

#1: The Abduction of Persephone

Persephone was the daughter of Demeter and Zeus. Persephone was picking flowers one day when Hades saw her. He was so captivated by her beauty that he took her by force to the underworld.

Demeter, goddess of the harvest and fertility searched for her daughter when Persephone went missing. Once she realized Persephone was taken to the underworld, she protested the abduction by stopping her work with the crops. Before this time, food in Greece was always plentiful, but now crops failed and food was scarce. Zeus and the other gods tried to convince Demeter to lift her curse on the land, but she would not until her daughter was released.

Zeus then sent Hermes to Hades urging him to release Persephone. Hades understood this as a demand that he needed to follow. Before releasing her, Hades had her eat seeds of the pomegranate. Because she ate fruit from the underworld she was now tied to the underworld and to Hades.

Zeus was forced to make a compromise between Demeter and Hades in their claims to Persephone. He arranged a plan for Persephone to spend four months with Hades as his queen, one for every seed of the pomegranate she had eaten. The other eight months she would return to her mother. Demeter continued to allow the crops to fail when Persephone was with Hades. This myth of Persephone was used by the Greeks to explain the cycle of fertility in nature.

As the story goes

Zeus had three sisters. Hera, his wife and sister, was the goddess of marriage and the queen of all the gods. Hestia, another of his sisters, was a much loved goddess by the woman of Greece - Hestia was the goddess of home and hearth.

His third sister, Demeter, was in charge of the harvest. All the gods jobs were important. Demeter's job was *very* important. If she was upset, the crops could die. Everyone, gods and mortals, worked hard to keep Demeter happy. What made her happy was enjoying the company of her daughter, Persephone.

Persephone had grown into a beautiful young woman, with a smile for everyone. One day, while picking flowers in the fields, Hades, her uncle, the god of the underworld, noticed her. Hades was normally a gloomy fellow. But Persephone's beauty had dazzled him. He fell in love instantly. Quickly, before anyone could

interfere, he kidnapped Persephone and hurled his chariot down into the darkest depths of the underworld, taking Persephone with him.

Locked in a room in the Hall of Hades, Persephone cried and cried. She refused to speak to Hades. And she *refused* to eat. Legend said if you ate anything in Hades, you could never leave. She did not know if the legend was true, but she did not want to risk it in case someone came to rescue her.

Nearly a week went by. Finally, unable to bear her hunger, Persephone ate six pomegranate seeds. It seemed her fate was sealed. She would have to live in the Underworld forever.

Meanwhile, back on earth, Zeus was worried about the crops. The people would die if the crops failed. If that happened, who would worship Zeus? He had to do something. Zeus did what he often did. He sent Hermes, his youngest son, the messenger, to crack a deal, this time with Hades.

Even as a baby, Hermes was great at making deals. Everyone knew that. But this deal might be the challenge of his life. His uncle Hades, king of the underworld, was really in love. This was no passing fancy.

When Hermes heard that Persephone had eaten six pomegranate seeds, he had to think quickly. The deal he made with Hades was that if Persephone would marry Hades, she would live as queen of the underworld for six months out of the year. However, each spring, Persephone would return and live on earth for the other six months of the year. Hades agreed. Zeus agreed. Persephone agreed. And finally, Demeter agreed.

Each spring, Demeter makes sure all the flowers bloom in welcome when her daughter, Queen of the Underworld, returns to her. Each fall, when Persephone returns to Hades, Demeter cries, and lets all the crops die until spring, when the cycle starts again.

#2: Medusa

The gorgon, in Greek mythology, is a female monster, or most commonly known as a Gorgo. These creatures were favorite subjects in art, being horrific, yet pungently humorous at the same time. The most famous of the Gorgons was Medusa.

A Gorgon head was most feared, as evidenced in the *Odyssey*, where Odysseus fears a Gorgon head might confront him if he stayed too close to Hades. The fear people had of the Gorgo was based on early poetry depicting these female creatures as furiously spirited with serpents writhing on their heads and piercing eyes that could turn a mortal to stone.

