

The Golden Fleece

retold by Anne Terry White

JASON was the rightful heir to the throne of Iolcus, but there seemed little chance that he would ever sit upon it. For his uncle Pelias had seized it and driven Jason's father away. The boy himself had been brought up by the centaur Chiron. This kindly creature, who was half-horse, half-man, had educated many heroes in his cave. Under his care Jason learned all that befits a stalwart man to know.

Now Pelias, the false king, was troubled by a strange oracle. He had been told to beware of a man wearing but one sandal. Pelias turned the mysterious words over and over in his mind, but could make nothing of them. And he was still worrying about the meaning years later, when Jason, his nephew, decided to travel to Iolcus and assert his rights.

Jason had grown into a tall, handsome man, and as he journeyed along, none could help admiring him. His bright, unshorn locks hung down his neck. The skin of a leopard he had strangled was thrown over his close-fitting leather tunic. Two broadbladed spears were in his hand. He looked so much like a god that many he met wondered whether he might not be one of the immortals.

As he approached the city of Iolcus, Jason had to cross a muddy river, and in crossing it he lost his sandal in the mud. So he arrived in the market place of the capital wearing but one. The place was thronged, for the King was just then making a sacrifice.

"Who can that be?" the people said to one another, looking at the handsome stranger with wonder. "Is this perhaps Apollo come in disguise?"

But the King's eyes went—as ever they did—to the stranger's feet. He saw but one sandal, and his face paled and his heart all but stood still.

"Who are you and what is your father's name?" the King asked when the rites were finished.

"I am Jason, the son of King Aeson," the young man replied. "And I have come to visit my father's house."

Pelias hid his fears under courteous words and invited Jason into the palace, where he entertained his nephew royally for five days. Then Jason said to him in a matter-of-fact way:

"This kingdom is mine for I am the rightful heir. But I shall leave you the wealth you took from my father. All the fields and the herds shall be yours. I ask only the scepter and throne which were my father's."

Pelias thought fast, and his face changed color several times as he spoke.

"All shall be as you wish," he said. "But I, too, have a request to make. I have been troubled by a dream. The shade of Phrixus has appeared to me. He has implored me to bring back to Greece the golden fleece of that sacred ram which once carried him across the sea to Colchis and which afterwards he sacrificed to Zeus. Go you in my stead. Bring back to Greece that glorious prize and put the spirit of Phrixus at rest."

When Jason heard these words, his soul was mightily stirred. For the golden fleece was the great prize of which every hero in Greece dreamed. All knew that in the land of Colchis the golden fleece hung from an oak in a sacred grove, where an un-sleeping dragon guarded it by day and by night. Jason's mind and heart were instantly so filled with longing for it that he did not stop to examine his wily uncle's reasons for proposing the adventure to him.

"I will go to Colchis with a band of heroes," he agreed at once. "And I will set the soul of Phrixus at ease."

Thereupon Jason sent heralds to all the courts of Greece, calling for bold men who dared to sail with him. And he had Argus the Thesopian build him a fifty-oared ship.

Hero after hero answered the call. Argus himself volunteered to go, he who had built the vessel. Heracles of Tiryns, the strongest man who ever lived, joined Jason. Laertes, grandson of Zeus, who one day would be father of Odysseus of the many adventures, came from Argos. Orpheus, the poet and wondrous musician who descended into Hades to seek his dead wife, Eurydice, hastened from Thrace. Peleus, who would one day father Achilles, the great hero of the Trojan War, also came. And many others of glittering fame hastened to Iolcus, so that never before had so gallant a ship's company come together.

When all was ready, Jason made a solemn offering to the gods of the sea. The heroes took their seats at the oars, and the *Argo* weighed anchor. Dangers untold lay before the bold Argonauts. But not one of the heroes lost heart.

Who can tell of all that happened before the Argonauts reached Colchis? It would take many books to say the whole, for countless

men have recorded the adventures of the heroes, and each tells the story in his own way. But arrive at last they did. It was sunset, and they were weary. They took down their sails, then rowed up the river toward the capital, and made the vessel fast. With a grateful heart, Jason offered up a libation to the gods. Then, filled with uncertainty about the morrow, the heroes lay down to rest.

"My plan," said Jason next morning when the heroes consulted together, "is to get the golden fleece without fighting, if possible. I shall ask King Aetes for it, and from his own mouth we shall learn what course we must take. Now remain quietly here on the ship, my noble comrades, while I with two of your number will go to the palace."

King Aetes received the Argonauts graciously. According to custom, he asked no questions until they were sitting down to food. But he no sooner learned who they were and what their errand was than his manner changed.

"Not for the golden fleece but to take my scepter and my throne you have come!" he broke out in fury. "Return to your homes before I have your tongues cut out and your hands lopped off!"

