imply" (Bracki, Dolson and Maurice p.7). His family dynamic is altered and his relationship with his mother is changed because of the tension between the boy begging the mother to leave the dominant man and the mother's inability to do so. The woman who has always loved and protected him is no longer his protector but needs protection instead. This is a frightening situation for a young boy to find himself in.

The modern child may feel helpless in this situation but Perseus is able to transcend it and rescue his mother. This ability to take control of the situation and, ultimately, triumph may inspire the modern child to feel that he may be able to transcend also as "it is regarded as a generally recognized truth that the fairy tale develops, enriches, and humanizes the child's psyche, since the child who listens to fairy tales feels like an active participant and always identifies himself with those characters who crusade for justice, goodness and freedom" (Chukovsky p.219). The fact that this myth confronts wounded and broken families makes it perhaps even more relevant today than it may have

been in past generations, because this is a family situation so familiar to us. This novel is designed to help boys feel more powerful and in control of their lives. It is meant as a positive image of individuation and maturity in which the boy knows what to do to save his family. It is based on the idea that, "the form and structure of fairy tales suggest images to the child by which he can structure his daydreams and with them give better direction to his life." (Bettelheim p.7). In days gone by a book could be a helpful friend to get you through a bitter time. A book could offer solace, advice and comfort and help you to take positive action. Due to the blandness of modern fiction written for children, there is often no longer solace in reading any more. If a child is too old for fairy tales, but too young to find his own truth outside of his family unit, a novel can be a powerful guide and a comforting friend. But it cannot be just any novel, it must be the right one.

Mythology and fairy tale are inexorably linked but there are some key differences between them. While fairy tales feature children as their protagonists, mythology often features boys becoming men. The tale of the hero is especially symbolic of the modern child's journey into adulthood. Typically a difficult time for children, mythology helps to frame the typically difficult transition in a positive and effective light. The hero's journey helps children feel confident and positive about their own journey, portraying characters that have the ability to affect change in their own lives and to take action against the powerful and evil forces they feel they are faced with, "The fate of these heroes convinces the child that, like them, he may feel outcast

and abandoned in the world, groping in the dark, but like them, in the course of his life he will be guided step by step and given help when it is needed."(Bettelheim p.11). This stage of development can come with feelings of helplessness in the sense that the child is consumed by the desire to break away and grow up but is still restricted by the confines of family life. Especially in cases where the child's family life is less than perfect, this psychological drive to be free or even to rescue yourself and members of your family can be extremely present. It becomes important, then, for children to have positive examples of characters doing just that. The beauty of the myth is that it represents these situations in ways that are sufficiently removed from the child's own life as to seem safe and, or possible. The symbolic nature of the story helps children to use their imaginations and make these situations more their own than they would be able to if reading a more realistic account similar to their own situation. The key to *Perseus* is that it can help children feel in control and to feel that taking control will work, "In the traditional fairy tale, the hero is rewarded and the evil person meets his well-deserved fate, thus satisfying the child's deep need for justice to prevail. How else can a child hope that justice will be done to him, who so often feels unfairly treated?"(Bettelheim p. 144). In this way the book becomes more than a book and graduates to the level of teacher, role-model and friend.

Method

The idea to novelize a myth for children came out of my own childhood love of Greek mythology. This was a love that did not come to me

on its own but was carefully handed down to me by my father. A lover of Greek mythology himself, he told me the myths as bedtime stories, telling and retelling them until they were part of my psyche and I couldn't help but love them. I never tire of hearing the story of when he told me my first Greek myth. High up in my loft bed, I listened as he related the story of heroes and monsters. Unable to see me, high up in my bed above him, when he finished the story he paused and waited for my response. "That was a great story!" came a little voice from high above, "do you have any more like that?!" I was hooked.