The three Gorgon sisters were daughters of ancient Sea Gods, Ceto and Phorcys. Two, Stheno and Eluryah were immortal, but the third, Medusa was not. She had been a female of absolute beauty, mostly her long, silky hair. She bragged at being more beautiful than the Goddess Athena, and one day, while in her temple, she was ravished by the Sea God Neptune. Athena was outraged by this and turned Medusa into the Gorgon she became famous for being. She turned her beautiful hair into snakes and let it be that she could no longer see the handsome men who came to court her, as they would instantly be turned to stone if they looked into her eyes.

Perseus, in trying to rescue his mother Danae from King Polydectes, was challenged to retrieve the head of Medusa. He was able to do so with the help of Athena and Hermes. Perseus was given a shield of reflection and a curved sword to remove her head. The blood of a Gorgon was said to be all powerful. It could be a lethal poison or hold magical powers, as it was used to grant Erichthonius the power to reanimate the dead. When Medusa was dying, she sprang forth from her blood the winged horse Pegasus and the giant Chrysaor, who later became the King of Iberia. While fleeing the other two Gorgons, Perseus used the helmet of Hermes which made him invisible and allowed him to escape unharmed.

Ovid and other poets told of the beauty of Medusa before she took on the characteristics of the Gorgon. In fact, Medusa was a very likable character, until her transformation. She bragged of her beauty but she was sought after by many suitors. The wrath of Athena was typical of the Gods in punishing Greeks who did not lavish or respect their ways. After the death of Medusa, Perseus was said to bring her head to Athena after having used it in battle to defeat his enemies. Athena cast the head into her shield and there it remained.

The Gorgon has been depicted in artwork throughout archaic Greece. Shields bore a Medusa head in order to fight off evil spirits. Doorways had Gorgon plaques above the archways to prevent evil from entering the homes. The Gorgon face, or gorgoneion, is similar to many other cultures' icons to ward off the spirits.

Though the Gorgons were not numerous throughout Greek art and literature, their presence was well noted. Many modern pieces of literature and art reflect a knowledge of Medusa and the metaphor of the Gorgon. It has been written that if you brag of your beauty, you will reflect like that of Medusa. So, is this a lesson to be learned from the Greek scholars, or a myth that has channeled through history to entertain yet another generation of beauties? It might be left to question, since we never quite know when we may invite the wrath of those ancient Gods.

#3: Theseus and the Minotaur

Once upon a time, a long time ago, there lived a king named Minos. King Minos lived on a lovely **island called Crete**. King Minos had a powerful navy, a beautiful daughter, and a really big palace. Still, now and then, King Minos grew bored. Whenever King Minos was bored, he took his navy and attacked Athens, a town on the other side of the sea.

In desperation, the king of Athens offered King Minos a deal. If Minos would leave Athens alone, Athens would send seven Athenian boys and seven Athenian girls to Crete every nine years to be eaten by the Minotaur.

The Minotaur was a horrible monster that lived in the center of a huge maze on the island of Crete. King Minos loved that old monster. He did like to give his monster a treat now and then. He knew his people would prefer he fed his monster Athenian children rather than ... well, after thinking it over, King Minos took the deal.

Nine years passed swiftly. It was just about time for Athens to send seven boys and seven girls to Crete to be eaten by the Minotaur. Everyone in Athens was crying.

Prince Theseus of Athens was very young. He knew that a deal was a deal. But he was sure it was wrong to send small children to be eaten by a monster just to avoid a battle with King Minos. Prince Theseus told his father (the king) that he was going to Crete as the seventh son of Athens. He was going to kill the Minotaur and end the terror.

"The Minotaur is a terrible monster! What makes you think you can kill it?" cried his father.

"I'll find a way," Theseus replied gently. "The gods will help me."

His father begged him not to go. But the prince took his place as the seventh Athenian boy. Along with six other Athenian boys and seven Athenian girls, Prince Theseus sailed towards Crete.