"Restrain your anger, King Aetes," Jason answered courteously. "We have come for no other purpose than I have stated. Destiny and the command of a wicked king prompted me to come. I pray you, grant our request. Give us the golden fleece. And if there is any service we can render you as fighting men, we shall gladly do it."

The King frowned. Then, changing his manner, he spoke more mildly.

"I hold no grudge against brave men," he said. "But you must prove your courage. In the field of Ares I have two bulls whose feet are of bronze and whose breath is fire. You must yoke them and plow that field. Instead of grain, you must sow dragon's teeth. From them a crop of warriors will spring up. These you must slay before nightfall. All this I have done myself. If you cannot do it, I will not give up the fleece, for it is but just that the more valiant man shall have it."

Jason sat speechless and confused. How could he promise to perform such a hopeless task? At last he said:

"The labor which you ask is heavy. But I will undertake it—even though I perish in the attempt. There are worse things than death."

With this the Argonauts rose from the table and went back to their ship.

When the rest of the comrades heard what a fearful task Aetes had set Jason, many offered to undertake the trial in his stead. But he refused them all.

"My destiny has brought me here," he said, "and come what may, I will obey it."

But now there came to them one of the King's grandsons, Argus by name, whom Jason had by chance once rescued from a wrecked ship.

"Jason," he said, "there is no hope of your performing the labor my grandfather has set you. Let me, therefore, seek the help of Medea. She is my mother's young sister, and is a maiden skilled in brewing magic potions. Hecate herself, whose priestess she is, has taught her. She alone can enable you to yoke the fiery bulls and plow the fields of Ares."

"We are indeed in a sad plight if our safety depends on a woman," Jason answered him sadly. "But go to her if you like. I will not hinder you."

Unknown to either Jason or Argus, Medea was herself thinking hard how she might help the hero. For she had seen Jason as he sat at her father's table and had been stirred by his beauty and manliness. Never before had she felt love for a man, but now her feelings strove against one another and were stronger than herself. Many thoughts flew through her mind. Reason said one thing, her heart another.

"If I do not help him, this noble stranger will surely perish," she said to herself. "But shall I, then, betray my father's kingdom and rescue an unknown foreigner that he may go home and become another woman's husband? Ah, but he will not do that. Before I help him he will give me his promise to marry me. He will never deceive me or forget what I have done for him."

As she sat thus thinking, her sister came to her. "Medea," she said, "my son Argus, whose life you know Jason saved, has sent me to beg your help. Give the stranger some device, I pray, whereby he can overcome the bulls."

Medea's heart laughed when she heard her sister speak, but she hid her joy.

"I will do it," she said, "only for your son Argus' sake. Let him inform Jason that early in the morning I will go to Hecate's temple and there give him the magic with which he can survive the trial with the bulls."

So Jason came to Medea in the temple of Hecate. Never had he looked so handsome. When Medea's eyes rested on the stranger

from Greece, she could not take them away. And when Jason took her hand, her heart fluttered so that she was speechless. For a long time they stood silent. Then Jason said:

"Lady, I come to beg you for the charm you promised. Ask in return what you will. And know that if you enable me and my companions to go home with the golden fleece, your glory will be undying. All Greece will praise you forever."

Medea did not answer—the tumult in her breast would not let her speak. She only placed a small box in Jason's hands. He stood holding the box tightly and gazing into her eyes, as much confused as she.

At last Medea spoke. "This is what you must do," she said, and told him what mystic rites he must perform and how to use the charm she had given him.

"Salve your body with this ointment," she said, "and also your weapons, that they be not consumed by fire. And when the warriors spring from the dragon's teeth, throw a great stone in their midst. That will cause them to turn one on another. And when all of them are dead, you can take the golden fleece and depart."

Tears gushed from Medea's eyes and rolled down her beautiful face as she said the last words and added, "Do not forget the name of Medea when you come home rejoicing, for she will be thinking of you."

"Never will I forget you, noble princess," Jason said passionately, "neither by night nor by day. But if you will come with me, all the men and women of Greece will adore you, for only because of you will their sons and husbands and brothers have returned home safe. And then nothing but death should stand between us."

Medea could have listened to his words without end, but the time had come to part. So, while Jason returned to his companions, she went back to the palace to struggle with her thoughts of loyalty and home and love.

It was scarcely dawn the next day when the townspeople assembled in the sacred field of Ares. They took their stand on the upper slopes. And in their midst King Aetes sat clad in purple, his ivory scepter in his hand. All eyes were on Jason, who stood upon the field examining the heavy yoke and plow.

Suddenly there was the sound of snorting and bellowing. Into the field rushed the brazen-footed bulls, wreathed in smoke and blowing fire from their mouths and nostrils. At the touch of their hot breath, the grass blazed up and roared as a furnace roars

when it is stoked. Yet Jason went toward them. The creatures saw him and swung their awful heads from side to side. They bellowed and pawed the ground with their heavy cloven hoofs.

