

PROLOGUE TO JASON AND THE GOLDEN FLEECE

THE GOLDEN FLEECE

King Athamas of Boeotia married the immortal Nephele, and she bore him two children, whom he loved: a son named Phrixus and a daughter named Helle. Later, Athamas fell in love with Ino and made her his second queen. Ino bore Athamas two sons and was determined that they, rather than Nephele's children, should inherit the kingdom. In order to carry out this plan, she secretly ordered the farm-women of Boeotia to sow the new crop of wheat with roasted seeds, which she knew would never sprout.

When Athamas saw that his people would starve, he sent messengers to Delphi in order to ask the oracle of Far-shooting Apollo what he should do to restore the fertility of his land. However, Ino intercepted the messengers and told them they must return to Athamas with this message: "The children of the king's first queen have poisoned the soil of Boeotia. Sacrifice them to Far-seeing Zeus. And the soil will bloom with sweet, life-sustaining grain."

At first, Athamas refused to sacrifice Nephele's children. However, when the people of Boeotia learned that he refused to accept the advice of Apollo's oracle, they gathered before the palace and shouted, "Athamas, you may not save your children while our children die! Sacrifice Phrixus and Helle to Far-seeing Zeus. Or we will do it for you!"

While Athamas prepared for the sacrifice, Nephele prayed to Zeus to save her children. He heard her prayers and sent his son, Swift-footed Hermes, to her with a ram whose fleece was of shining gold. "Go forth to my father's altar. Cut your children loose. And order them to climb on the ram's back," commanded Hermes. "It will carry them to Colchis, in Scythia. And there I will meet them.

Before the ram reached Scythia, Helle fell into the sea, known thereafter as the Hellespont (Sea of Helle), where she drowned. However, the ram carried Phrixus safely to Colchis. There, Hermes told Phrixus to sacrifice the Golden Ram to Zeus and to take its Golden Fleece to King Aetes. Aetes accepted both Phrixus and the gift because

Hermes had told him to obey the will of Zeus. Then Phrixus married Chalcioppe, the king's older daughter, and became the father of four sons.

Meanwhile, Aetes nailed the wondrous fleece to a great oak tree in a grove that was dedicated to Ares. However, Shining Helios told Aetes, who was his son, that members of his family would contrive deceitful schemes that would lead to treachery and destruction. Therefore, Aetes placed a sleepless serpent by the fleece to guard it.

JASON AND THE GOLDEN FLEECE

Muse—divine daughter of Far-seeing Zeus, Father of Gods and Mortals—sing of the ways of the human heart. Sing of how the heart floods, like the storm-tossed salt sea, with waves of love, hatred, ambition, and revenge, enslaving the human mind with these passions and making all who walk the earth its victims. And sing of the Olympian gods—the deathless ones—who observe all who are mortal, judge them, and then respond in ways mortals do not expect. And through your song, reveal who is to blame for the troubles that plague all who walk the earth.

Muse—divine daughter of Far-seeing Zeus, Father of Gods and Mortals—sing of Jason's arrival in Iolcus. Sing of how King Pelias sends Jason forth to fetch the wondrous Golden Fleece. Sing of Phineus. Sing of Jason's arrival in Colchis. Sing of the tasks King Aetes demands of Jason. Sing of Medea. And sing of the capture of the Golden Fleece.

Chapter 1

Jason claims the throne of Iolcus. Then King Pelias commands him to fetch the Golden Fleece, and the Argo departs for Colchis.

In Thessaly, Pelias—mad for power and without respect for law—took the royal scepter, the throne, and the kingdom of Iolcus from his half-brother, Aeson, who was the rightful king. In time it came to pass that Aeson's wedded lady gave birth to a son, whom they named Jason. Jason was the rightful heir to the throne. Thus, Aeson and his wedded lady feared that, swift as the wind, Pelias would push their son into the grasping hands of Thanatos. And there he would look his last upon light and life. So Aeson secretly gave little Jason to the centaur Cheiron to rear.

In time, it came to pass that, like Aeetes, Pelias lived in fear of the grasping hands of Thanatos. For the oracle of Far-shooting Apollo at Delphi caused the king's heart to flood with terror by declaring, "Pelias, beware of a man wearing a single sandal—whether he is a stranger or one of your own people—who comes to the bright land of Iolcus from a home on the mountain."

So the oracle had prophesied. And in time, it came to pass that Jason left Cheiron's cave high on Mount Pelion. And he set forth to find his real parents, for he intended to claim the royal scepter, the throne, and the kingdom in the name of his father. And as he strode down the mountain path, Jason looked like one of the deathless gods. Uncut curly locks framed his godlike face and danced upon his back as he walked. The clothing of a hunter graced his godlike form. A leopard skin lay draped across his shoulders. And in each hand he carried a great spear.

Now when Jason approached the towers of the royal city of Iolcus, he found that the river that flows past the city had become a roaring flood-tide with a treacherous current. For Shining Helios's golden rays had warmed the snow-covered meadows high on Mount Pelion. And the snow had fled, sending cascades of water down into the valley below.

But Jason knew that, if he wanted to find his parents, he would have to cross the churning waters as best he could. So he plunged into the icy river and began to push his way through the roaring winter flood-tide. And as he fought his way through the mighty current, he lost his left sandal in the swollen floodwaters. So it came to pass that Jason walked through the gates to the royal city—and arrived in the marketplace of Iolcus—wearing only his right sandal.

Now the marketplace was crowded with people. But everyone stood silent and still when the godlike stranger suddenly appeared among them. For just as a rippling brook sparkles like a jewel beneath the golden rays of Shining Helios's gold-yoked chariot, so Jason's beauty, strength, and vigor now shone forth from his youthful face and form.

Swift as the wind, Rumor flew to the royal palace. "A strange youth—surely as godlike as Far-shooting Apollo or Death-dealing Ares—has entered the marketplace of Iolcus!" she whispered into every ear. So it came to pass that King Pelias heard the

news. Swift as the wind, he went forth to the marketplace. And there he did not have to look far to find the stranger. For just as a great oak tree cowers over the surrounding pine trees in a forest, so Jason stood head and shoulders above the people.

And so it came to pass that Jason and King Pelias came face to face. Jason stood silent and still before the king. Plans of revenge now flooded his mind. And his heart overflowed with courage. Pelias, too, stood silent and still. For the sight of the godlike stranger flooded his eyes. And so, swift as the wind, his eyes flew straight as an arrow from the youth's face down to his feet. And seeing that the stranger was wearing only one sandal, the king's mind flooded with the prophecy of Far-shooting Apollo's oracle. And so his heart flooded with waves of fear and anguish.

But Pelias acted as if he had nothing to fear. "Welcome, Stranger!" he exclaimed. "What land do you call home? And whom do you call Father? Let your words fly as swift and straight as a well-aimed arrow. For my heart easily floods with rage."

So King Pelias spoke. And to his words, Jason replied, "My lord, my home and my father's name: are best revealed within your palace."

"Then come with me, Stranger," replied Pelias.

There, Jason announced, "My lord, I call Cheiron—the deathless and renowned centaur—Father. For he is the only father I have ever known. And I call his cave on Mount Pelion my home. There, I have lived while twenty years have followed one upon the other as Gleaming Selene follows Shining Helios across the heavens. And there Cheiron has reared me. But I was born in Iolcus. And my true father is Aeson, a grandson of King Aeolus. And so I have come to the royal city of Iolcus in order to reclaim my birthright.

"Cheiron has told me about you, Uncle. And plans of revenge have flooded my mind. But that is an old path, Uncle. And now, we need to make a new one. And so open the doors of your mind to my words. For, like well-aimed arrows, they will fly forth straight and true. Being related by blood, surely we do not need to threaten each other with swords or spears in order to gain what, by birth, is rightfully ours. For your part, Uncle, you may keep my father's fields, his flocks of sheep, and his herds of oxen—though, by taking them, you increased the wealth that was already yours.

"But Uncle—in the name of Far-seeing Zeus, Lord of Justice—I ask you to return the royal scepter, the throne, and the kingdom that rightfully belongs to my father. Only a reckless man keeps power unlawfully. His eyes are blind to what will come to be, and so he walks in the dark. And he bears a burden that weighs heavily on his mind and his heart."

So Jason spoke. And to his words, Pelias replied, "Cheiron has taught you to speak with a honeyed tongue, Jason. And your words are as wise as they are sweet. For Time—who ravishes all Mother Gaea's children—has left his mark on me. And I am now like an autumn leaf—no longer fresh and green—but old and stiff and weak.

"You are like a spring fruit, with your ripeness still to come. And so I give you my sacred promise—with Far-seeing Zeus, Lord of Justice, as my witness—that I will soon give you the royal scepter, the throne, and the kingdom of Iolcus. And you will rule—not in your father's name—but in your own."

So Pelias spoke, but his honeyed words concealed the rage that flooded his heart.

It came to pass that the godlike youth became reunited with his parents. And soon thereafter, Pelias invited Jason to join him in his offerings to Lord Poseidon and to the other Olympian gods. But the king was so distraught that he foolishly neglected to make the offerings that would honor Golden-throned Hera. For his mind was still flooded with the prophecy of the Far-shooter's oracle. And his heart was still flooded with waves of fear and anguish at the presence in Iolcus of the single-shod young man. And so his mind could think of nothing but the best way to destroy Jason.