When the prince and the children arrived on the island of Crete, King Minos and his daughter, the Princess Ariadne, came out to greet them. The king told the children that they would not be eaten until the next day and to enjoy themselves in the palace in the meantime. The Princess Ariadne did not say anything. But her

eyes narrowed thoughtfully. Late that night, she wrote Prince Theseus a note and slipped it under his bedroom door.

Dear Theseus (Ariadne wrote)

I am a beautiful princess, as you probably noticed the minute you saw me. I am also a very bored princess. Without my help, the Minotaur will surely gobble you up. I know a trick or two that will save your life. If I help you kill the monster, you must promise to take me away from this tiny island so that others can admire my beauty. If interested in this deal, meet me by the gate to the Labyrinth in one hour.

*Yours very truly,
Princess Ariadne*

Prince Theseus slipped out of the palace and waited patiently by the gate. Princess Ariadne finally showed up. In her hands, she carried a sword and a ball of string.

Ariadne gave the sword and the ball of string to Prince Theseus. "Hide these inside the entrance to the maze. Tomorrow, when you and the other children from Athens enter the Labyrinth, wait until the gate is closed, then tie the string to the door. Unroll it as you move through the maze. That way, you can find your way back again. The sword, well, you know what to do with the sword," she laughed.

Theseus thanked the princess for her kindness.

"Don't forget, now," she cautioned Theseus. "You must take me with you so that all the people can marvel at my beauty. A deal is a deal."

The next morning, the Athenian children, including Prince Theseus, were shoved into the maze. The door was locked firmly behind them. Following Ariadne's directions, Theseus tied one end of the string to the door. He told the children to stay by the door. Their job was to make sure the string stayed tied so that Theseus could find his way back. Theseus entered the maze alone.

He found his way to the center of the maze. Using the sword Ariadne had given him, Theseus killed the monstrous beast. He followed the string back and knocked on the door.

Princess Ariadne was waiting. She opened the door. Without anyone noticing, Prince Theseus and the children of Athens ran to their ship and sailed quietly away. Princess Ariadne sailed away with them.

On the way home, they stopped for supplies on the tiny island of Naxos. Princess Ariadne insisted on coming ashore. There was nothing much to do on the island. Soon, she fell asleep. All the people gathered to watch the sleeping princess. She was a lovely sight indeed. Theseus sailed quietly away with the children of Athens and left her there, sleeping.

After all, a deal is a deal.

#4: Pandora's Box

As the story goes

Two brothers named Epimetheus and Prometheus lived in Ancient Greece. They had upset the gods by giving the gift of fire to humans and now the gods wanted to punish them

The gods created a beautiful woman called Pandora and took her to Prometheus, but he refused to accept her because he knew the gods wanted to take their revenge on him. His brother Epimetheus thought Pandora was so beautiful that she could never cause any harm, so he agreed to marry her.

The couple lived very happily together, until one day the god Mercury arrived, carrying a magnificent box. Mercury wouldn't tell them what the box contained but only that it had to remain sealed forever. He asked the couple if he could leave the box with them until he returned from his journey, and they agreed.

Pandora was very curious about the contents of the box but she had promised Mercury she would never open it. Pandora could not stop gazing at the box. All she could think about was its contents. She began to imagine that it contained beautiful gowns or exquisite jewellery, or even money!

When Pandora knew Epimetheus was out of sight, she would untie the heavy gold cords that kept the box securely fastened, and run her fingers over the carved woodwork. She longed to give in to temptation and open the box, but she always re-tied the cords and returned the box to its shelf.

However, one day Pandora's curiosity got the better of her and she grabbed the box and pulled at the gold cord and knots. But to her surprise when she lifted the heavy lid there was no gleam of gold or treasure, and not one beautiful dress!

Instead the gods had packed the box full of all the terrible evils they could think of. Out of the box poured disease, misery and death, all shaped like tiny buzzing moths. The creatures stung Pandora over and over again and she slammed the lid shut. Epimetheus ran into the room to see why she was crying in pain.