I was lucky enough to have grown up in a place where my love of Greek mythology was fostered and expanded. Not only was my family knowledgeable and supportive, but I went to school in England where a study of "Classics" is required of all elementary-aged children. The study of the stories I already loved so much and the history of the people who told them expanded my knowledge and interest. By high school I had opted to take all the Classics courses offered and studied rigorously the ancient rites and rituals, dress and daily life of the people who told the stories I loved so much. But it was really the stories that held me in their thrall. The lives of people who really lived peaked my curiosity, but the stories of those who didn't captured my heart. I never tired of hearing those stories or of reading them over and over again. The problem, of course, was I had read them all. Not only had I read each story, I had read each version in any collection of myths that passed as readable. I was at a loss.

Even though I have always loved Greek myths and tell them at every opportunity, I have stopped reading them. I have read many myths in many collections so that, at this point, my imagination has created faces to suit the names and landscapes to suit the stories. I see the characters and hear their voices as clearly as if they were old friends. Yet they are friends I see rarely in the real world. Knowing this, I wanted to find a way to make these characters and stories accessible to children today, children who had no knowledge that these stories existed. I believed, and still do, that more than a simple retelling of the myth, embellishing on nothing and fleshing nothing out, would not be enough to hook the modern child. These stories are universal, their themes are relevant for today, but the medium through which they are represented has waned and died. They needed to be approached in a modern way to appeal to the modern child. The myth itself is "plain writing, direct, matter-of-fact. It often seems, when translated with any degree of literalness, bare, so unlike what we are used to as even to repel"(Hamilton p.72). This is why I chose to write a novelization of a myth. I wanted to bring the essence of the story itself, not a modern version, into the twenty first century. I feel that breathing life into the characters of the ancient myth in the form of novel will allow children to see it for what it really is: a compelling tale with relevance to their own lives. Without this modern medium, I believe the story will fall flat for many children, simply because they are unused to the way in which it is presented. My goal is to bring back the ancient myth.

In order to begin the process of revitalizing the myth of Perseus, I looked to the writers and books I admire to try to get a sense of what makes them worthwhile. By doing this I hoped to then emulate these writers and their ideas so that I, too, could create a plot and characters that were captivating, real and timeless. In doing this, I dealt with four main elements: character, setting, language and plot. For each I looked to books I admire to find unifying characteristics that speak to the essence of each element. Every book has a main character and, for me, the qualities of this character can make or break a book. It was very important to me to boil down what exactly I wanted in a main character. I settled on some key points. A main character must have good morals. His motivations must be for the good even if he sometimes falls short and makes choices that end up hurting his cause. He must also have fears which he, ultimately, overcomes. Bravery is nothing if there is no fear to overcome. These fears must be real and tangible to the reader, even if the situation is not. Lastly, the main character must go through some kind of human journey and emerge changed. In essence, he must discover something about himself, or the world he lives in, which alters him.

Two characters come to mind when I think of these attributes of character. The first is Harry Potter from the series *Harry Potter* by J.K. Rowling. Harry is a character of complex, human emotions, yet his morals are intact. He believes that goodness should triumph over evil and that, where possible, he should act in the name of the good. He also sticks by his friends, rescuing them many times in the face of punishment or even death. He also

has fears which he overcomes time and again. Harry's fear of Voldemort does not stop him from confronting him and his love of Dumbledore causes him to set his fears aside and hunt down his nemesis. His journey, traced throughout the entire series, is one from "muggle" to wizard. He begins as an ordinary boy, abused and forgotten, and becomes a wizard with the power to rid the world of Voldemort forever.

The second character who embodies these attributes is Lyra Belaqua from the series *His Dark Materials* by Phillip Pullman. Though Lyra is a something of a wild child she has an internal set of morals from which she does not waver. Like Harry she believes that you stick by your friends and embarks on a journey, which lasts through all three books, in order to rescue her best friend Roger. Her morals begin to shine through more and more as the trilogy reaches its conclusion and Lyra realizes she must choose between the good of the world and her own desires. Ultimately, she chooses the good of the world, though her heart is broken, because her morals tell her she must fix the problem she created. Through her journey, Lyra must face and overcome her fears time, and time again. The creatures she meets along the way, though many turn out to be friendly, are immediately frightening. She carries with her, also, the fear of being separated from her daemon, Pantalaimon, and the fear of growing up. Ultimately, she faces this fear as her journey leads her from child to adult and she is changed.