"Surely Jason must look his last upon light and life. For only in this way will I escape my fate. And yet, I cannot kill him. For Far-seeing Zeus protects strangers and guests. And Aeson's son is both. Surely I do not want Zeus's heart to flood with wrath toward me. Instead, Thanatos must embrace Jason far from the shores of Hellas at the hands of some other man or between the jaws of some wild beast.

So Pelias mused. And so it came to pass that he approached Jason at the sacrifice and said, "Jason, tell me what you would do under the following circumstances. Assume you are a great king. For you will rule this kingdom. And assume you learn from Far-shooting Apollo's oracle at Delphi that, in time, one of your subjects will push you

into the grasping hands of Thanatos. And there you will look your last upon light and life. Then later, you discover the identity of the man you fear. Once you know who he is, what would you do?"

So the king spoke. And to his words, Jason replied, "Why, Uncle, I would summon the man I fear. And—if he appeared to have the courage, strength, and skill of a heroic young man—then I would command him to go forth on a great quest. I might send him to Aetes' kingdom of Colchis, in Scythia. For it lies at the far, eastern shore of Oceanus—at the end of the world we know. And there I would command him to fetch the Golden Fleece that belongs to King Aetes.

"Now Uncle, the man I fear—if he appeared to have the courage, strength, and skill of a heroic young man—would surely look upon my command as a great opportunity. For the wondrous Golden Fleece is the prize of all prizes! And the heart of King Aetes and mercy are strangers. So the heart of the man I fear would flood with joy, for he would welcome the challenge and the adventure I would be offering him. And he would look upon this quest as the way to win the glory that brings lasting fame.

"And yet, Uncle, I would be pushing the man I fear into the grasping hands of Thanatos. For that dreadful god would embrace him! He might find him on the voyage to Colchis. Or in Aetes' kingdom. Or on the return journey. But he would surely embrace him. And so the man I fear would look his last upon light and life."

So Jason spoke. And to his words, the king replied, "Jason, my heart floods with joy at your clever scheme! And so I now command you to go forth to Colchis. For you are the man to whom the Far-shooter's oracle referred. Fetch the Golden Fleece, Jason. And when you return to the towers of Iolcus, present it to me as a gift.

"Now I will build you a fifty-oared ship for the journey. And you, Jason, will invite the crew to man her. I expect that—by the time your companions have assembled and the well-benched ship is ready to sail—spring blossoms will have become summer flowers. But summer is a good time for sailing the salt sea, for it brings favorable winds, and you will need all the help you can get!"

So King Pelias spoke to Jason. Meanwhile, Golden-throned Hera had been looking down from Mount Olympus, watching and listening to Jason and Pelias, in order

to see how she could contrive to punish the king. And when King Pelias pretended to ask Jason's advice, her heart had flooded with joy.

"Pelias's scheming mind will now prove to be his undoing!" she had silently exclaimed. "Already I can see him in the embrace of Thanatos. For swift as the wind, I will flood Jason's mind with the idea of fetching the Golden Fleece from King Aetes. And Pelias will accept Jason's scheme."

So the White-armed Goddess had decided. And so it had come to be. And so now, she silently exclaimed, "How clever I was to make the most of Pelias's challenge to Jason, for now my plan to punish Pelias begins! And my heart floods with joy when I think of all that will come to pass!"

And it came to pass that, swift as the wind, the greatest heroes of Hellas accepted Jason's invitation to accompany him on his quest. For each hero longed for adventure and the opportunity to win the glory that would bring him lasting fame. And soon after they all had arrived, Jason's well-benched ship, the Argo, was ready to sail upon the salt sea. Jason went forth to join his companions with his heart flooded with the call of glory and lasting fame. And so it was with the other Argonauts. And as they took their places at the benches, every hero gleamed like the shining stars in Nyx's robe, and every heart flooded with joy.

And joy flooded the heart of King Pelias, as well. "Now Jason will surely look his last upon light and life," the king thought, "for Thanatos will surely embrace him. He may find him on the voyage to Colchis. Or in Aetes' kingdom. Or on the return journey. But of this one thing, I am certain. Jason will never return to Hellas alive!"

So King Pelias mused. But he did not know his only son, Acastus, was planning to join the Argonauts. And when he discovered this, his heart flooded with grief. For he feared that Acastus as well as Jason would soon give up light and life. When the shipbuilder, too, joined the Argo's crew, Jason's heart overflowed with joy. "This quest may not be the death of me after all!" he silently exclaimed, "for Pelias would never send his only son on a doomed voyage. And the shipbuilder has such pride in his craft, he, too, has chosen to accompany us."

Now everyone knew that, if Jason captured the Golden Fleece, then poets would sing of it for as long as mortals walk the earth to hear of it. And so as the Argonauts

prepared to row out of the harbor of Iolcus, Pelias's subjects thronged the shore and cheered their voyage. And on Mount Olympus, the deathless gods, too, watched as the Argonauts stowed their gear and prepared to work their oars. For aboard the Argo were two sons of Far-seeing Zeus, four sons of Earth-shaking Poseidon, one son of Far-shooting Apollo, one son of Strong-armed Hephaestus, two sons of Swift-footed Hermes, and one son of Gold-helmeted Helios. And other Argonauts were favorites of the deathless gods.

Now when the Argonauts finished their final preparations, they raised the anchor of their well-benched ship. And Jason raised a golden goblet—a cup as bright as the golden rays of Shining Helios's gold-yoked chariot. "Far-seeing Zeus—Father of Gods and Mortals—and Earth-shaking Poseidon—Lord of the Sea—I call upon you. Smile on our great venture," he prayed. "Grant us favorable winds and friendly waves. Protect us as we sail upon strange waters and discover strange peoples. And bring us safely back to our homes in Hellas."

So Jason prayed. And the great deathless gods heard his prayer. For Zeus, the Loud-thunderer, responded. Swift as the wind, the ears of those aboard the Argo—and the ears of those standing by the shore of the salt sea—flooded with the rumble of the god's thunder. And their eyes flooded with the flash of the god's bright lightning-bolt. And yet, Shining Helios was still driving his gold-yoked chariot across the heavens. And so everyone now stood silent and still. And their hearts flooded with awe. For they knew they were witnessing the signs of the greatest of the Olympian gods.

And this most favorable of omens caused the heart of every Argonaut to flood with joy. One and all, they raised their voices in a mighty cheer, and the hearts of those by the shore of the salt sea flooded with joy, as well. And they, too, raised their voices in a mighty cheer. And so it came to pass that the well-benched Argo departed for King Aetes' kingdom of Colchis—at the far, eastern shore of Oceanus and at the end of the known world.

Chapter 2

The Argonauts rescue the seer Phineus and the sons of Phrixus. At last, the Argo reaches Colchis. Jason and Medea meet in Aetes' palace.

In time, it came to pass that the Argo entered the narrow passage that leads to the great eastern salt sea. In time, the Argonauts anchored her in a small harbor on the western shore. For their eyes flooded with the sight of a great hall. And they went ashore to find its lord.

And it came to pass that—at the sound of their feet and voices—a blind and decrepit man slowly rose to his feet and came forth from his hall to greet them. With trembling arms and hands, he reached out for walls and objects that would guide his shaking legs. And as he walked, his withered knees and feet found it hard to support the weight of his lean form.

"Welcome, Jason! Welcome, heroes of Hellas!" exclaimed the blind and decrepit man. "And may you, Far-seeing Zeus, and you, Far-shooting Apollo, see that my heart floods with gratitude for your gift of these heroes."

So the blind man greeted his visitors. But Jason and the Argonauts only stood silent and still, for their eyes flooded with the sight of this wreck of a man who was now staggering toward them. He was gazing at them with eyes that could not see. His dry skin was thin and filthy. And having no flesh beneath it, it clung to his bones like a finely-woven, but very wrinkled robe.

At last, Jason replied, "We thank you for your welcome, my lord. And please forgive our silence. But your greeting has caused our hearts to flood with waves of pity and wonder. Why do we find you in this sad state? And how do you know who we are?" So Jason spoke. And his decrepit host replied, "Heroes of Hellas, let your eyes flood with the sight of my ravaged face and form, for Far-seeing Zeus is the most fearsome foe of all who do not recognize and respect the privilege and power of the deathless gods.

"Heroes of Hellas, you must not walk in my foot-steps! And so open the doors of your mind to my words, for, like well-aimed arrows they will fly forth straight and true. My name is Phineus, and in time of old, I was king of the Thracians. And I was renowned—not for my wealth and power, great as they were, but for the godlike gift of prophecy that Far-shooting Apollo has given me.

"In time of old, my heart flooded with good will toward all who walk the earth. And so I did my best to help everyone who came to me in need. Time after time, I revealed

everything about each needy person's fate. For I know all there is to know about what will come to be.

"And it came to pass that my greatest talent caused my suffering. For time after time, I revealed more than Far-seeing Zeus wants mortals to know about what is to come. And when Zeus looked into my heart, he saw presumption where I saw compassion. As I saw it, my heart overflowed with kindness. But the Lord of Olympus saw that my heart overflowed with pride.

"Heroes of Hellas, Far-seeing Zeus has shown me that good and evil often appear dressed in each other's robes. And so we mortals—all too often, the best among us!—can find it difficult to recognize which is which. Our eyes can look upon Shining Helios's golden rays and see them. And yet, we can look upon our thoughts and our deeds but not see them. Then we are blind. For we do not know ourselves. And so we act recklessly.