Pandora could still hear a voice calling to her from the box, pleading with her to be let out. Epimetheus agreed that nothing inside the box could be worse than the horrors that had already been released, so they opened the lid once more.

All that remained in the box was Hope. It fluttered from the box like a beautiful dragonfly, touching the wounds created by the evil creatures, and healing them. Even though Pandora had released pain and suffering upon the world, she had also allowed Hope to follow them.

#5: Echo and Narcissus

When Zeus came to the mountains, the wood nymphs rushed to embrace the jovial god. They played with him in icy waterfalls and laughed with him in lush green glades.

Zeus' wife, Hera, was very jealous, and often she searched the mountainside, trying to catch her husband with the nymphs. But whenever Hera came close to finding Zeus, a charming nymph named Echo stepped across her path. Echo chatted with Hera in a lively fashion and did whatever she could to stall the goddess until Zeus and the other nymphs had escaped.

Eventually Hera discovered that Echo had been tricking her, and she flew into a rage. "Your tongue has made a fool of me!" she shouted at Echo. "Henceforth, your voice will be more brief, my dear! You will always have the last word - but never the first.

From that day on, poor Echo could only repeat the last words of what others said.

One day Echo spied a golden-haired youth hunting deer in the woods. The boy's name was Narcissus, and he was the most beautiful young man in the forest. All who looked upon Narcissus fell in love with him immediately. But he would have nothing to do with anyone, for he was very conceited.

When Echo first laid eyes upon Narcissus, her heart burned like the flame of a torch. She secretly followed him through the woods, loving him more with each step. She got closer and closer until finally Narcissus heard the leaves rustling. He whirled around and cried out, "Who's here?"

From behind a tree, Echo repeated his last word, "Here!"

Narcissus looked about in wonder, "Who are you? Come to me!" he said.

Narcissus searched the woods, but could not find the nymph. "Stop hiding! Let us meet!" he shouted.

"Let us meet!" Echo cried. Then she stepped from behind the tree and rushed to embrace Narcissus.

But the youth panicked when the nymph flung her arms around his neck. He pushed her away and shouted, "Leave me alone! I'd rather die than let you love me!"

"Love me!" was all poor Echo could say as she watched Narcissus run from her through the woods. "Love me! Love me! Love me!"

Humiliated and filled with sorrow, Echo wandered the mountains until she found a lonely cave to live in.

Meanwhile Narcissus hunted in the woods, tending only to himself, until one day he discovered a hidden pool of water. The pool had a silvery-smooth surface. No shepherds ever disturbed its waters - no goats or cattle, no birds or fallen leaves. Only the sun danced upon the still pond.

Tired from hunting and eager to quench his thirst, Narcissus lay on his stomach and leaned over the water. But when he looked at the glassy surface, he saw someone staring back at him.

Narcissus was spellbound. Gazing up at him from the pool were eyes like twin stars, framed by hair as golden as Apollo's and cheeks as smooth as ivory. But when he leaned down and tried to kiss the perfect lips, he kissed only spring water. When he reached out and tried to embrace this vision of beauty, he found no one there.

"What love could be more cruel than this?" he cried. "When my lips kiss the beloved, they touch only water! When I reach for my beloved, I hold only water!"

Narcissus began to weep. When he wiped away his tears, the person in the water also wiped away tears. "Oh, no," sobbed Narcissus. "I see the truth now; It is myself I weep for! I yearn for my own reflection!"

As Narcissus cried harder, the tears broke the glassy surface of the pool and caused his reflection to disappear. "Come back! Where did you go?" the youth cried. "I love you so much! At least stay and let me look upon you!"

Day after day, Narcissus stared at the water, in love with his own reflection. He began to waste away from grief, until one sad morning, he felt himself dying. "Good-bye, my love!" he shouted to his reflection.

"Good-bye, my love!" Echo cried to Narcissus from her cave deep in the woods.