Characters exist within the framework of a setting and that setting must be the perfect stage upon which the main character's journey is played

out. For me, the most important aspect of setting is that the landscape holds within it the essence of the story that is being told. In other words, the ambience of the story must mirror the plot itself. *The Phantom Tollbooth* by Norton Juster is a book which does this expertly. Entering a place in which there is absolutely no sound, for example, Juster writes: "Not the slightest thing could be heard, and it felt as if, in some mysterious way, a switch had been thrown and all the sound in the world had been turned off at the same instant" (Juster p.145). Descriptions like these help the world of the story become more real than the real world. Without them, the real world maintains a firm hold. A place where silence can be turned up, a watch dog is really a dog that ticks and a spelling bee is really a bee that spells captures a sense of whimsy and topsy-turvyness that echoes the plot of the book.

The Giver, by Lois Lowry, is another book which presents its mood through setting. The fact that no one in the book can see in color echoes the restricted nature of this futuristic world. So too, the lack of information about what occurs here mimics the way in which the characters in the book live their daily lives. Lowry describes this strange world as if it were normal and natural, as if there had never been the world we know. For the characters in the book, the world we know is unknown to them, so we must learn about it through observation. Lowry expertly sets the scene without breaking the mood of the story, giving us tidbits of information and letting us piece together this fully formed world. For example, we learn about the odd way in which birthdays are celebrated as part of Jonas' memory: "He could

remember the Decembers back to when he had become, well, probably a Four. The earlier ones were lost to him. But he observed them each year, and he remembered Lily's earliest Decembers. He remembered when his family received Lily, the day she was named, the day that she had become a One" (Lowry p.11). This is particularly important in a story like mine in which the setting is not the everyday world of the reader.

The characters and the setting cannot come alive without language. The books that I admire are written with language that is direct and words that do not get in the way of the story. Similarly, I feel that a book should be about the story, not a display of technique. The first and most important quality must be the plot; the language is a vehicle for the plot, not the other way around. *Hatchet* by Gary Paulson is a good example of a plot-driven book. Though the language is expressive and evocative, it is not the main point of the book. Instead the reader focuses on the story of survival and courage, bourn along by the language, not bogged down by it: "He wiped his mouth and tried to move his leg, which had stiffened like wood. There was thirst, and hunger, and he ate some raspberries from the jacket. They had spoiled a bit, seemed softer and mushier, but still ad a rich sweetness. He crushed the berries against the roof of his mother with his tongue and drank the sweet juice as it ran down his throat. A flash of metal caught his eye and he saw his hatchet in the sand where he had thrown it at the porcupine in the dark" (Paulson pp.84-5). The language is descriptive and beautiful but it moves the plot along and provides insight into the minds of its characters.

When writing my own story I thought first of my main character. I wanted Perseus to embody the qualities I saw in Harry Potter, Lyra Belaqua and other worthy protagonists. Because the character is not entirely drawn from my own imagination, but is a creation of the ancient Greeks as well, I wanted to make sure I stayed true to who Perseus is in the myth as well as who I needed him to be for my story. In the myth, Perseus is a hero, he is brave and determined and he saves the day. I wanted to keep the qualities of a mythic hero alive in him while tempering them with more human characteristics as well. Perseus has good morals, he wants to save his mother from an abusive man and will risk his own life to do so. When he encounters Andromeda in much the same situation as his mother he takes time to save her too. His fears are many but he overcomes them all. His fears of leaving his family and the only home he has ever known are doubled by the knowledge that he may not return. He also fears the beasts he must fight, Medusa and the Craken, and knows that there is a very real chance he could die at their hands. Nonetheless, he is able to face his fears and win the day. Through this process he is changed in much the same way that Lyra is. He begins as a boy who cannot help his mother and ends a man able to protect those he loves.