"Far-seeing Zeus has shown me that, though we are mortal, the deathless gods permit us to be godlike. But we must always remember we are only mortal. We may not think and act as if we are one of the deathless gods. And should we forget, sooner or later the gods will punish us. They themselves may punish us. Or they may use other mortals to punish us. But they will surely punish us.

"Now those among us who remain blind usually blame the deathless gods when a disastrous change of fortune befalls them. But those who learn to know themselves will surely discover that they themselves—through their own thoughts and deeds—caused their own suffering.

"Heroes of Hellas, open the doors of your mind to my words. For when you have won the glory of great deeds, and when your deeds have brought you lasting fame, they will protect you.

"Far-seeing Zeus has sorely punished me for my pride and my blindness. Because I looked but did not see, the Lord of Olympus decreed that I should look my last upon the light of Shining Helios's golden rays. But, alas, Zeus did not decree that I should give up the wind of life that blows through me! And so Thanatos has refused to embrace me. My face and form reveal how Time—who ravishes all Mother Gaea's

children—has continued to leave his mark on me. And so I would welcome the embrace of Thanatos. But that dreadful god has turned his back on me.

"And whenever I must eat or drink, Zeus's hounds—the Harpies—descend on me. You may know them as the Snatchers. Swift as the wind, they fly down from the clouds like the Loud-thunderer's lightning-bolts. They snatch whatever I wish to eat or drink from my hands before I can put it into my mouth. And they cast the disgusting smell of decay over whatever food and drink remains. The stench is so strong, only a starving mortal would dare to come near it!

"Heroes of Hellas, the winged sons of Boreas stand here among you. And they alone possess the power, and the permission of the deathless gods, to save me from the Harpies. So, Jason, permit them to save me! And in return, I will reveal as much of what is to come as Far-seeing Zeus will permit. None of the deathless gods—not even the Lord of Olympus—can remove a god's gift once it has been given. And so the Far-shooter's gift of prophecy is still mine."

So Phineus spoke. The heart of every hero flooded with pity for their blind and decrepit host. And to his words, Jason replied, "Flood your heart with hope, my lord, for your words reveal that the gods have decided to rescue you. And we have arrived to carry out their will. So command your servant bring forth your food and drink, and the sons of Boreas will attack the Harpies as soon as they appear.

So Jason spoke to Phineus. And it came to pass that, swift as the wind, the sons of Boreas rose to meet the Harpies. And they would have killed Zeus's hounds, but Golden-winged Iris suddenly appeared and declared, "Sons of Boreas, Far-seeing Zeus will not permit you to destroy his hounds. But he promises they will never attack Phineus again."

And it came to pass Phineus kept his word. For he revealed whatever Far-seeing Zeus would permit of what was to befall the Argonauts. Then Jason said, "Phineus--respected lord of those who walk the earth—you have told us how, if the deathless gods smile on us, we will reach Colchis. Now tell us. How will we fare with King Aetes? For I have heard that his heart and mercy are strangers. And tell us. Will our eyes ever again look upon our homes in Hellas? For my heart floods with fear that our return will have no familiar signs to mark the way."

So Jason questioned Phineus. And in response, the blind seer declared, "My friends, at the far shore of Oceanus you will come upon the Phasis River. And not far from where this great river joins the salt sea, you will see the towers of the royal city of Aea and the wondrous palace of King Aeetes. And you will see the sacred grove of Death-dealing Ares, where the wondrous Golden Fleece you seek hangs upon the branches of a leafy oak tree. The fleece is guarded—both day and night—by a deathless dragon whose watchful eyes never close in sweet sleep.

"Guides will help you reach Colchis and find King Aeetes. And one of the deathless gods will guide your return to Hellas. But the success of your quest, Jason, will depend on Foam-born Aphrodite. However, Far-seeing Zeus forbids me to reveal more about this."

So Phineus spoke. And it came to pass that the Argonauts soon continued on their way. They beached the Argo on the island of Ares the Death-dealer, as Phineus had directed. And help came to them from the angry waves of the salt sea, as Phineus had foretold. For there, Jason and his companions rescued four shipwrecked youths. They were Phrixus's sons, and Argus, the eldest, advised and guided Jason on the rest of their voyage.

Meanwhile, once again Golden-throned Hera had been looking down from Mount Olympus in order to see how her plans for Jason were progressing. And when she saw that the well-benched Argo would soon reach the kingdom of Colchis, her heart flooded with joy. "Now I can proceed with my plan for Pelias!" she silently exclaimed. "Foam-born Aphrodite must have her son, Eros—whose love-inspiring arrows flood even the hearts of the Olympian gods with fear—aim his bow at King Aeetes' maiden daughter. For Medea must fall in love with Jason. And then she will use her great skill with magic to help him acquire Aeetes' wondrous fleece."

So Golden-throned Hera decided. And so it would come to pass that Laughter-loving Aphrodite and Love-inspiring Eros would help Jason in his quest for the Golden Fleece, for the Foam-born Goddess spoke with her son. And swift as the wind, Eros put on the golden belt from which his quiver of love-inspiring arrows hung. Then he picked up his curved bow and sped down through the air to Aeetes' kingdom of Colchis. There,

he waited by the Phasis River—and not far from the royal city of Aea—for the arrival of the Argo.

While Love-inspiring Eros was making his way toward Colchis, the Argonauts were rowing their well-benched ship into the swirling waters that formed the broad mouth of the Phasis. And as they rowed, Jason declared, "My friends, surely our safety lies in our secrecy. And so, Argus, guide our well-benched ship into a quiet cove. For there we will anchor her. And there I will offer honey and wine to the great Colchian gods of earth and sky—Mother Gaea and Gold-helmeted Helios. May they welcome us here, and may they help us with our quest!"

So Jason spoke. And so it came to pass. And then Jason announced, "Friends, I want you to remain here while the sons of Phrixus lead me forth to King Aeetes. I will greet the king with the honeyed words of friendship. It may come to pass that the heart of Aeetes will flood with the warmth of hospitality, and he will give me the wondrous Golden Fleece as a host-gift. Then we will not have to rise against him in battle and take it by force."

So Jason spoke. And in reply, Argus announced, "I speak for my brothers and myself when I declare that the strength of the sons of Phrixus will forever be at your service, Jason. For we owe our lives to you! But Jason, open the doors of your mind to my words, for, like well-aimed arrows, they will fly forth straight and true.

"The task King Pelias has laid upon you is a hopeless one! King Aeetes is the son of Shining Helios—the Gold-helmeted God who drives his gold-yoked chariot across the heavens and into the western waves of Oceanus. And he is our grandfather, so his ways are well-known to us. He commands warriors beyond number. Just his war cry floods every mortal heart with fear! For no one can defeat him in battle. His heart and mercy are strangers. And whoever opposes him becomes food for birds and dogs!

"Grandfather will never give you the Golden Fleece, Jason. Nor will you be able to steal it from him, for a great deathless dragon lies coiled around the tree from which the wondrous fleece hangs. It is a child of Mother Gaea, and so it is more than mortal. Its watchful eyes never close in sweet sleep, and its skin defies the strongest and sharpest of weapons, so no mortal possesses the skill to defeat it.

So Argus spoke. And his words caused the heart of every Argonaut to flood with fear. But then, as everyone sat silent and still, Peleus pushed fear from his heart and declared, "Argus, my friend, your words have caused courage to panic and flee from our hearts, but we possess the courage, strength, and skill to defeat King Aeetes and his warriors on the plain of battle. Many of us are sons of the deathless gods, and if Aeetes will not give us the wondrous fleece in friendship, then—strong as he is—he will not be able to stop us from taking it!"

So Peleus replied to Argus. And then Jason declared, "Surely Peleus speaks for all of us. But I will now speak for myself alone. I do not take your words lightly, Argus, but I have not come all this way in order to retreat now! The coward flees from danger. But he who meets life with courage greets danger as a welcome friend. And in this way, the brave man earns the respect and love of the deathless gods. My heart and fear are strangers! And so I will proceed with the task Pelias has given me, come what may!"

So Jason spoke to Argus. Meanwhile, once again, Golden-throned Hera had been looking down from Mount Olympus, watching and listening, in order to see how her plans for Jason were progressing. And now she silently exclaimed, "My eyes flood with the sight of Love-inspiring Eros. For he has arrived in Colchis!"

And now he rests near the Argo, so Jason will surely have to pass him as he walks toward the towers of Aea. My heart floods with joy when I think of all that will now come to pass!"

So White-armed Hera mused. And it came to pass that the goddess watched as Argus and his brothers led Jason forth to the royal city and the palace of King Aeetes. She watched as—unseen by mortal eyes—Love-inspiring Eros left his resting-place and began to walk at Jason's side. And she watched until Jason and the sons of Phrixus approached Aea's walls. Then, swift as the wind, she wrapped a cloak of thick, gray fog around the royal city, for she knew Jason could only meet Medea if he reached Aeetes' palace and entered its grounds in safety.

And it came to pass that, as the young men walked through the city, Argus declared, "Jason, once we enter Grandfather's palace, your eyes will flood with the sight of many marvels, for in a time now past, Shining Helios helped Hephaestus. And so the

Strong-armed god built this wondrous palace for my grandfather, and he gave him the marvelous gifts that will flood your eyes.