Then Narcissus took his last breath.

After he died, the water nymphs and wood nymphs searched for his body. But all they found was a magnificently beautiful flower beside the hidden pool where the youth had once yearned for his own reflection. The flower had white petals and a yellow center, and from that time on, it was called Narcissus.

And alas, poor Echo, desolate after Narcissus's death, did not eat or sleep. AS she lay forlornly in her cave, all her beauty faded away, and she became very thin until her voice was all that was left. Thereafter, the lonely voice of Echo was heard in the mountains, repeating the last words anyone said.

#6: Eros and Psyche

One day on Mount Olympus, Aphrodite decided she had become fed up with the beauty of Psyche, the maiden. Psyche was very beautiful and was often complimented for her beauty. Aphrodite wanted to set her straight. So she called her son, Eros, to shoot one of his arrows, which poisoned immortal and mortal alike with love, at Psyche, while she was sleeping. "What is the point of shooting an arrow at her when she is asleep?" asked Eros.

"When she wakes up," replied Aphrodite "I will be sure to supply her with someone like the castle dwarf, or maybe a donkey. Yes, that's a possibility."

"That is a cruel trick," said Eros.

"It is meant to be cruel. Now go and obey your mother," replied Aphrodite.

When Eros was above the sleeping Psyche, he took out an arrow and prepared to shoot it. But he accidentally poked himself with the arrow, and all of a sudden Psyche was the most valuable and wonderful thing the earth had ever created. He loved Psyche more than anyone or anything in the world. He flew back to Mount Olympus, leaving Psyche unaffected.

Aphrodite was furious at Eros for not complying with her orders. The fight that followed was one of the worst Olympus, or for that matter, the world, had ever seen. While Eros was sulking, no one fell in love and Aphrodite began to wither. So eventually Aphrodite saw that Eros must have his way. "What is it you wish?" she asked him.

"The girl," replied Eros.

"You shall have her," said Aphrodite.

So Aphrodite had Zephyr, the west wind, come and bring Psyche to Eros. But Eros could not be seen by Psyche for a little while after their marriage. When Psyche's sisters visited her, they convinced Psyche that her invisible husband was a monster. Psyche, curious, brought a candle into her husband's bedchamber and looked at him. It was Eros, the god of love. In her shock, Psyche let a drop of candle wax drip from the candle. Eros awoke with a start and became very angry with Psyche. "Yes, I am love itself, and I cannot live where I am not believed." Then Eros left.

But eventually Eros forgave Psyche and invited her back to live with him, and Psyche was made immortal upon Eros' request. Psyche is now the goddess of the soul, and that is where we get the prefix "psych-", as in psycho, psychology, and psychiatrist.

#7: The Trojan Horse

Legend says Once upon a time, a long time ago, there was an ancient city named Troy. Troy was located on the coast of Asia, across the sea from the Greek city-state of Sparta.

In those days, people used to build walls around their city to help protect them. Some walls were only a few feet high. Others as much as twenty feet high!

The people built gates in the wall. The gates could be opened to let people inside the city. In times of war, the gates could be closed and locked to stop intruders from getting inside.

Along the wall, inside of the city, a set of stairs wound up to the top. Warriors could stand at the top of the stairs and shoot arrows down at intruders who were trying to get inside the city. There were also holes built high on the wall. Archers could shoot arrows through the holes as well. If the wall was high enough and strong enough, it could do a pretty good job keeping intruders from coming inside.

The walls around Troy were very high and very strong. According to the legend of Trojan Horse, for ten long years, the Greeks had been trying to get over the wall around the city of Troy. But the Greeks could not get over the wall. And the Trojans could not drive the Greeks away. Year after year they fought. And year after year, neither side won.

One day, a Greek general, Odysseus, had a tricky idea. "Let's pretend to sail away," he suggested. "We'll leave a gift for Troy, a gift to announce the end of the war, a wooden horse with 30 men hidden inside. At night, these men can sneak out and open the gate of Troy!" That was the way things were done back then. When you admitted defeat, you supplied a gift. It could be a gift of money, art, slaves, anything really. It made sense to leave a gift of art. The Greeks were famous for their art.