I tried to set the story in a landscape reminiscent of ancient Greece though I was cognizant of the fact that these myths took place in a fictional Greece, even when they were being told. I tried to capture the grandeur and mystery of a place where kings were all-powerful, monsters roamed the earth and gods were frequent visitors to the human race. I thought a great deal

about the different locations throughout the book and how the ancient Greeks might have imagined them. I tried to make the palaces of Polydectes and Cepheus as grand as possible so that they were worthy of the wealth of ancient kings. I tried to depict the small towns along the way, such as the town where Perseus lives and the town where he is attacked by the mob, in stark contrast to the palaces. I made them places in which there is poverty and filth and people live in very close quarters. I also wanted to capture the mystery of the magical elements in the story. The Oracles cave, for example, is a place shrouded in the mystery of the ages and I tried to do it justice in my writing: "He looked back at the cave's entrance, the craggy opening in the steep cliff's base, the darkness within lit only faintly by glowing candles, and the still, silent form of the Oracle, cross-legged and veiled alone in her knowledge, dealing out life and death as fate permitted."

As I wrote, I was very conscious of my audience. I wanted the book to be understandable to children but not to speak down to them. Because of this, I use language that may not appear in many books for this age group today, however I felt this language was appropriate to evoke the ancient feel of the story. This speaks to my requirement that the language be a vehicle for telling the story. I made sure that all descriptions forwarded the plot in some way and that the language was not unnecessarily complicated. Instead I tried to evoke the world I was describing through the language that I used. In essence, the language, the setting and the plot are inextricably linked. It is my hope

that readers do not even notice the language but are plunged into the story as if by some external power.

Conclusion

I am so grateful to have had the support and encouragement of Bank Street College of Education in writing this novel. It is a wonderful example of the parallel process by which graduate students at Bank Street can experience the same blend of spontaneity and guidance that we are being taught to share with our students. This novel was only an idea until I was allowed to explore it further in a thesis. Now it is a fully-formed being, taking on a life of its own and begging for independence. There is nothing for me, but to let it go free.

My hope is that I will be able to publish this book as the first in a series of novels based on Greek myths. I truly believe that there is a niche for this series in children's literature and that it could become a well-loved and useful text for school-aged children and their teachers. I am committed to teaching and strive to educate my students in as many ways as I can. Writing this book is one more way that I hope to educate children. With this book I hope to bring the joy that mythology can bring back into the lives of children today. My hope is they will find these stories relevant to their own lives and find strength and courage in their message. Though I am writing now about the myth of Perseus, the hero myths that will be included in this series will be chosen for their relevance to today's world and for their power to help shape and transform young minds. Through literature, I hope to inspire children to feel that they are in control of their lives, that they can achieve great things

and that, though they might be in the least likely of places, there will always be friends along the way, cheering them on and wishing them well.

Appendix A: Plot Outline for *Perseus*

Character List:

Perseus: son of Danae and grandson of Acrisius
Acrisius: Danae's father and Perseus' grandfather
Polydectes: King of the country which Perseus and Danae arrive in
Danae: Perseus' mother and Acrisius' daughter
Dictys: A fisherman
Medusa: a gorgon
Graeae: three gray haired sisters guarding Medusa's cave
Andromeda: daughter of Casseopia and Cepheus
Cepheus: father of Andromeda and husband of Casseopia
Casseopia: mother of Andromeda and wife of Cepheus
Phineus: Andromeda's fiancé
Boy: A servant in Cepheus' castle
Medicine Woman: A medicine woman in Cepheus' castle
Pegasus: winged horse
Chimera: fire-breathing monster, a conglomeration of a lion, goat and dragon
Zeus, Artemis and Hermes: gods

Plot Outline:

- Acrisius is told by the oracle that his daughter's son will be the cause of his death
- Acrisius shuts Danae up in a tower so she can't get pregnant
- Zeus sees Danae as she is being led up to the tower and falls in love with her
- Zeus comes anyway (in a shower of golden rain) and Danae becomes pregnant
- Danae gives birth to Perseus
- Acrisius hears Perseus crying and discovers him
- Acrisius locks Danae and Perseus up in a wooden chest and sends them down the river
- Acrisius feels guilty about what he's done and runs away from his homeland.