So Argus spoke. And indeed it came to pass that Jason's eyes flooded with the sight of marvels as soon as he stepped through the palace gates. First, he noticed a plow that had been fashioned from an unbreakable stone. It rested beside an enormous but empty field. Then he noticed a pair of huge bulls, grazing nearby, that pulled this great plow. Jason was astonished to see that these bulls had bronze feet. They also breached fire from their bronze mouths, and so they were scorching the grass they were eating.

It came to pass that soon after Jason and his companions entered the home of the royal family, their eyes suddenly flooded with the sight of the beautiful maiden princess. Medea was a priestess of Night-wandering Hecate, the dreaded Underworld goddess from grim Hades' lifeless kingdom. And so she usually spent her days at the goddess's temple. But White-armed Hera had found reasons to keep her at home.

When Medea's eyes suddenly flooded with the sight of her nephews, swift as the wind, she cried out in surprise. For her mind flooded with questions about their return home. And at first, her eyes did not mark the presence of the godlike stranger among them. And swift as the wind, her cry brought her sister to her side. And when Chalciopé's eyes suddenly flooded with the sight of her children, she too cried out in surprise. And her eyes did not mark the presence of the godlike stranger among them.

Meanwhile, swift as the wind, Eros drew forth his curved bow and aimed one of his love-inspiring arrows at Medea just as her eyes flooded with the sight of the godlike stranger.

And just as a poor woman heaps dry sticks around a small log in order to kindle a blazing fire—and as she watches, the burning log ignites the sticks and they suddenly erupt into a blazing sheet of flame—so Eros's arrow now caused Medea's heart to flood with flames of love and longing for the godlike stranger. Then, having completed his task, the son of Laughter-loving Aphrodite flew back to his home on Mount Olympus.

Chapter 3

King Aeetes plans to kill the strangers from Hellas. He demands that Jason perform tasks in order to win the Golden Fleece. Argus promises to help Jason.

Medea has a strange dream.

And it came to pass that Aeetes held a great feast in honor of the return of his four grandsons. But only after everyone had feasted on the sumptuous fare did the king declare, "Argus, the time has come for you to answer two questions. First, why have you returned home? And who is the stranger whom you have brought with you?"

So Aeetes spoke. And his words caused Argus's mind to flood with thoughts of Jason's quest and the debt he owed him. So it came to pass that Argus answered the king with honeyed words. He explained how Jason had rescued them. He spoke of Jason's family. And he explained why Jason had come to Colchis.

"Give Jason your wondrous fleece, Grandfather," advised Argus, "and he will pay you well for it. For with courage, strength, and skill, Jason and his companions will fight the enemies who lie to the north of us. They are the greatest heroes of Hellas. Many are children of the deathless gods, and the gods look with delight on them all."

So Argus spoke, but his honeyed words only caused Aeetes' heart to flood with fury. And swift as the wind, Aeetes' eyes sent forth fiery golden rays—rays as blindingly bright as the gold-yoked chariot his father, Shining Helios, drives across the heavens each day.

"Argus, you must think I am soft of mind and weak of heart that you prey upon me with honeyed words," he declared "Jason has not come for my wondrous fleece. He wants my royal scepter, my throne, and my kingdom!"

So Aeetes spoke. And with these words, he turned toward Jason and exclaimed, "I wish I had not entertained you as my guest! For I would now cut out your tongue and chop off your hands so that you could not return and try to overthrow me! But you have become my guest, Jason. And so I will give you a choice. You may return to your companions and your ship, and then I will guarantee you safe passage from Aea and the kingdom of Colchis. Or you may try to earn the Golden Fleece for which Argus says you have come. But, before you choose, open the doors of your mind to my words, for, like well-aimed arrows, they will fly forth straight and true.

"To perform all the tasks I will demand of you, you will need courage, strength, and skill that equal my own. For when Blushing Eos makes the new day light, it is my custom to go forth to the Plain of Ares the Death-dealer and yoke my two bulls to my plow. Next I plow and sow the field. Then, at the proper time, I reap the harvest. But I am performing no simple set of tasks.

"As you entered the palace grounds, surely your eyes flooded with the sight of the huge fire-breaching bulls and the great, deep-cutting plow of unbreakable stone that Strong-armed Hephaestus gave my father, Shining Helios. When Blushing Eos makes the new day light, I force the yoke on these bulls, though fiery flames spurt forth from their mouths and burn me, and their bronze hooves kick me.

"Once I have plowed the field, I sow 'seeds' that are the terrible teeth of Death-dealing Ares' dragon. And once I have planted them, swift as the wind, they begin to grow into armed men. By the time Father has driven his chariot two-thirds of the way across the heavens, each tooth will have sprouted into a fearsome bronze-clad warrior. Now each of these warriors comes forth from Mother Gaea wielding a double-pointed spear, and they will push me into the grasping hands of Thanatos unless I kill them first.

"These bronze-clad warriors are Mother Gaea's children. But, fortunately for me, my own spear can force them to give up light and life. And so I slice off their heads, or their trunks, and I push them into the grasping hands of Thanatos before they push me. Every earthborn, bronze-clad warrior looks his last upon light and life, and by the time I have finished this harvest, Father has driven his gold-yoked chariot into the western waves of Oceanus.

"And so, Jason, if you choose to earn the Golden Fleece for which Argus says you have come, you will need to be well rested, both in mind and in body. For when Blushing Eos makes the second day light, you must go forth to the Plain of Death-dealing Ares, and there you must plow, plant, and reap the field just as I would do.

"Complete these tasks, Jason, and I will reward you with the wondrous Golden Fleece. And I will permit you to return with it to Hellas. For then you will have proved that you are my equal in courage, strength, and skill, though surely you will not be my equal in power! But if you do not agree to undertake these tasks, Jason, then you are a

coward, and swift as the wind, you must leave my kingdom. No man of courage lets a coward have his way!"

So King Aeetes spoke in his great pride, and his words caused Jason's heart to flood with despair. "Argus was right. Both Pelias and Aeetes want to kill me!" he silently exclaimed. "But I must quiet my quaking heart, and I must be brave before this cruel king, for his heart and mercy are strangers. And in courage lies my only hope!"

So it came to pass that Jason responded, "King Aeetes, it is your right to make me win the Golden Fleece if I would have it. And so I accept your challenge. At the appointed time, I will go forth to the Plain of Death-dealing Ares. There I will plow, plant, and reap the field just as you would do. And I will prove I am your equal in courage, strength, and skill."

"As you have agreed, Jason, so it will be," declared Aeetes. "Return now to your companions and rest well, for, at the appointed time, we will meet again—on the Plain of Death-dealing Ares."

Jason and the sons of Phrixus returned to their well-benched ship. And there Jason gathered the Argonauts and announced, "My friends, my heart overflows with despair, for the heart of King Aeetes floods with rage toward us. And so he has commanded me to complete a series of tasks only a godlike mortal like himself can perform. And yet I have agreed to do all Aeetes demands of me, for I had nothing better to offer."

So Jason spoke to the Argonauts, and swift as the wind, Peleus responded, "Jason, let us determine for ourselves whether your heart has cause to overflow with despair. What are these tasks King Aeetes now commands you to perform?"

So Peleus questioned Jason. And so Jason described the tasks Aeetes was demanding of him. And his words caused every heart to flood with despair.

But then Peleus declared, "Jason, open the doors of your mind to my words, for, like well-aimed arrows, they will fly forth straight and true. Look into your mind and heart, and see if you are willing to perform all the godlike tasks that Aeetes now demands of you. For your heart must flood with courage. And your limbs must go forth with strength and skill. If you are willing, then you should honor your promise.

"But what if you cannot summon the courage you will need? What if you are uncertain of your strength and skill? Then Jason, I will go forth in your place. And I will perform all the tasks that King Aeetes now demands of you, for I have nothing to lose. If I am successful, I will win the glory of the great deed. And if I fail, Thanatos will embrace me. Why should my heart flood with fear? Heroes and cowards alike share the same fate. For that dreadful god will clasp all who walk the earth in his grasping hands. And so if I must look my last on light and life, let it be when I am performing great deeds. For I would choose a death that brings glory and lasting fame!"

So Peleus responded to Jason. And his words caused the hearts of other Argonauts to flood with courage as well.

But swift as the wind, Argus declared, "Peleus's heart overflows with courage, but even he lacks the strength and skill to yoke my grandfather's bulls and do battle with Mother Gaea's bronze-clad children. Believe me, my friends, when I tell you Jason is in dire straits! And surely now, Jason, you realize what a hopeless task King Pelias has given you! So open the doors of your mind to my words, for, like well-aimed arrows, they will fly forth straight and true.

"I have a plan, Jason. And, if you agree with it, you will be able to perform all the tasks my grandfather demands of you, for I have an aunt—my mother's younger sister, Medea. She is still a maiden, but she is wise far beyond her years. She serves Hecate, the Night-wandering Goddess, and the goddess has caused her to be gifted in the ways of charms and magic. And so if my mother can get Medea to help you, surely you will succeed!"

"For in Medea's skillful hands, all the herbs that grow on land and all that live in the salt sea become drugs and charms. She can call forth blazing fires. She can quiet rushing rivers. And in the heavens, she can make Silver-horned Selene drive her silver-yoked chariot next to the gold-yoked chariot of Gold-helmeted Helios. She can make spring flowers bloom in summer. She can make the grain grow ripe for harvesting in winter. And she can make the floor of heavily-wooded forests reflect Shining Helios's golden rays."