Rigid and breathless, the Argonauts watched from the slope as Jason boldly approached. Their hearts all but stood still when they saw Jason force first one bull, then the other, to its knees and harness the beasts to the yoke. And when the plow bit into the earth and turned up a black furrow, they broke into loud cheers, while all the Colchians stood amazed.

Jason plowed, and as he walked up the field and down, he kept taking from his helmet the dragon's teeth which had been given him and sowing them in the furrow. In the afternoon the four-acre field was done. Then Jason unyoked the bulls, and at his cry they fled in terror to their underground stable. When he turned, the crop of armed men was springing from the earth.

And now fear again took hold of the Argonauts, for they saw all the warriors prepare to hurl their spears at the hero. Even Medea felt a wave of panic surge over her as she beheld one solitary youth against so many men. Softly she chanted a spell to help him. But there was no need. Jason took up a great round stone and tossed it in the midst of the warriors, and immediately they turned on one another. To the last man they perished in that bloody war.

Then the Argonauts cheered so that the hills rang with the sound. Rushing down into the field, they hugged Jason in eager embraces. Even the Colchians shouted. But King Aetes returned to the palace without a word. Anger gnawed at his heart. He knew that Jason could never have performed the labor without Medea's help, and he brooded into the night on vengeance and how he might outwit the clever Argonaut.

Medea passed the night in agony. She feared her father, but she also feared what might befall her if she fled with Jason. At last she made her decision. The palace doors opened at her magic spells, and she hurried to the shore where the Argonauts kept a great fire burning. At her call Jason leaped ashore.

"My father is planning fearful vengeance," Medea said. "Save yourselves and me from his wrath. I will get you the golden fleece. Only swear to me, swear that you will treat me honorably when I am a stranger in your native land."

"The gods be my witness that I shall make you my wife!" Jason promised.

"Then let us go at once and take the fleece," Medea said.

Quickly the ship carried them to the sacred grove, and together Jason and Medea approached the sacred oak. The dragon stretched his long neck toward them. He hissed fiercely. But Medea's charms lulled the creature to sleep, and for the first time the sleepless eyes closed. Then Jason snatched the golden fleece from the limb, and the two ran toward the ship.

With what wonder the Argonauts viewed the marvelous prize they had come so far to seek! But Jason, eager to depart, would not take time to let each man touch it.

"My noble comrades," he said, "let us be on our way, for we shall surely be pursued. And as for Medea here, know all of you that she who has helped us accomplish what we undertook shall be my lawful wife. I look to you to help me protect her, for she has rescued Greece."

So the Argonauts seated themselves hastily at the oars, and the vessel glided down the river and out upon the waves of the sea.

Hercules and his 12 Labors

Hercules, whose name meant greatest hero in Greek mythology, was no ordinary hero. He had the great god Zeus for his father. Though Zeus already had a wife, Hera, he had Hercules with a mortal woman. So, Hera did not like Hercules. She sent two snakes down to kill him in his crib, but a while after, Hercules was found strangling both snakes, then threw them into space. As Hercules got older, he became more talented with a bow and arrow and his human strength became increasingly stronger. Although he was strong, Hercules was driven mad by Hera. In a frenzy, he killed his wife and kids. As a result of that and to be forgiven for his sin, he was sentenced to perform 12 labors. These labors were given by King Eurytheus. Eurytheus would not have been king if Hera hadn't tricked Zeus into crowning him.

LABOR 1: NEMEAN LION

The first task for Hercules to do was to kill the Nemean lion. Although the lion had skin that couldn't be penetrated by anything less than Zeus' lightning bolt, Hercules managed to block off its cave, wrestle it down, and choke it to death. Since then, Hercules wore the impenetrable skin for a cloak and jaws for a helmet.

LABOR 2: THE HYDRA

After seeing Hercules wearing the Nemean lion cloak, King Eurytheus hid like a coward in a storage vase. He told Hercules the next labor from inside the jar. The next task was to seek out and destroy the monstrous multi-headed hydra. Many people thought that the hydra had a thousand or so heads. It did no good to chop off or beat off a head because two would grow back instead. During the fight, the hydra called on an ally, a giant crab. The crab bit Hercules in the ankle. Hercules' nephew Iolaus, helped Hercules by putting fire on the heads as Hercules chopped them off so that they couldn't grow back.

LABOR 3: CERYNITIAN HIND

The third labor was to capture the Cerynitian Hind. This hind was very hard to catch because of its knowledge. It was also sacred to Artemis, goddess of the hunt and Hercules dared not to wound it. Hercules ran it down for a year before he caught it. When he found it, he took careful aim with his bow and shot it between the tendons and bones of the two forelegs, pinning it down without drawing blood. Even though he didn't draw blood, Artemis was still mad. Hercules dodged her wrath by blaming it on King Eurytheus.