- Dictys pulls Perseus and Danae out of the river
- Dictys explains that he is the king's brother but has been exiled from the palace. He offers to let Danae and Perseus live with him
- Before they can live with him, Dictys must take Danae and Perseus to see his brother the king
- Polydectes is a mean and cruel king and takes a liking to Danae

- Polydectes wants to marry Danae but she has fallen in love with Dictys and refuses
- Danae agrees to come to Polydectes' palace every day as long as she does not have to marry him
- When Perseus is a fifteen he strikes a deal with Polydectes: if he kills the gorgon Medusa, Polydectes must set Danae free
- Artemis (goddess of hunting) gives Perseus a shield and Hermes (the messenger god) gives Perseus winged sandals to help him on his quest.

- Perseus sets off on his journey
- At a town where he stops to ask directions he is attacked by a mob and injured
- He is taken to the palace of King Cepheus
- Here he meets Chepheus' daughter Andromeda. He does not know she is the princess because she keeps her identity hidden and goes only by the name Night.
- He finds her beautiful and charming but she is betrothed to Phineus who sucks up to Cepheus and Casseopia (Cepheus' wife) but is really an oaf.
- Casseopia loves the attention of Phineus because she is very vain. She even boasts that she is more beautiful than the sea nymphs
- Perseus encounters Acrisius here (Acrisius has been living here in hiding, ashamed of what he did to his daughter and grandson). Perseus feels as if he knows Acrisius and Acrisius feels as though he knows Perseus but they cannot find a connection to one another.

- Perseus leave Cepheus' palace and arrives at Medusa's lair. He must first get past the Graeae, women with only one eye and one tooth between them.
- Perseus uses the shield as a mirror to slay Medusa without looking at her (one look at Medusa's ugly face you are turned to stone)
- When he cuts of her head, Pegasus and Chimera come out
- Perseus takes Medusa's head and rides off on Pegasus

- As Perseus is riding back, he sees Andromeda chained to a rock about to be eaten by a sea monster
- Perseus kills the monster by using Medusa's head to turn it to stone and rescues Andromeda
- As a reward Cepheus says Perseus can marry Andromeda, this angers Phineus
- The story then is revealed that it should have been Casseopia chained to the rock as punishment for her boast that she was more beautiful

than the sea nymphs but an oracle had told Cepheus to switch mother for daughter. Phineus knew all this and didn't rescue Andromeda.

- At Perseus and Andromeda's wedding Phineus gets a band of men and tries to kill Perseus. Perseus kills them all with Medusa's head
- One of the band of men is the man Perseus thought he recognized from the palace earlier (Acrisius). Perseus turns him to stone because he was helping Phineus
- Phineus is the last of his men standing (because he cowardly and letting everyone else do the work) he begs Perseus to spare him, but Perseus turns him to stone

- Perseus takes Andromeda back to Polydectes' palace and his mother
- There Polydectes is about to wed Danae, thinking that Perseus is dead
- Perseus uses Medusa's head to turn Polydectes to stone
- He installs all the statues (men he killed with Medusa's head) in a special room. Danae recognizes Acrisius and the prophecy is fulfilled – Perseus killed his grandfather
- Dictys becomes king and is able to marry Danae

Appendix B: Excepts from the Novel *Perseus*

Chapter 8

When Danae woke, she couldn't see. Her head ached as though she had been struck with one of Zeus' thunderbolts and, when she reached up to touch it, she felt dried blood. She held up her hands in front of her face but could see nothing. *Am I blind?* she thought, and then, *Where am I?* And then, *Where is my son?* Suddenly she was aware of movement, the ground she was lying on was not steady, it was rocking gently back and forth, rhythmically. She began to sit up and her head knocked against something, sending new lightening bolts of pain through her skull. She reached up her hand more cautiously and touched something that felt like wood. She reached out to the side and came across the same hard substance. It was the same on her other side and underneath where she lay. *I am in a box* she thought. Then suddenly her panicked thoughts cried out, *A coffin!* But no, coffins don't rock back and forth.