So Argus spoke. And in reply Jason declared, "Fear not, Argus. Whatever will ensure my success, I will do. I will even rely on a woman! And so kneel before your

mother. Clasp her knees. Take her chin in your hand. And with honeyed words, plead on my behalf."

So Jason spoke to Argus. And in time, it came to pass that the eyes of all the Argonauts closed in sweet sleep.

But within the royal palace, sweet sleep fled from King Aetes. For his mind flooded with thoughts of his grandsons and the stranger from Hellas. And he knew that, as soon as Blushing Eos made the new day light, he would call the warriors of Colchis to assembly, and he would flood their ears with his commands.

And sweet sleep fled from Medea as well. For she had been present at the great feast that had celebrated the return of her nephews. And so she had heard her father challenge the stranger from Hellas. And she had heard the stranger's response. She had stood silent and still, for the sight of this stranger had flooded her eyes, and the godlike beauty of his face and form had caused her heart to flood with waves of love and longing. Even after the stranger had left the great hall, she still could see how he looked as he sat and as he walked. And she still could hear his courageous words.

As the maiden sat on her bed, her mind flooded with waves of conflicting thoughts. "This stranger from Hellas towers over all other men!" she silently exclaimed. "Stranger though he is, my heart would have to be made of stone or bronze to resist him. What a pity Father's bulls will cut his life short! But I cannot reveal the love that floods my heart for this stranger, for he is my father's enemy, and to befriend him would be treason. Yet I must help the man I love, or Thanatos will soon embrace him. And there he will surely look his last upon light and life!"

So Medea mused, and the thought of the stranger's impending death caused her heart to flood with grief, and tears flowed freely from her eyes. And so the maiden now called on the Underworld goddess whom she served. "Oh hear me, Night-wandering Hecate. Smile on this stranger from Hellas. And help him!" she prayed. "Lead grim Hades—Lord of the Dead—to take no interest in him. Help this stranger return safely to his home in Hellas. And help me show him that, in me, he has a loyal friend in this land where he is an unwelcome guest."

So Medea prayed. And it came to pass that the maiden, weary from the overwhelming passion that flooded her heart, lay down and fell into a troubled sleep. And in her sleep, she dreamed the stranger had not come to recover the Golden Fleece. Instead, he had come to wed with her. And she dreamed he planned to take her, as his wedded lady, back to his home in Hellas.

Moreover, in her dream, Medea—and not the stranger—performed all the tasks her father demanded of him. She yoked the fire-breathing bulls, she sowed the terrible dragon's teeth, and she reaped the harvest of the fearsome earthborn warriors. Her skill in magic enabled her to perform these tasks easily. And so she saved the stranger's life.

But her father's heart flooded with rage, for the stranger from Hellas had not performed these tasks, and so her father refused to give up the Golden Fleece. His refusal caused the stranger's heart to flood with wrath, and so the stranger argued angrily with her father. At last, they agreed to have her choose between them. And swift as the wind, she chose the stranger from Hellas. Her decision caused the hearts of her parents to flood with waves of anguish and anger, and their cries awakened her.

"What a terrifying dream!" Medea silently exclaimed. "My heart quakes like a great oak tree in a storm wind! But I must offer this stranger my help—no matter what happens. And may the deathless gods see into my heart and forgive me, for that is the only way to stop the anguish that floods my own heart."

So Medea mused, and these thoughts caused tears to flow freely from her eyes. The eyes of King Aeetes had long since closed in sweet sleep, and now only Medea lay awake in the dark silence, for waves of terror and love flooded her heart, preventing sleep's arrival.

When Blushing Eos with her sparkling eyes made the new day light, King Aeetes gathered his armed men. And it came to pass that more than the storm-tossed waves of the salt sea, more than the grains of shining sand on its shores, and more than the autumn leaves on the floor of the oak forest were the Colchian warriors who now responded to their great king's call for revenge.

And when they had assembled in front of the royal palace, the great king of Colchis declared, "Warriors of Colchis, open the doors of your mind to my words, for, like well-aimed arrows, they will fly forth straight and true. The sons of Phrixus are

traitors! They have joined these strangers from Hellas, for they want to steal my royal scepter, my throne, and my kingdom!

"My father, Shining Helios, warned me of this. He told me to beware of deceitful schemes. He said they would lead to treachery and destruction, and he warned me that those of my own blood would contrive them. Now surely I have no cause to fear my daughters or my son. It is only my grandsons—the sons of Phrixus—whom I cannot trust.

"And so, warriors of Colchis, I will treat my grandsons—as well as these strangers from Hellas who have corrupted them—as they deserve. One and all, they must give up light and life! My bulls will tear Jason's limbs from his trunk, and I will leave his lifeless flesh as food for birds and dogs. Then, as soon as Jason falls, you must go forth to the forests that clothe our wooded hill-sides, and there you must fell the trees and make fiery torches of them. Then you must find where these strangers have hidden their well-benched ship, and you must destroy her and all who would escape on her.

"For just as bees will always return to their hive, so the Argonauts—with the sons of Phrixus among them—will surely return to their ship. So keep close watch, for not one of them must escape your torches. One and all, they must look their last upon light and life!"

So Aeetes spoke to his armed men. Meanwhile, Argus kept his promise to Jason. As soon as Blushing Eos with her sparkling eyes made the new day light, he secretly went forth to speak with his mother. There, he knelt before her. He clasped her knees. He took her chin in his hand. And with honeyed words, he pleaded on Jason's behalf.

Chapter 4

Medea decides to help Jason win the Golden Fleece, and she prepares him for his tasks.

Argus's words sent Chalcioppe forth to her sister's room. And when she saw her, she exclaimed, "Medea, tears are flowing freely from your eyes! Why does your heart flood with grief?"

"Oh, Chalcioppe, I dreamed your sons became food for birds and dogs!" exclaimed Medea. "For I dreamed that Father killed them, along with the strangers who

have come here from Hellas! When Blushing Eos makes the new day light, we often see our dreams flee, swift as the wind, like snow beneath Grandfather's golden rays. But I fear my dreams reveal events that will indeed come to pass, for your sons have shown Father they support the stranger from Hellas and his quest for the wondrous Fleece. And so they are traitors!"

So Medea spoke, and her words caused Chalcioppe's heart to flood with fear. And so Chalcioppe now knelt before Medea. She clasped her sister's knees. She took her sister's chin in her hand. And tears flowed freely from her eyes as she exclaimed, "Then I plead with you, Medea. You must save my sons, for you have powers that are greater than Father's."

So Chalcioppe spoke. And in reply, Medea declared, "You give me more power than I possess, Chalcioppe, but I hereby take the sacred oath of our people. And with the great, deathless gods of earth and sky as my witnesses, I promise I will do my best to save your sons, Chalcioppe."

So Medea spoke, and in reply, Chalcioppe declared, "For you to save my sons, Medea, you must find a way for the stranger from Hellas to accomplish all the tasks Father demands of him. And then, swift as the wind, you must help him take the Golden Fleece. For my sons plan to leave Colchis with the Argonauts, and they all must escape before Father forces them to give up light and life!"

"In fact, Argus is here in the palace. He wants you to help the stranger from Hellas perform the tasks Father demands, and he is waiting for my reply. He says the stranger will gladly accept whatever help you can give him, for the stranger knows that, without your help, Thanatos will surely take the wind of life that blows through him. This is what brought me to your room, Medea, but your tears distracted me. Now what message should Argus give the stranger?"

So Chalcioppe spoke, and her words caused Medea's heart to flood with joy. "Chalcioppe, this stranger from Hellas has put the lives of your sons, as well as his own life, in danger. And may my eyes look their last upon light and life if I let anything come before you and your sons! So I will now prepare to go forth to Night-wandering Hecate's temple, and I will take powerful herbs that will act as charms against Father's bulls. Tell

Argus to lead the stranger forth to meet me at the temple, and there I will give him the charms he will need."

So Medea spoke, and her words caused Chalcioppe's heart to flood with joy. Swift as the wind, she left Medea and gave Argus the welcome news.

And so it came to pass that, once again, Medea was alone in her room. And once again, her mind flooded with waves of conflicting thoughts. "What madness! I have vowed to help a stranger whom Father regards as his enemy!" she silently exclaimed.

"Surely it is better to forget my oath and welcome the embrace of Thanatos, or to place myself at the mercy of the deathless gods. I should pray they punish me by making me live the life of a loyal daughter whose heart never floods with joy.

"I wish Artemis—the Archer-Goddess—had killed me with one of her golden arrows before my eyes had seen this godlike stranger, for love only floods the heart with anguish! I can choose to help the stranger from Hellas, or I can choose to die, or I can choose to suffer in silence. But the end will be the same unbearable anguish! For if I do not help him, then he will surely die, and my heart will never know another love. And yet, if I do help him, how can I face Father, for how can I hide my treachery?

"I should save the godlike stranger. And then I should welcome the embrace of Thanatos, for I know which herbs to swallow. But even my death would not wash away my crime. Nor only the Colchians but all who walk the earth would come to hear of it, for poets would sing of the maiden who dishonored her family and her people because of her love for a godlike stranger. And other poets would sing these songs even in times yet to come. No, I must give Thanatos the wind of life that blows through me, but I must do it now—before I do any harm!"