LABOR 4: BOAR

The fourth labor was to bring back an enormous boar alive from Arcadia. Before Hercules started the labor, he stopped by to see the centaur Pholus (a creature who was half man, half horse). While Pholus was examining one of Hercules' arrows, he dropped it accidentally on his own foot. The arrow was soaked in the Hydra venom and Pholus immediately died. Finally Hercules found the boar on top of Mount Erymanthus and he drove it into a snowbank, immobilizing it. He picked up the boar and flung it onto his shoulder. He carried it back to Eurytheus who cowered as usual in his storage jar.

LABOR 5: STABLE CLEANING

Eurytheus was very proud of himself for thinking of the fifth labor because he thought it would humiliate his cousin Hercules. Hercules had to clean out the stable of King Augeas in one day. Augeas owned many herds of cattle which deposited their manure in such quantity over the years that a thick smell hung over the entire Peloponnesus. Instead of using a shovel and a basket like Eurytheus imagined, Hercules diverted two rivers through the stable yard and finished the job without getting dirty. But because Hercules demanded payment, Eurytheus did not call it a labor.

LABOR 6: STYMPHALIAN BIRDS

The sixth labor put Hercules up against the Stymphalian birds, which live in a marsh near Lake Stymphalus in Arcadia. The sources differ on these birds. Some people say they eat human flesh, some say they killed men by shooting them with their feathers, and some say they merely constituted a nuisance because of their number. Hercules could not get through the marsh to the birds. So Hercules made lots of sound with his castanets. The birds took flight because of the racket and Hercules dropped them with arrows.

LABOR 7: CRETAN BULL

In the seventh labor, Hercules had to defeat the Cretan Bull. This bull was greatly feared in Crete which was ruled by Queen Pasiphae. Even though the bull belched flames, Hercules overpowered it and shipped it back to Athens where Theseus had to deal with it.

LABOR 8: MARES OF DIOMEDES

Next Hercules had to bring Eurytheus the mares of Diomedes. These horses ate the flesh of travelers who made the mistake of accepting Diomedes hospitality. He fed Diomedes to his own mares and then took them to Eurytheus. After he saw them, they were released into the wild and eventually eaten by wild animals on Mount Olympus.

LABOR 9: AMAZON BELT

The ninth labor took Hercules to the Land of the Amazons to get their queen's belt for Eurytheus' daughter. The Amazons were a group of women archers who had invented

the art of fighting on a horse. Hercules brought along some other heroes, among them Theseus. When Hercules asked Hippolyte (the Amazon Queen) for the belt she willingly gave it to him. Hera, on the other hand, was not about to let him off that easy. She told the Amazons that the Greeks had kidnapped their queen and a great battle ensued. Hercules ran with the belt and Theseus kidnapped an Amazon princess.

LABOR 10: CATTLE FROM THUS GERYON

Hercules had to steal cattle from Thus Geryon for the tenth labor. His cattle had three heads and/or three separate bodies from the waist down. He also had a watch dog named Orthus which had two heads. This labor took place somewhere in Spain. Orthus ran at Hercules while he was stealing the cattle and Hercules took him out with one blow from his wooden club. Hercules took the cattle and the guard dog back to Greece.

LABOR 11: HESPERIDES

The Hesperides were nymphs that Hera told to guard the apples she got as a wedding gift. The apples were kept in a grove surrounded by a tall wall and also guarded by a many headed dragon. The apples were located in the mountains named after Atlas. Atlas sided against Zeus in a war and his punishment was to hold up the Earth and the Heavens. Hercules was told that he would not be able to get to the apples without the aid of Atlas. Atlas was only too happy to oblige. He told Hercules to hold the Earth while he retrieved the fruit. First Hercules had to kill the dragon with an arrow. When Atlas returned, he realized how nice it felt to have the strain gone from holding up the Earth. Hercules said he just wanted to give Atlas back the Earth long enough to put a cushion on his shoulder. When Atlas got the Earth and Heavens back, Hercules walked off with the apples, never to return.

LABOR 12: HELLHOUND OF HADES

As the final labor, Hercules was to bring the hellhound up from Hades, the kingdom of the dead. The first barrier was to get across the river Styx. You had to be dead and you had to pay a bribe in the form of a coin under the corpse's tongue. Hercules did not pass in either of the categories which made the ferry boatman very mad. But Hercules merely glowered so fiercely he had to let him across.

Next he had to deal with Cerberus who had razor teeth, three heads of dogs, and a venomous snake for a tail. He lashed this tail at Hercules while one head reached for his throat. But Hercules was wearing his trusty lion's skin, which is impenetrable. He eventually choked the beast into submission and dragged him to Tyrens where he received his credit for all the labors. Hercules finally died when his wife Deinara gave him a tunic covered in the Hydra's venom on accident. He died in agony after he put it on.