Suddenly she felt something move beside her and sprang back. There was not much room but she drew up her knees, afraid of what might be in here with her. Tentatively she reached out her hand. At first she felt nothing, only the wooden floor of the box. But then she felt something warm and soft. It felt like skin. She felt around the form. It was small. At the top there was hair and at the bottom, there were feet. She found the face. Even though she could not see, she knew this face to touch, it was her boy, her son!

"Perseus!" she cried out, drawing the little bundle to her.

At his name the baby stirred and let out a little gurgle and then a wail. Danae held him tightly to her, so glad he was alive.

"He didn't kill us!" she said aloud. "He let us live." But then, as she remembered the four wooden walls and the wooden ceiling just above their heads she wondered, "We are alive, but what has he done to us?"

Danae took a deep breath and tried to stay calm. She focused her attention on the swaying of the box. What would make a box sway like that? At first she could think of nothing but then she wondered, *Has he sold us into slavery? Are we caged on some pack mule ambling along a dirty country road?* But almost as quickly as she had this idea she set it aside. A mule would move more jerkily than this. This was a gentle rocking motion. She thought again. Closing her eyes she let her body feel the ebb and flow of the rocking as it tilted the box from side to side. *Water!* she thought with great certainty. *We are floating on water.* Once she had decided that this must be it, she pieced together what must have happened.

Her father, unable to kill his only child and her tiny baby had, instead, hauled out the huge oak chest he had built for storing old blankets and clothes. From it he had flung the moth-eaten clothes and left it bare and gaping. Into it he had placed his unconscious daughter and her terrified son and locked the lid. With all his might he had dragged it down to the banks of the river and pushed it into the fast-rushing current. Having done so, he had turned his back on the river and condemned his bloodline to death.

But they had not died. At least not yet. Danae nestled Perseus in the cramped space as best she could and then, making sure he was as much out of the way as possible she flung her body upwards towards the lid of the chest with as much force as she could muster. The lid did not even shift. Her father was a master carpenter and she knew anything that he had made would never break. But perhaps there were people along the banks of the river. Gods knew how far they had gone already; perhaps they were floating through a town. She knocked hard on the lid and called out.

"Help! My son and I are locked in the box floating down the river. Save us, please!"

Although she banged and shouted for what seemed like an eternity the box continued to rock back and forth as it glided down the river. Eventually, Danae could shout no longer and she fell into an exhausted sleep. When she woke up the situation had not changed and she felt the panic rise within her. The river was long and the box was sturdy, they would die of hunger before it ever reached the sea. She held Perseus to her and stroked his hair. He gurgled in his sleep. A love as fierce as it was tender welled up within Danae and she knew that, whatever happened to her boy, she would be right there with him, sharing his fate. She held him and let the rocking of the box lull her back to sleep.

*

Mother and son were startled from sleep by a violent change in the box's motion. The gentle rocking had been like a lullaby, lulling Danae into a

sense of security and sleepiness, suddenly though she was aware of their danger as the box was jerked from its course and then bumped along as if over rocks. She clung to Perseus who was crying quietly in little hiccups and waited for what would happen next. Just as suddenly as it had been thrown off course the box stopped moving. Danae's stomach did a little summersault as she got used to stillness again. Perseus moaned. Danae took a chance and hollered,

"Let us out, please, we are locked in here!" She hammered on the lit as she spoke.

From somewhere above the box she heard a man's gruff voice,

"Great gods! A woman. I heard a woman! Hand me that plank."

There was a pause as, presumably, the plank was handed over and then a crack as the lid of the box was pried open. Sunlight flooded Danae's eyes and she put up a hand to shield them. When they had adjusted a little she saw the weather-beaten face of a man staring down at her, wide-eyed and open-mouthed.

"Gods of Mount Olympus," he whispered. Then he seemed to shake himself and reached a hand into the box and helped Danae out. She was a little shaky on her legs and he had to hold onto her as she stood on the sand. She could feel his work-hardened muscles in the arm that supported her.

"My baby," she said, shocked at the weakness of her own voice.

At first the man did not understand, Perseus was shielded from view under the blanket. Danae took a step forward to retrieve him herself but

stumbled and fell into the arms of the man. She gestured feebly towards the box.