So Medea mused. And with these thoughts it came to pass that she found and opened the box in which she kept all her powerful herbs—those that cured ills as well as those that created them. And with tears flowing freely from her eyes, her sure hand chose those herbs that, swift as the wind, would invite Thanatos to embrace her and cause her to look her last upon light and life. But waves of a conflicting passion now flooded the maiden's heart. "Surely it is dreadful to choose an early death! For my heart floods with longing for life!" she silently exclaimed.

"What would it be like to give up light and life? My heart would never again flood with the joy of embracing someone I love! My ears would never again flood with the sound of a bird's sweet song! And my throat would never again be moistened by sweet water from sparkling streams! My eyes would never again flood with the sight of Grandfather's chariot! And my skin would never again flood with the comforting warmth of his golden rays! My eyes would never again flood with the sight of fields of flowers. And my nose would never again flood with the smell of their sweet fragrance!

"And so how can I face grim Hades' lifeless kingdom and all the shades of the dead who live there? How can I choose death when my heart floods with love of life? No, I cannot give Thanatos the wind of life that blows through me! And so I will keep the sacred oath I made before Chalciope and the deathless gods. I will meet with the stranger from Hellas. I will give him the herbs he needs. Yes, I will save the man I love! And the poets can sing of it!"

So Medea decided. And so it came to pass. For Golden-throned Hera had been looking down from Mount Olympus, watching Medea and listening to the maiden's thoughts, in order to see how her plans for Pelias were progressing. And Medea's plan to invite the embrace of Thanatos had caused the goddess's heart to flood with wrath. "I cannot permit Medea to give up the wind of life that blows through her!" the goddess had silently exclaimed. "For without Medea, my plans to avenge Pelias's insult to my honor cannot succeed. And so I must now flood the maiden's mind and heart with the love of light and life."

So the White-armed Goddess had decided. And so it came to pass that Medea now washed her tears from her cheeks and rubbed a sweet-smelling oil into her skin. Then she artfully arranged her golden hair and put on a lovely robe. She covered her head with a silver veil, and she chose just the herbs that would help the stranger from Hellas.

"The man who covers his body with these drugs will be invincible!" she silently exclaimed. "For one day his strength and skill will prevail against any flames from a blazing fire and any blow from a bronze weapon. He will be more than mortal, for these drugs will prolong his strength, and they will give him the power of renewed youth."

So Medea mused. And with these words, she tucked the powerful herbs into the folds of her waistband and left the palace. Then she drove her chariot to Night-wandering Hecate's temple. It came to pass that she arrived before Jason, and as she performed her tasks, her ears remained alert to every sound that might herald the arrival of the godlike stranger.

Meanwhile, Argus was leading Jason forth to the goddess's temple. However, as soon as they could see the structure in the distance, Argus declared, "Jason, you must now go forth alone to meet the Colchian maiden at the Night-wanderer's temple. Win her heart with honeyed words, and she will surely help you with your tasks."

So Argus advised Jason. And it came to pass that, at last, the sight of the stranger from Hellas flooded Medea's eyes. The maiden now stood silent and still as once again the beauty of his face and form caused her heart to flood with waves of love and longing, for White-armed Hera had made Jason even more godlike in his beauty.

Swift as the wind, Medea's cheeks flushed a fiery red, and her limbs felt too weak to move. Just as oak and pine trees in a mountain forest stand side by side but silent and still when no breeze stirs them, and yet, later, they will rustle constantly when a brisk wind blows upon them, so the maiden from Colchis and the stranger from Hellas now met face to face but stood silent and still. And yet, later, love would unleash a steady stream of words.

Jason saw Medea's confusion and declared, "I come to you alone, lovely maiden, so you need not fear me. You appear to be both gentle and kind. I know the deathless gods have given you the power to save me, and that you have promised to give me the charms I will need if I am to accomplish my tasks. And so I now kneel before you. I clasp your knees. I take your chin in my hand. And as I ask you to keep your word, I invoke both Far-seeing Zeus, who protects suppliants and guests, and Hecate, the Night-wandering Goddess from grim Hades' lifeless kingdom who is honored by this temple.

"Lovely maiden, you hold my life and my death in your hands. If your heart floods with the pleasure of power, you will choose to destroy me by withholding your help. But if your heart floods with the glory of the great deed, then you will choose to save my life by giving me whatever help you can. And your decision will confer life or death on my

companions as well. Help me, lovely maiden! And in gratitude I will praise you to all who walk the earth! Everyone will know your name and your deed. My companions aboard the well-benched Argo will praise you as well, and their mothers and wives, in turn, will praise you, for you will have saved the lives of us all."

So Jason spoke to the Colchian maiden. Meanwhile, once again, Golden-throned Hera had been looking down from Mount Olympus, watching and listening, in order to see how her plans for Jason and Medea were progressing. And now she silently exclaimed, "How clever I was to put honeyed words into Jason's mind and heart, for they will tear Medea's heart away from her loving parents. And now her heart will overflow with waves of love and longing for Jason, for so it must be if I am to use Medea to avenge Pelias's insult to my honor."

So the White-armed Goddess mused. And so it came to pass that the stranger's honeyed words caused Medea's heart to overflow with waves of love and longing for him. The maiden took from her waist-band certain of the herbs that would save the stranger's life, and she handed these drugs to him. For she saw that the stranger from Hellas needed her, and she saw the love that passed from his eyes to hers. And—if he had only asked her—she would have handed him her soul as well.

"Stranger, open the doors of your mind to my words, for, like well-aimed arrows, they will fly forth straight and true," declared Medea. "When Nyx ascends her throne and covers Mother Gaea with her star-filled robe, you must go forth alone. First you must purify yourself by bathing in the lively stream that flows near this temple. And then you must honor the Night-wandering Goddess by pouring her an offering of honey. Only then, may you ask her to help you perform the tasks my father demands of you.

"Then you must return to your companions. But you must take care never to look back, for when the goddess hears your prayers, she will leave grim Hades' lifeless kingdom and come forth to accept your sacrifice. Remember, Stranger, dreadful sounds will flood your ears. And terrifying sights will flood your eyes, but you must not look back.

"Your ears will flood with the sound of fearsome hissing, for deadly serpents writhe in woven coils among the leafy oak twigs that form the goddess's crown. Your ears will flood with the sound of furious barking, for grim Hades' fearsome hounds

always accompany the Night-wanderer when she walks upon Mother Gaea. And your ears will flood with the dreadful cries of the nymphs who live in marsh and stream, for when their eyes flood with the sight of the Night-wanderer, their hearts will flood with terror.

"The goddess's torches will chase Nyx from her throne, for the Night-wanderer's lamps gleam like Shining Helios's gold-yoked chariot. And so your eyes will flood with the sight of fields that, swift as the wind, now shine as brightly as when Shining Helios bathes them in his golden rays. Meanwhile, the goddess's feet will cause even Mother Gaea to quake with fear. And so—beneath your own feet—you will hear and feel her trembling.

"The dreadful sounds that flood your ears and the terrifying sights that flood your eyes will surely cause even your own heroic heart to flood with fear. But you must not look back! If you forget my warning, you will dishonor the goddess. You will ruin your sacrifice. And you will look your last upon light and life. You will not be safe until you have rejoined your companions.

"When Blushing Eos makes the new day light take this herb I now place in your hand, and soak it in water until it becomes soft. Then remove your clothing, and rub the softened herb into the skin of your entire body. Rub it on your shield and on your sword and spear, as well.

"You already possess the necessary courage and skill to perform the tasks that await you, Stranger. But if you do just as I say, then the flames of my father's fire-breathing bulls will not harm you. Nor will the double-pointed spears of the fearsome bronze-clad warriors—those children of Mother Gaea who will spring forth from the furrows where you have sown the terrible dragon's teeth—leave a mark upon you.

"Once you have sown the dragon's teeth, you must stand aside from the Plain of Death-dealing Ares. Rest from your labors in the shade of a great boulder that lies nearby. And in time it will come to pass that the field will shine with the gleaming, plumed helmets of the earthborn ones.

"Then you must surprise these warriors by suddenly tossing that great boulder among them. For just as starving dogs will tear into one another in order to grab hold of a piece of meat—fighting until they have given up light and life—so the fearsome

bronze-clad warriors will now fight to their death in order to possess the boulder you have thrown among them. And now, swift as the wind, you must go forth to kill the earthborn ones while they are fighting each other! And if you do just as I say, Stranger, then you will win the wondrous Golden Fleece.

"Once the fleece is yours, I will lead you to it and enable you to take it, for despite your victory, Stranger, my father will never give it to you. And without my help, you will never be able to take it from him, for a great deathless dragon lies coiled around the tree from which the fleece hangs. It is a child of Mother Gaea, and so it is more than mortal. Its watchful eyes never close in sweet sleep. And its skin defies the strongest and sharpest of weapons. No mortal possesses the skill to defeat it. But I will subdue it for you.

"And then, Stranger, you must take the wondrous fleece. And, swift as the wind, you must flee, for your victory will cause my father's heart to flood with fury. He commands tribes of Colchians beyond number. Before Blushing Eos makes the new day light, his warriors will have made fiery torches of the trees that clothe our wooded hillsides. And they will carry their flaming weapons forth to your well-benched ship, for surely my father will have commanded them to destroy both your ship and all who have come here with you. Stranger, no one can defeat my father in battle! And he will not rest until you and all your companions have become food for birds and dogs!"