The Greeks thought it was a brilliant idea. They had their best artists build the horse. It was a magnificent horse. When it was ready, the Greeks brought the huge wooden horse as close to Troy's city gates as they could get without being shot full of arrows. The Greeks pretended to sail away.

When the Trojan archers at the top of the stairs saw the Greeks leaving, they could not believe their eyes. Were the Greeks giving up at last? Had the Trojans won the

war? It certainly appeared so! The Trojans dragged the horse inside their city and closed the gates.

Some people wanted to burn the horse, which would have been a sad fate for the Greek soldiers hidden inside. But the Trojan people said, "NO! It's too beautiful! We'll keep it forever as a reminder of our victory!" (The Greeks had counted on that reaction. The Greeks might be famous for their art, but the Trojans were famous for their bragging. The Greeks were sure the Trojans would want to display the magnificent horse. Sure enough, that's exactly what happened, or so legend says.)

That night, while the Trojan people slept soundly, exhausted from their celebrations, the 30 Greek men hidden inside the wooden horse climbed out and opened the gates of Troy and let the Greek army inside. That was the end of Troy.

There is an old saying, one still used today - *Beware of Greeks bearing gifts!* That old saying refers to the legend of the Trojan Horse.

#8: King Midas and the Golden Touch

Many years ago there lived a king named Midas. King Midas had one little daughter, whose name was Marigold. King Midas was very, very rich. It was said that he had more gold than any other king in the world.

One room of his great castle was almost filled with yellow gold pieces. The King grew so fond of his gold that he loved it better than anything else. He loved it even more than his own little daughter, dear little rosy-cheeked Marigold.

His one great wish was for more and more gold. One day he got his wish. A fairy appeared to him. "Midas," said the fairy. "If I should grant you one wish, would it be for more gold?"

"No," said the King, "I would ask that everything I touch to be turned into gold."

"Your wish shall be granted," said the fairy. "At sunrise to-morrow morning your slightest touch will turn everything into gold."

The next day King Midas awoke very early. He was eager to see if the fairy's promise had come true. As soon as the sun arose he tried the gift by touching the bed lightly with his hand. The bed turned to gold. He touched the chair and table. Upon the instant they were turned to solid gold.

The King was wild with joy. He ran around the room, touching everything he could see. His magic gift turned everything to shining, yellow gold. The King soon felt hungry and went down to eat his breakfast.

Now a strange thing happened. When he raised a glass of clear cold water to drink, it became solid gold. Not a drop of water could pass his lips. The bread turned to gold under his fingers. The meat was hard, and yellow, and shiny. He could not eat a thing.

All was gold, gold, gold.

His little daughter came running in from the garden. Without thinking, he greeted her with a kiss. At once, the little girl was changed to a golden statue.

A great fear crept into the King's heart, sweeping all the joy out of his life. In his grief, he called and called upon the fairy who had given him the gift of the golden touch.

"O fairy," he begged, "take away this horrible golden gift!" In a moment, the beautiful fairy was standing before him.

"Do you still want gold more than anything in the world?" asked the fairy.

"No! no!" cried the King. "I hate it! I hate the very sight of the yellow stuff."

"Very well," said the fairy, "take this pitcher to the spring in the garden and fill it with water. Then sprinkle those things which you have touched and turned to gold."

The King took the pitcher and rushed to the spring. Running back, he sprinkled the head of his dear little girl first. Instantly, she became his own darling Marigold again, and she gave him a kiss. He blessed the sight of her rosy cheeks.

The King sprinkled the golden food, and to his great joy it turned back to real bread and real butter. Then he and his little daughter sat down to breakfast. How good the cold water tasted! How good the bread and butter, meat, and all the food!

The King hated his golden touch so much that he even sprinkled the chairs and the tables and the bed and all the things that had been turned to gold.