Grasping that there was something in the box she wanted, the man sat her gently down on the sand at the bank of the river and peered into the box once more. At first he saw nothing and wondered if the woman was mad but then, a tiny movement caused him to lift the blanket aside. He nearly dropped it again when he saw the child, lying still at the bottom of the box. The baby's eyes followed him as he reach in and scooped him up, sitting down beside the woman he passed her the child.

"I cannot thank you enough" said Danae, looking into the strangers gold-flecked eyes. "You see we were . . .my father . . ." the magnitude of her tale overwhelmed Danae and she found herself unable to tell this kind stranger anything.

"Hush," he said. "I will take you to my home and you can rest. It is a humble place, I am but a fisherman, but I think you will find it clean and comfortable. When you have rested and eaten then, perhaps, you can tell me why the gods have brought you to my doorstep in a wooden box. But not before."

Danae shot him a look of gratitude and leaned heavily on his outstretched arm. She wondered, sleepily, how long they had been in the box, her legs felt as though they had not been used for days. She was barely aware of lying down in a cool, clean bed and drifting off to sleep. She dreamed of nothing and slept for a very long time.

Chapter 20

Perseus woke with the certain knowledge that a noise had woken him. He looked about the chamber and realized it was night. The curtains were drawn across the window and only the light from a wall torch in the hall let in a little light under the door. He sat up slowly and listened. At first there was nothing, not a sound. Then he thought he heard a hushed voice and then, distinctly, a giggle. *What on earth is going on?* he asked himself. He listened harder. He was sure then that he heard the rustle of a gown and the muted tones of someone who wished to remain unheard. Suddenly the light under his door was lessened by two shadows that strikingly resembled feet. He was sure the door would be flung open at any minute, but nothing happened. Then, clearly from under the door he heard a woman's voice, whispering,

"I can't hear anything."

Then there was a giggle and another voice replied, "Shh, of course you can't, you're talking!" Then there was silence.

This was very strange but quite intriguing. It sounded like the people outside were about his own age. Could it be some servant's children out on a midnight adventure? He listened again. Nothing at first, but then,

"Come on," hissed one. "Nothing's happening."

He saw the feet retreat away from his doorframe. Hungry for company he couldn't let them go.

"It's alright," he called. "You can come in if you want to."

There was a stunned silence from the other side of the door and Perseus felt sure they would run away without coming in. Just as his disappointment was getting the better of him he heard a torrent of whispering just outside the door. Though he couldn't catch the words it seemed clear that whoever was out there were in a heated debate about whether or not to enter. He waited. The whispering stopped. Then, ever so slowly, the door to his chamber opened and a head peeked around the doorframe.

Though it was hard to see in the half-light of the hall, the face that now peered into the room was completely round. Her cheeks were rosy and her eyes a twinkling blue. Her thin blond hair hung down in wisps to her shoulders. She rubbed a chubby hand over her eyes. She peered at him a moment longer and then turned aside to speak to her companion who was still out of view.

"I can't see him at all, the light's no good."

"Then bring a candle in, you idiot!" came a voice from the other side of the wall. Perseus couldn't help smiling at that so, when the girl acquired the candle and thrust it through the door to get a better look at him, she found him smiling up at her from his bed. Seemingly emboldened by this display of good humor the girl produced her whole body from behind the wall. She was as plump as her face suggested her to be. She filled out her nightdress so that her arms stuck out on either side, being unable to lie flat. Her mouth, though small, was rosy enough and she used it now to smile at Perseus.

"Hello," he said. "You really can come in. I won't hurt you. I promise."

The girl regarded him thoughtfully. "I'm supposed to find out if you will or won't myself before I let my companion see you."

"Is that so?" asked Perseus, amused. "Are you her protector?"

The plump face took on an air of pride as she said, "In a way, I am."

"Fair enough," said Perseus. "Well, do I look like I'll bite?"

The girl giggled, a sound Perseus recognized from the whispered conversation he'd heard outside. "I suppose you're alright," she said. Then, turning to the person outside his frame of vision she said, "It's alright, you can talk to him. He won't hurt us."