So Medea advised Jason. Her heart now flooded with grief as her mind flooded with the thought of his leaving her, and so tears flowed freely from her eyes as she declared, "Once you have returned safely to Hellas, Stranger, do not forget me! For I will not forget you! But if you forget me, then, swift as the wind, Rumor will fly across the sea to Colchis with the news. And you will find that I am your unexpected guest in Iolcus. Then I will remind you of how I helped you perform all the tasks my father demanded of you, and how I helped you capture the wondrous Golden Fleece."

So Medea spoke, and her tearful words caused Jason's heart to flood with love for the weeping maiden. And he replied, "Your heart floods with waves of fear and sorrow without cause, lovely maiden. And so your words are as empty as a lone cloud when Shining Helios bathes Mother Gaea in his golden rays. For if I live to return safely to Hellas, day and night, for as long as I live, I will remember you!"

So Jason spoke. And it came to pass that, as Medea stared into Jason's eyes, her own eyes shone with love for the godlike stranger. And as she continued to look at him, her eyes grew brighter and brighter until they sent forth fiery golden rays, rays as blindingly bright as the gold-yoked chariot her grandfather, Shining Helios, drives across the heavens each day. Beset by Medea's gaze, Jason saw nothing but that blindingly bright light. And then he saw nothing at all. His knees gave way, and his body collapsed gently upon Mother Gaea. And there he lay in a deep sleep.

Medea recited an incantation over the sleeping stranger that put him into an even deeper sleep—a deathlike state from which only she could awaken him. Then she brought forth a pile of firewood, a tripod, and a large bronze cauldron from Night-wandering Hecate's temple. These she arranged one upon the other. Last, she brought forth a sharp, wood-chopping blade. And this she put to one side.

Medea filled the great pot with water from the stream that flowed nearby. And she ignited the wood beneath the tripod. Next she removed handfuls of herbs that she had stored in the waistband of her robe, and she sprinkled these drugs into the water. Then she picked up a large, dead olive branch, and she began to stir the brew in the cauldron carefully and well.

At first it came to pass that, as the broth in the cauldron became hotter, the bare olive branch began to grow strong and green. Then, as the broth became even hotter, the branch sprouted a host of green leaves. And at last, as the broth began to boil vigorously, a wealth of firm, ripe olives grew upon the branch. Meanwhile, wherever the pot boiled over and the broth splattered upon the earth, Mother Gaea sent forth fresh green grass and fragrant flowers.

Medea now stopped stirring and returned to the stranger, who still lay silent and sleeping as if he were dead. She picked up her wood-chopping blade and chopped the stranger's body into pieces and dropped them into her boiling brew. "Stranger, for this one day, my herbs will give you the power of a god!" she exclaimed. "My broth will fill you with such strength, you will feel as if divine ichor, and not the blood of a mortal, flows within you. When you awaken, you will have the strength to yoke Father's great bulls, and you will be able to plow Death-dealing Ares' fearsome field."

So Medea spoke. And indeed, it came to pass that, swift as the wind, just as Medea's brew had restored the olive branch to life and youth, so the stranger's body now became restored and renewed as it cooked in the boiling broth. And so the maiden now lifted him from the broth and laid him, once again, upon Mother Gaea.

Then Medea returned to the cauldron. Now she added herbs that would render the broth powerless, and she put out the fire. She emptied the cauldron. She returned the great pot and its tripod to Night-wandering Hecate's temple, and she swept away the ashes. Last of all, she recited a second incantation over the sleeping stranger, and so Jason awoke from his deathlike sleep. And it came to pass that he remembered only the love he had seen shining forth from the maiden's eyes.

"Come with me to Hellas, lovely maiden," he declared. "And there the Hellenes will treat you with the honor and respect they give one of the deathless gods, for you will have saved the lives of their sons, their wedded lords, and their kinsmen. Come with me to Hellas, lovely maiden. For there I will make you my wedded lady. There I will keep you safely at my hearth. And there—for as long as the wind of life blows through me—I will let nothing destroy our love!

"For I will love you, Medea, as long as Shining Helios drives his gold-yoked chariot across the heavens and into the waves of the western sea. But if Shining Helios should tire of his journey—if instead, he closes his eyes in sweet sleep when Blushing Eos beckons him with her light—then still I will love you.

"And I will love you, Medea, as long as Nyx ascends her throne and covers Mother Gaea with her star-filled robe. But if the goddess should tire of her robe—if instead, she wraps herself in a robe of blushing red or leafy green or even a robe of gleaming silver or shining gold—then still I will love you.

"And I will love you, Medea, as long as Lord Poseidon causes the salt sea to send forth its waves upon Mother Gaea's shores. But if the heart of the Earth-shaker should flood with anger—if instead, he causes the sea to disappear like a drop of water beneath Shining Helios's golden rays—then still I will love you.

"And I will love you, Medea, as long as Mother Gaea sends forth grains and fruits from the earth on which we mortals walk. But if the heart of Mother Gaea should flood

with anger—if instead, she causes the earth to become as dead as grim Hades' lifeless kingdom—then still I will love you.

"So come with me to Hellas, lovely maiden. And there our days will follow, one after the other, like blossoms of shining gold upon a golden chain."

So Jason spoke. And his loving words flooded the maiden's heart with joy and her soul with longing. Medea now stood before the stranger, silent and still. She flooded her eyes with the godlike beauty of his face and form. And it came to pass that her soul flew into the stranger's keeping.

At last, Jason spoke again. "Lovely maiden, swift as the wind, we must now part. For we have tarried here too long already. Someone might pass by this sacred place. And we must not be seen here together.

"But first, open the doors of your mind to my words. For, like well-aimed arrows, they will fly forth straight and true. If it comes to pass that, with your help, I accomplish the tasks your father demands of me. And if, with your help, I claim the wondrous Golden Fleece, then your life will be in danger, and you will have to flee with me. Remember! You must take your little brother with you!"

"Surely the loss of my brother—my father's only son—will be more than Father can bear, Stranger!" exclaimed Medea. "And it floods my heart with terror to think of how he will respond to it!"

"Lovely maiden, if your little brother remains behind with your father, in time, he will have to avenge our theft of the wondrous fleece. But if we manage to escape with him, he will grow up with our love. Then he may choose to remain loyal to us. So do not let your heart rule your mind in this matter. Do just as I say, and we will fare well."

So Jason spoke. And with these words, he returned to his companions, and his heart flooded with joy. "Medea will help me! And so I will perform all the tasks Aetes demands, and I will capture the wondrous Golden Fleece!"

So Jason mused. Meanwhile, his words about Apsyrcus flooded Medea's mind. "The godlike stranger's promise of lasting love floods my heart with love for him! But when my mind floods with thoughts of the deeds I have promised to perform, then my heart floods with horror! For by choosing to help the stranger from Hellas, I am forsaking

my parents, my home, and my homeland. And so from this time forth, whatever this stranger wants, I will have to give him."

So Medea mused, and so it had to be, for so White-armed Hera had contrived. And with these words, the maiden returned to her father's palace.

Meanwhile, once again, Golden-throned Hera had been looking down from Mount Olympus, watching and listening, in order to see how her plans for Jason and Medea were progressing. And now she silently exclaimed, "My heart floods with joy! For with Medea's help, Jason will capture the Golden Fleece. He will return safely to Iolcus. And he will bring more than the wondrous fleece. He will bring Medea! And through Medea I will avenge Pelias's insult to my honor, for his fate must remind all who walk the earth that I will not tolerate anyone who dishonors me!"

Chapter 5

Because of Medea's help, Jason performs his tasks.

In time, Shining Helios drove his gold-yoked chariot into the western waves of Oceanus. Nyx ascended her throne, and she covered Mother Gaea with her star-filled robe. And so it came to pass that Jason set forth to perform the tasks Medea had given him. He felt that her love had renewed his youth, so he carefully performed the offering to Night-wandering Hecate. And then he returned to his companions. He did not look behind him. But all the sounds the maiden had told him he would hear now flooded his ears. And all the sights she had told him he could safely see now flooded his eyes.

And it came to pass that, when Blushing Eos with her sparkling eyes made the new day light, Jason applied the special herb Medea had given him. And as soon as he rubbed it into his skin, he felt like one of the deathless gods. Just as a war horse that longs for battle first raises its head and its ears and neighs—and then it prances about and paws at Mother Gaea with its hooves—so Jason now flexed his limbs and longed for his tasks to begin. And just as lightning flashes forth from summer storm clouds, so Jason leapt into the air with his ash spear in one hand and his bronze shield in the other.

Jason now went forth to the Plain of Ares the Death-dealer, for he was ready to perform all the tasks King Aetes was demanding of him. When he reached the field, his

eyes flooded with the sight of all the Argonauts as well as with the sight of King Aeetes, his warriors, Medea and the other members of the royal family, and a great crowd of Colchians who had already gathered nearby.

King Aeetes was surely the strongest of all who walk the earth, but on this day, Jason surpassed him, for now Jason was truly godlike! Surely Death-dealing Ares had entered his mortal body, and Far-shooting Apollo had entered his spirit. And all whose eyes flooded with the sight of the stranger from Hellas knew that the fearsome king of Colchis had met his equal.

So it came to pass that King Aeetes dropped the terrible dragon's teeth into Jason's bronze helmet. And the stranger from Hellas set forth to yoke the king's fire-breaching bulls. Just as a blacksmith places his bellows into his furnace and works it in order to raise a great fire, resting only after he has created a fiercely roaring flame, so Aeetes' bulls now thundered with rage and sent furious flames soaring forth from their mouths. Like blasts of storm-winds, their fiery breath lashed Jason's face and body as he labored to place the bronze yoke on their backs. And like bolts of lightning, their bronze hooves kicked him.