Perseus

by Alice Low

KING Acrisius of Argos had a beautiful daughter named Danaë, but he was not satisfied with her, for he wanted a son. He visited the oracle at Delphi to find out if he would ever have a male child. To his dismay he was told, "You shall never have a son. Furthermore, your daughter shall give birth to a son who shall take your life."

I must make certain that Danaë never has any children, said the king to himself. And he shut his daughter away from the world in a bronze house underground, so that no man would ever fall in love with her and father her child. Nobody could enter the house, for only a tiny section of the roof was open to the surface of the earth, to let in light and air.

Poor Danaë! She was all alone, week after week, with just a patch of sky to look at. Then one day a strange thing occurred. Suddenly a shower of gold rained down into her house, and that shower changed into Zeus, who declared his love for her.

Within the year Danaë bore Zeus's son, whom she named Perseus. Danaë tried to hide Perseus from her father. At last, though, King Acrisius discovered him and said to Danaë, "One day this son of yours will kill me. I cannot kill him, for that would anger his father, Zeus. But I will have the two of you sealed in a chest and tossed into the sea. If you do not survive, that will be Poseidon's fault."

"Please, Father, spare us," cried Danaë. "I will keep Perseus by my side always and make certain that he will never harm you."

But Acrisius said, "The oracle at Delphi never lies, and I must protect myself."

He ordered carpenters to make a large wooden chest. When it was finished, he put Danaë and Perseus in it and had it thrown into the sea.

For a day and a night, Danaë cowered in the chest, holding Perseus in her arms as the waves tossed them to and fro. Then, suddenly, Danaë felt a bump, and the chest stopped moving. "We are on land," she said to Perseus. "But how can we ever get out of this sealed chest?"

Perseus was too young to understand her, and he cried and cried because he was hungry. Danaë tried to comfort him, but

Perseus

his walls continued, which was a good thing. A fisherman, passing by, heard the cries and broke open the chest. His name was Dictys, and he took Danaë and Perseus to his home, where he and his wife cared for them gladly, for they were childless.

Perseus grew into a strong young man and became a fisherman on that small island. He and his mother were content until Dictys's brother, Polydectes, who ruled the island, fell in love with Danaë and tried to force her to marry him. Perseus defended his mother so bravely that Polydectes decided he had to get rid of him.

Pretending he was going to marry another princess, Polydectes asked each guest to bring a wedding gift. Perseus said to Polydectes, "Alas, I am too poor to bring a gift for a ruler and his bride."

And Polydectes said, "Then I shall tell you of a gift you can win for me, but I do not know if you are brave enough to get it."

"Tell me what it is, and I promise I shall get it for you," said Perseus. "I do not lack for bravery."

"Very well," said Polydectes. "I want you to bring me the head of Medusa, the horrible Gorgon."

Perseus was trapped by his bold promise, even though he knew that this feat was impossible for one man alone. Medusa was one of the three Gorgons—huge, hideous winged creatures. Their hair was made of snakes, and their faces were so ugly that anyone who looked at them immediately turned to stone.

Fortunately for Perseus, a goddess and a god overheard that conversation, and not long afterward they appeared to him and offered him their help.

First Athena flew down from Mount Olympus, holding her dazzling shield of brass. She gave it to the astonished Perseus, saying, "You must use this as a mirror when you slay Medusa. In this way you will not look at her directly, but only at her reflection, and so you will not be turned to stone."

Perseus thanked the wise goddess and then said, "But I do not know where Medusa lives. How shall I find her?"

At that moment, Perseus saw a bright light overhead. Hermes, the messenger of the gods, flew down and landed at his side. "I shall be your guide," he said, "and also help you overcome the terrible Medusa. Here is a sword that can never be broken, not even by the hard scales of Medusa's neck."

"This is indeed a wonderful gift," said Perseus. "Now I must be on my way to slay Medusa and bring back her head."

"Not yet," said Hermes. "There are three other things you must

have first: winged sandals, a magic wallet, and a cap to make you invisible. These are guarded by the nymphs of the North, and only the Gray Women, who live in a dreary gray land, know where to find *them*. Follow me, and we will begin the long journey."

Hermes guided Perseus to the gray land, where it was always gray twilight. At last they found the shriveled old Gray Women, who had swanlike bodies and human heads, but only one eye among the three of them. Perseus and Hermes hid behind a rock and watched the Gray Women pass the eye around. Each had a turn to put it in the middle of her forehead.

"The next time the eye is passed around," said Hermes to Perseus, "you must grab it and not give it back until they tell you where to find the nymphs of the North."

Perseus waited for the right moment. Then he darted out and snatched the eye. The Gray Women ran around blindly, shouting, "Where is our eye? Who took it?"

"I took your eye," Perseus said, "and I will not give it back until you tell me how to find the nymphs of the North."