The plump girl stood back to allow her companion entrance before her into the room. With the recession of the candle it was a moment before Perseus' was able to focus on the newcomer. When he did, finally, he gasped.

She was a girl of about his age, perhaps a little younger. Her glossy black hair cascaded over her shoulders and down her back like a wave of cooled lava. Her slender frame was rendered even more so by the cozy plumpness of her nearby friend. Her nightdress was sleeveless allowing her bare arms to be exposed and he looked on them now and likened them to porcelain. Her features were delicate, as if they had been crafted by the gods themselves. Her nose slender and royal, her lips full and red, her cheekbones high. Her eyes, which fixed on him now with all the inquisitiveness of a deer wondering if he was friend or foe, were the most startling blue, rendered even

more startling in contrast to her jet black hair. In short, she was the most beautiful person he had ever seen.

Dumbstruck, Perseus said the first thing that came into his head: "Who are you?"

"Who *is* she?" crowed her now forgotten friend. "Who *is* she? For goodness sake, she's . . ."

But the girl silenced her with a finger to her lips, a gesture Perseus found beautiful in its very simplicity. "Quiet, you'll wake the entire household." She spoke in tones of honey laced with ice. Beautifully complex and lusciously dangerous. Then she turned back to Perseus. "We are servants," she said. Casting her eyes downwards.

"Both of you?" Perseus couldn't help blurting out.

"Well I like that!" said the round companion, though she didn't look half as upset as she sounded.

"Yes, both of us," said the girl firmly. "My parents were of noble birth but have since lost their fortunes and we now work here in the palace."

"My name is Perseus," said Perseus. "What's yours?"

"Well I'm . . ." said the oft-forgotten companion but was shushed again by her luminous friend.

"We cannot tell you our names" said the fallen lady. "We do not know that we can trust you and if you tell someone that you saw us and spoke with us we could get in trouble."

"Well, I wouldn't want that," said Perseus, honestly. "Well, at least come in and talk with me a while. I don't get many visitors." This was not really true. In the one day that he had been awake he had been visited by Boy and the medicine woman. But he was willing to do or say anything to make this goddess on earth stay. She seemed to consider it a moment and then acquiesced.

"But only for a little while."

Perseus nodded. "Leave whenever you have to," he said, though he hoped it wouldn't be for a long, long time.

Although Perseus tried to engage the slender, fragile girl in conversation, it was the plump, robust one that did most of the talking. Perseus would say, "So, what's it like living in a castle?" looking at the one and the other would say, "Oh we love it. It's cold and drafty sometimes but there's always something to do or see. It's quite a nice life."

Not wanting to be rude, Perseus listened politely to the chubby blond servant and, though his eyes never left her silent companion for long, he began to like this buoyant girl even as he wished fervently to know more about the other. After a time the mysterious creature got up, saying it was time for them to go.

"Please," said Perseus when they were at the door, "at least give me something to call you. I want to think of you both with names."

She seemed to consider this and then nodded. "Alright," she said, in one of her rare moments of speech. "I am dark and my companion fair, we

are opposites she and I. So call me Night and call her Day. I think those names aptly describe us, inside and out." With this cryptic statement she turned to leave, Day following on her heels.

"I hope I will see you again," said Perseus, praying he didn't sound desperate.

"We shall return tomorrow night. You amuse us," said Night. Then, without a backwards glance from either of them, they were out the door and gone. *I amuse her*, though Perseus to himself. *I suppose that's better than nothing.* Then he fell to thinking of her, of Night, this girl with no name who had appeared, like a ghost, in his room. He imagined what it would be like to touch her. Just to touch her hand. In his village there had been very few girls his age, the ones who were were generally sent to the palace to be one of Polydectes' maidens. He was at a loss to know what to do with his feelings. He shook his head. "I barely know her," he said aloud. But his thoughts would not be swayed from her, even when he thought of his mother and killing Medusa. In fact, he thought of his quest now in a new light. It would be something to prove himself. A test of manhood to show this girl that he was more than just an amusement. It was a long time before he drifted back to sleep.

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