

After Perseus became a young man, he was sent on a mission to destroy a once-beautiful-girl-turned-monster, named Medusa:

When Perseus was grown up Polydectes sent him to attempt the conquest of Medusa, a terrible monster [known as a Gorgon] who had laid waste the country. She was once a beautiful maiden whose hair was her chief glory, but as she dared to vie in beauty with Minerva [that's Athena, to the Greeks] the goddess deprived her of her charms and changed her beautiful ringlets into hissing serpents. She became a cruel monster of so frightful an aspect [appearance] that no living thing could behold her without being turned into stone. All around the cavern where she dwelt might be seen the stony figures of men and animals which had chanced to catch a glimpse of her and had been petrified with the sight. (Bulfinch's Mythology, page 80.)

In other words ... even someone sent to kill her would die because how could the deed be done without looking at the object of the mission? Unless, of course, the dispatcher had supernatural help:

Perseus, favored by Minerva [Athena] and Mercury [that's Hermes, to the Greeks], the former of whom lent him her shield and the latter his winged shoes, approached Medusa while she slept, and taking care not to look directly at her, but guided by her image reflected in the bright shield which he bore, he cut off her head and gave it to Minerva [Athena], who fixed it in the middle of her Aegis ["a goatskin shield which had a fringe of snakes"]. (Bulfinch's Mythology, page 80.)

After he killed Medusa, by severing her head, Perseus had a weapon which turned his opponents to stone. The dead Gorgon's head, in other words, still petrified all who gazed on it.

Perseus used his special aids to fly home. Along the way, he arrived at a different country (which was in crisis-mode). Bulfinch continues with the story:

Perseus, continuing his flight, arrived at the country of the Ethiopians, of which Cepheus was king. Cassiopeia his queen, proud of her beauty, had dared to compare herself to the Sea-Nymphs, which roused their indignation to such a degree that they sent a prodigious sea-monster to ravage the coast.

This monster, known as Cetus, is sometimes called "The Kraken."

According to the legend, King Cepheus consulted with an oracle to determine how best to resolve the dangerous situation. The recommended remedy created another impossible situation:

To appease the deities, Cepheus was directed by the oracle to expose his daughter Andromeda to be devoured by the monster.

Flying overhead, Perseus could not believe his eyes:

As Perseus looked down from his aerial height he beheld the virgin chained to a rock, and waiting the approach of the serpent. She was so pale and motionless that if it had not been for her flowing tears and her hair that moved in the breeze, he would have taken her for a marble statue. He was so startled at the sight that he almost forgot to wave his wings.

Asking Andromeda what was wrong, Perseus began to hear the girl's pitiful tale. Then, he heard something else:

*Before she had done speaking, a sound was heard off upon the water, and the sea-monster appeared, with his head raised above the surface, cleaving the waves with his broad breast . . .
Then spoke Perseus: "There will be time enough for tears; this hour is all we have for rescue. My rank as the son of Jove [Zeus] and my renown as the slayer of the Gorgon [Medusa] might make me acceptable as a suitor [for Andromeda]; but I will try to win her by services rendered, if the gods will only be propitious [helpful]. If she is rescued by my valor [she was], I demand that she be my reward [she was]."*

Did Perseus save Andromeda by slaying the Kraken?

And now the monster was within the range of a stone thrown by a skillful slinger, when with a sudden bound the youth soared into the air. As an eagle, when from his lofty flight he sees a serpent basking in the sun, pounces upon him and seizes him by the neck to prevent him from turning his head round and using his fangs, so the youth darted down upon the back of the monster and plunged his sword into its shoulder.

Irritated by the wound, the monster raised himself in the air, then plunged into the depth; then, like a wild boar surrounded, by a pack of barking dogs, turned swiftly from side to side, while the youth eluded its attacks by means of his wings.

Wherever he can find a passage for his sword between the scales he makes a wound, piercing now the side, now the flank, as it slopes towards the tail. The brute spouts from his nostrils water mixed with blood. The wings of the hero are wet with it, and he dares no longer trust to them.

Alighting on a rock which rose above the waves, and holding on by a projecting fragment, as the monster floated near he gave him a death stroke.

Perseus had saved Andromeda who would, as promised, become his wife.

See, also:

Perseus - Clash of the Titans

Perseus - Son of Zeus

Credits:

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From a U.K. television series:

"The Storyteller: Greek Myths" (1990)

Original Air Date:

December 8, 1991 (Season 1, Episode 2)

Cast:

Michael Gambon - The Storyteller

Brian Henson - The Dog (voice)

Jeremy Gilley - Perseus

Frances Barber - Medusa

See Alignments to State and Common Core standards for this story online at:

<http://www.awesomestories.com/asset/AcademicAlignment/Perseus-Severs-the-Head-of-Medusa1>

See Learning Tasks for this story online at:

<http://www.awesomestories.com/asset/AcademicActivities/Perseus-Severs-the-Head-of-Medusa1>