Of course the Gray Women were anxious to have their eye, and so they immediately gave Perseus detailed directions. He gave them back their eye and went on his way with Hermes.

Once more they traveled far and long, this time over the ocean to the north. The nymphs of the North received them warmly and gave Perseus the three magic gifts.

Perseus put on the cap of invisibility and the magic sandals and, holding the magic wallet, flew after Hermes to the island of the Gorgons. Beneath him he could see stones in the shapes of animals and men, and he shuddered, for he knew that they had once been alive—before they had looked at the fearful Gorgons. But he was confident, now that he was armed with Hermes' sword, Athena's shield, and the three magic gifts.

Perseus hovered over the Gorgons. Fortunately he remembered to look into the mirrorlike shield at their reflections. The three hideous, winged, snake-haired Gorgons were asleep.

But which one is Medusa? he thought. *She is the only one I can kill, for the other two are immortal.* Again Athena came to his aid, saying, "That one in the middle is Medusa. Strike now, while she is asleep."

Perseus flew within inches of Medusa, his sword held ready. Then, looking into the shield, he struck off Medusa's head with one well-aimed blow. He stuffed the head into his magic wallet, which grew large enough to hold the head with all its snakes still hissing and wriggling.

The other two Gorgons woke up when they heard the headless body of Medusa thrashing about. They flew into the air in pursuit of Perseus. But they could not see him, for he had on his cap of invisibility, and he flew away in his winged sandals, faster than the wind.

Now Perseus headed for home alone, for Hermes, his mission accomplished, had left. On his way, Perseus slew a dangerous sea monster that was about to devour a lovely princess named Andromeda. Then Perseus took Andromeda home with him, for she had agreed to be his bride.

As soon as they reached home, Perseus strode into Polydectes' palace and said to the ruler, "I have brought you the head of Medusa."

But Polydectes refused to believe Perseus. "If you even had gone near Medusa, you would not be here to tell the tale. What a liar you are!"

Perseus could not stand to be taunted and mistrusted. And now he realized that this cruel ruler had sent him on the chase just to get rid of him. He pulled out Medusa's head to show it to Polydectes, who turned to stone the moment he saw it.

King Dictys became ruler of the island, and Perseus sailed to Argos with his mother, Danaë, and his wife, Andromeda. Danaë wanted to see her father, King Acrisius, again and to be reconciled with him. But Acrisius was attending games that were being held in another city.

Since Perseus wanted to take part in the games, he journeyed to that city. There he took his turn at throwing the discus. As the discus left his hand, a sudden wind blew it into the grandstand. It hit King Acrisius, who was a spectator, and killed him. Thus was fulfilled the prophecy of the oracle at Delphi, which had predicted that the king would be killed by his grandson.

Theseus and the Minotaur

retold by Anne Terry White

IN the palace of old King Pittheus of Troezen a grandson was growing up—brave, strong, and handsome. And people said of him: "What wonder that Theseus is so fair and noble? Is not the great god Poseidon his father?"

The young Theseus was pleased enough with being a god's son, the more especially as his cousin Heracles was one. For Theseus idolized the hero whose praises sounded in every court. Often the boy said to himself, "I will be like Heracles and slay wild beasts and giants and evil men." So it was a shock to him to learn that he was no demigod but the son of a mortal—King Aegeus of Athens.

The secret was revealed to him in a curious way. For several years past on his birthday, his mother, the Princess Aethra, had taken him to a great black stone standing by the sea.

"My son," she had always said, "see if you can push this stone aside."

Try as he would, he had never been able to do it. But on his eighteenth birthday he had scarcely exerted his strength when the mighty rock yielded, disclosing a hollow beneath, and in the hollow lay a gold-hilted sword and a pair of embroidered sandals.

"This sword and these sandals were your father's," Theseus' mother said. "Take them up, for now they are yours."

Then she told him about her secret marriage to King Aegeus and how on parting from her he had said: "When my son—if you bear a son—is strong enough to move this stone, give him my sword and my sandals and let him come to Athens and make himself known to me."

Theseus at once put on the sandals and strapped the great gold-hilted sword by his side. He was all on fire to go to Athens.

"I will provide you with a vessel and oarsmen," his grandfather King Pittheus said. "For the roads are beset with robbers."

"Indeed, indeed, grandfather, I will go by land," Theseus protested. "For how can I come to my father with his sword unstained? Greece rings with the fame of Heracles my cousin, and shall I avoid robbers rather than slay them?"

Theseus pleaded so hard that in the end King Pittheus, great as were his fears, gave in and said, "Do according to your spirit."

So Theseus set out on foot and alone.

Now as the young traveler strode lightly along, his mind busy with thoughts of Athens and high deeds, the first of the evildoers who beset the way rushed out at him from the woods. A black bearskin cloaked his bulky body and an iron club was in his hand. He stood squarely in the path, brandishing his weapon and shouting fearful threats.

Theseus did not draw back. "To slay villains like you, have I come this way!" he cried and flung himself boldly on the attacker.

Not in vain had the prince labored to perfect himself in wrestling and boxing. He soon left the savage dead upon the ground. But the iron club he took away and ever after carried with him. Did not Heracles his cousin also bear a club?

Many a time on that journey Theseus was glad of the powerful weapon. For the way to Athens, as his grandfather had warned, was infested with robbers. Three more scoundrels he slew before he reached the river Cephissus not far from Athens. And had not chance put him on his guard, before crossing that river, he might have lost his life. For now there came toward him a villain of another sort, a fellow richly clad and smiling and pleasant of speech.

"Noble traveler," he said to Theseus, "you must come with me and eat and drink of the best my house affords, for it is my custom to show hospitality to all who pass this way."

"I am in haste," Theseus answered, thanking him courteously.

But the other seized hold of Theseus' hands and would not let him go. Theseus did not like to offend one who seemed so hospitable. So against his will he followed the stranger to his house.

Now while they sat at table, his host was called from the chamber, and the slave who poured the wine, whispered to Theseus:

"Young man, flee this house while yet you may! My master is a monster of evil. He will bid you sleep in his famed iron bed which fits all men. Once you are asleep, he will bind you to it. If you are too long for his bed, he will cut off your legs. If you are too short, he will stretch you to fit. Therefore is he called Procrustes, the Stretcher."

Theseus said no word, but grasped his club, which he had laid down by him. And before he left that house, he had fitted Procrustes to his own bed.

News of the hero's exploits traveled fast. Long before Theseus arrived, Aegeus knew that a brave youth from Troezen was on his way to Athens. But the King had no thought that this was his son and anxiously awaited his arrival. For Athens was in

turmoil, and the childless King was afraid.

"The people might set him on the throne in my place," he thought.

Now Aegeus' wife was none other than Medea, that same Medea who had taken such fearful revenge on Jason. In her chariot drawn by dragons she had escaped through the air to Athens. There she had gained great influence over the old King and had then got him to marry her. She knew who Theseus was. She, too, feared his coming. But it was for a different reason. "With a hero son by his side, the king will no longer hearken to me as of old," she thought.

And she said to Aegeus: "Let us poison Theseus at the first opportunity. For I have learned by my magic arts that he comes to destroy you."

So when with welcoming cries the Athenians brought the hero to the palace, Aegeus received him graciously, hiding for the moment his evil intentions. Theseus, for his part, was all eagerness. He could hardly wait to make himself known to his father. But the Prince had set his heart on having Aegeus recognize him of his own accord. So he gave no reason for his coming and accepted the King's hospitality merely as any hero might do.

Morning came. Theseus took his place beside Aegeus at the meal that had been set forth. A goblet of wine stood at the youth's place, and Aegeus watched eagerly to see Theseus drain it, for Medea had mixed a deadly poison for him. But Theseus did not even notice the wine. His happy eyes were turned on his father and he waited, a smile on his parted lips, hoping to be recognized. When Aegeus made no sign, the hero quietly laid his sword on the table.

A look of horror spread over Aegeus' face and a loud cry escaped him as he beheld the golden hilt. He reached across the table and dashed the fatal goblet to the floor. Then, weeping, he took his son in his arms and hugged him and passed his hands over the stalwart body and felt the knotting muscles and kissed the fair beardless cheeks of his hero son. Nor could Theseus look enough upon his father.

But Medea knew well that her hour had come, knew well that her witching rule in Athens was over. So once again she summoned her swift-flying dragons. And once more they bore her away—none knew where.

Not long after Aegeus had acknowledged Theseus as his son and heir, Athens was thrown into mourning. Heralds had arrived

from Crete to demand for the third time the terrible human tribute which every nine years had to be paid to King Minos.

Years before, Androgeos, the son of Minos, had gone to Athens to take part in the games. He had shown great prowess, overcoming all the Greeks. Provoked by this, Aegeus had treacherously caused Androgeos to be slain, whereupon King Minos made war on him. The King of Crete raised a great fleet and pressed Aegeus so hard that he was glad to make peace at any price. And the price was terrible—a tribute of seven youths and seven maidens to be sent to Crete and thrown to the Minotaur, the monster half-man, half-bull that lived in the Labyrinth.

Theseus saw that the Athenians were deeply angry with his father, who had brought this grief upon them. At once he offered to go to Minos.

"No, no, my son!" Aegeus pleaded. "The victims will be chosen by lot. Wait and see if you are selected. I have but newly found you!"

But Theseus was like a rock. "I will be one of the fourteen," he said, "whether I am chosen or not."

So Aegeus had to yield. Weeping, and with all Athens following, he went with the victims to the dismal ship.

"O my father, do not weep so," Theseus told him. "All is as the gods will. It may indeed be my fate to slay the Minotaur, and we who sail today in sorrow may yet return in joy. If so, you will know the good news from afar. For I promise you, if the Minotaur be slain, the ship that brings us home will not wear these deadly black sails but victorious white ones."

After this the vessel took to the sea, the land slipped away, and the youths and maidens turned their faces toward Crete.

At Cnossos, the capital of Crete, crowds gathered to see the Athenians whom the Minotaur would soon devour. With many a taunt the captives were paraded in front of the palace. Everyone ran out to see the victims, and with them Ariadne, King Minos' lovely daughter. She stood with a throng of her maidens and looked on as did the rest. But her gentle eyes fixed themselves on one alone—on princely Theseus, who, head high and eyes proudly flashing, marched looking neither to the right nor to the left. A surge of sudden love swept over the princess. And as the taunts rose all around her, she promised herself: "He shall not die!"

As soon as night fell, Ariadne stole out of the palace and went secretly to the captives.

"Fair youth," she whispered to Theseus, "I who for my brother's sake should be your enemy am not. Therefore, I have

brought you this." And she took from the folds of her dress a glistening sword and put it in Theseus' hand.

He grasped it joyfully and strapped it beneath his garments.

"Now let the Minotaur roar as loud as he will—he will roar in vain!" Theseus said. "Thanks, gracious Princess. May I live to serve you!"

Ariadne then confessed her love, and Theseus, who found it easy enough to give his in return, promised ardently to make her his wife.

"Indeed I would have it so," Ariadne said. "But there is one thing more," she added. "Without it the sword would be useless, for you would never be able to find your way out of the Labyrinth, which the Athenian Daedalus built. The Minotaur's house is a maze. The passages turn and turn and lead into one another and end nowhere. None who enters may come forth again. Take, therefore, this ball of thread. Tie one end to the inside of the door and unwind the ball as you go. Then, winding it again, you will be able to retrace your steps."

So it was that the hero met the Minotaur in the gloomy depths of the Labyrinth and was not afraid. He came upon the monster sleeping and leaped on him and battled furiously with him. And when the creature lay dead at his feet, Theseus picked up the ball of thread and wound it back to the entrance.

What joy there was when Theseus' glad voice resounded through the passages and his companions saw their leader emerge! What embracing, what happy talk of home! With stealthy steps they made their way to their vessel, where Ariadne stood anxiously waiting for them. Deftly they hoisted sail, dipped their oars, and left the harbor so noiselessly that the Cretans never awoke to realize their loss.

Meantime at Athens King Aegeus daily mounted the cliffs by the sea and sorrowfully strained his old eyes in the direction of Crete. At last he saw the ship approaching—and his heart died within him. Black sails drank the wind. In the joy of homecoming, Theseus had forgotten to change the dismal sails of mourning.

"My son is dead!" the unhappy King cried out. "Why, then, do I live?"

Grief overpowered him and he cast himself headlong into the sea, which ever after has borne his name.

The Judgment of Paris

by Max J. Herzberg

ONE of the most beautiful of the Nereids was the silvery-footed Thetis, who dwelt with her sisters in the depths of the sea, but was a favorite of Juno* and often visited the heights of Olympus. So lovely was she that both Jupiter and Neptune wished to marry her, but the oracles declared that her son would be greater than his father, and neither of the deities dared risk being overthrown. She was therefore given in marriage to a mortal, Peleus, king of the Myrmidons of Thessaly.

To the marriage feast of Peleus and Thetis came all the gods, who brought many rich gifts. But one deity had not been invited to the celebrations—*Eris*, or *Ate*, the goddess of discord. She was greatly enraged at the oversight, and resolved that she would take revenge. While the merrymaking was at its height, therefore, she suddenly appeared in the midst of the revelers and threw upon the ground a wonderful apple, brought from the Garden of the Hesperides, and labeled "For the Fairest."

Immediately a contention arose as to who should have the apple. All the contestants finally withdrew, except three: Juno, Venus, and Minerva. They appealed to Jupiter to settle the dispute and award the apple, but he wisely declined to do so. He agreed, nevertheless, to appoint an arbitrator, and told the three goddesses that Paris of Troy would make the decision.

So the three goddesses then hastened to Paris. Troy was a city in Asia Minor; it was sometimes called Ilion or Ilium. Priam reigned over Troy. He had been twice married, the second time to Hecuba, and had fifty sons, two of whom were of particular note: Hector, one of the noblest heroes of ancient times, and Paris, who was destined to cause the destruction of his people. At the birth of Paris it had been prophesied that he would bring disaster to Troy, and he had consequently been exposed on a mountainside. But some shepherds had found him and had brought him up, and he was at this time a very handsome and attractive youth.

*Juno: Roman name for the Greek goddess Hera, queen of the gods (See page 3 for a table of Greek gods and their Roman equivalents.)