However, Medea's wisdom and skill came to Jason's aid, for her drug gave him the protection he needed in order to succeed with this task. And so, in time, it came to pass that Jason yoked Aeetes' fire-breaching bulls. Meanwhile Aeetes stood by and watched, and his heart flooded with waves of anguish and anger as he marveled at his adversary's might.

Then Jason drove Aeetes' fearsome bulls and his great, deep-cutting plow of unbreakable stone onto the Plain of Ares the Death-dealer. And there he began his next two tasks. First he plowed the field, forming deep furrows on Mother Gaea's surface. Meanwhile, Aeetes still stood by and watched, and once again his heart flooded with waves of anguish and anger as he marveled at his adversary's might.

Next Jason walked beside the furrows, and he tossed the terrible dragon's teeth into the beds that were far from him, for his heart would often flood with terror as he sowed these strange seeds. And then he would turn his head—now this way, and now that way—in order to be certain he was not in danger, for he feared the bronze-clad,

earthborn ones would spring forth from their mother before he was prepared to fight them.

In this way, in time, it came to pass that Jason finished sowing the Plain of Death-dealing Ares. Shining Helios had now driven his gold-yoked chariot two-thirds of the way across the heavens, and Jason now left the field. He rested from his labors in the shade of the great boulder that lay nearby. And as Jason rested, he watched as—here and there, before his eyes—the earth he had so recently plowed suddenly began to move. First, spear-points on wooden shafts began to push up through the soil. Then gleaming helmets with waving plumes began to burst forth from the furrows where he had sown the dragon's teeth.

As Jason continued to watch, faces began to appear beneath the plumed helmets, followed by bronze-clad shoulders and chests and pairs of arms with hands that held oxhide shields as well as double-pointed spears. And at last pairs of bronze-clad legs with shod feet emerged from Mother Gaea.

Just as Shining Helios's golden rays warm the snow-fields winter storms have left high on a mountain-side, causing the snow to flee and sending cascades of water down into the valley below—and the stream that is lazily making its way through that valley suddenly begins to swell, and its waters increase until it becomes a roaring flood-tide with a treacherous current—so a host of fearsome, bronze-clad warriors now began to flood the furrows where Jason had so recently sown the terrible dragon's teeth.

Meanwhile, as Jason watched the growing army of earthborn warriors, Medea's advice flooded his mind. And so he relaxed by the side of the field until the gleaming helmets and shining armor of the bronze-clad ones covered the Plain of Death-dealing Ares, setting the field ablaze with golden rays that were as bright as those cast by Gold-helmeted Helios and his gold-yoked chariot. Then it came to pass that Medea's voice suddenly flooded his ears, rousing him from his rest. "Stranger!" urged the voice. "Lift the rock that now comforts you, and, swift as the wind, throw it among the warriors!"

And with these words, Jason noticed the immense size of this rock. All hope now fled from his heart. And just as a heavy spring rain flows freely from the roof of a house, so Jason's feeling of renewed youth now poured forth from his body. His heart now flooded with despair. His arms now hung weakly at his sides, and his feet now remained

rooted to the earth as if they were planted in Mother Gaea. "Stranger!" urged Medea's voice, once again. "Do not let the size of the rock weaken your will! Four of the strongest youths, working together, could not lift it off Mother Gaea. But you will be able to do it!"

So Medea's voice resounded in Jason's ears. And in response Jason slowly rose to his feet and put his arms around the great rock. And it came to pass that his heart flooded with surprise. For he found that, despite the rock's immense size, he could move it. Swift as the wind, his heart flooded with joy. He lifted the rock off Mother Gaea, and he tossed it among the bronze-clad warriors. And then, swift as the wind, he crouched behind his shield, for he did not want any of the earthborn warriors to see who had thrown the rock into their midst. And there—behind his shield—his heart flooded with courage. Meanwhile, once again, Aeetes stood by and marveled at his adversary's might.

And what Medea had described to Jason indeed came to pass. Just as a pack of hungry wolves will break into a sheepfold—tearing into the frightened flock of sheep and fighting fiercely over the carcass of a lamb they have killed—so the fearsome earthborn ones now leapt upon the great boulder and fought to their death in order to possess it. And just as storm winds batter great oak trees—and cause them to fall lifelessly upon Mother Gaea—so the fearsome warriors now began to destroy each other.

Then it came to pass that, just as a fiery star shoots through the star-filled robe of Nyx and leaves a trail of bright light, so, swift as the wind, Jason now went forth to battle, unleashing his shining sword and leaving a trail of blood. And just as stalks of grain fall to the earth beneath a farmer's newly-sharpened sickle, so beneath Jason's sharp blade, the bronze-clad bodies now fell lifelessly upon Gaea, their mother.

By the time Shining Helios had driven his gold-yoked chariot across the heavens and into the western waves of Oceanus, the furrows Jason had plowed ran red with a flood of blood, and every earth-born warrior lay dead upon the field, having given up both light and life to the point of a sword—and to the grasping hands of Thanatos. Bloody corpses now littered the Plain of Death-dealing Ares like beached sea-monsters on the shore of the salt sea. Some lay with just their heads protruding from the earth.

Others lay with their chests and arms exposed, but their legs still buried in Gaea, their mother. While still others lay stretched out upon the earth, fully formed, but sliced apart. Nyx ascended her throne, and she covered Mother Gaea with her star-filled robe. And then it came to pass that King Aeetes and his family silently returned to their palace. The king's mind flooded with thoughts about the events on the Plain of Ares that had flooded his eyes. And so it came to pass that his heart now flooded first with despair, then with grief, and at last with rage.

"Jason has successfully completed all the tasks I demanded of him, and so the wondrous Golden Fleece should be his. But he could never have performed these tasks without the aid of powerful magic! Who dared to help him? A traitor must live in my own house! Now the sons of Phrixus, though I have doubted their loyalty, lack all knowledge of drugs and charms. And my daughter Chalcioppe, too, lacks such knowledge.

"And so only Medea could have committed this traitorous deed. My own daughter! Why did she choose to dishonor her father, her family, and her homeland? It is beyond belief! And yet my mind knows Jason has not honored the terms of our agreement, and my heart knows Medea is the traitor, for only Medea's drugs and charms could enable Jason to perform all the tasks I demanded of him. And so he has no right to the wondrous Golden Fleece!

"These thoughts flood my heart with rage! I will treat Medea and my grandsons—as well these strangers from Hellas who have corrupted them—as they deserve! I have already decreed death for every Argonaut, and for the sons of Phrixus, as well. Now I must also decree death for Medea, for one and all, they must now give up light and life. And I will leave their lifeless flesh as food for birds and dogs.

"My warriors must now rid Colchis of these enemies. They must go forth to the forests that clothe our wooded hillsides. And there they must fell the trees and make fiery torches of them. Then they must find where these strangers have hidden their well-benched ship. And they must destroy her and all who would escape on her. For just as bees will always return to their hive, so Jason and the Argonauts—with the sons of Phrixus, among them—will surely return to the Argo. And now Medea will surely flee there, as well. So my warriors must keep close watch, for no one must escape their torches. Thanatos must embrace them all!"

So King Aeetes mused. And with these thoughts, he went forth to speak with those who led the warriors of Colchis.

Chapter 6

With Medea's help, Jason captures the Golden Fleece. Then the Argonauts escape from Colchis with Medea, Apsyrtus, and the sons of Phrixus.

Meanwhile, Medea returned to her room in the royal palace. "Father surely knows what I have done!" the maiden silently exclaimed. "And how could I have done it? Was my heart so flooded with passion for the stranger from Hellas that my judgment abandoned me? Whatever the answer, it is too late for such thoughts. The question is what to do now?"

And just as a frolicsome fawn freezes with terror—as, deep within the woods, it suddenly hears the cries of deer-hounds—so Medea's heart now flooded with dread as she became certain that news of her treachery would spread like a forest fire throughout her father's kingdom. "Swift as the wind, the ears of one and all will flood with the news of what I have done!" she silently exclaimed. "First everyone in the palace will hear of it. Then everyone in Aea will hear of it. And then everyone in Colchis will hear of it.

"And so what should I do now? My room is spinning before my eyes! I cannot breathe! What is left for me but to swallow poisonous herbs and put an end to my agony? And yet I cannot face grim Hades' lifeless kingdom and all the shades of the dead who live there. I cannot choose death when my heart floods with love of life. No, I cannot give Thanatos the wind of life that blows through me! And so I must now flee from my father's palace, from Aea, and from Colchis. My heart may flood with passion, or it may flood with shame, but I must now forsake my parents, my home, and my homeland. And I must cast my lot with the stranger from Hellas!"

So Medea decided. And so it came to pass. For once again, Golden-throned Hera had been looking down from Mount Olympus, watching Medea and listening to the maiden's thoughts, in order to see how her plans for Pelias were progressing. And Medea's desire to invite the embrace of Thanatos had caused the goddess's heart, once again, to flood with wrath. "I cannot permit Medea to give up the wind of life that blows through her!" Hera had silently exclaimed. "For without Medea, my plans to avenge

Pelias's insult to my honor cannot succeed. And so I must now, once again, flood the maiden's mind and heart with the love of light and life."

So the White-armed Goddess had decided. And so it came to pass that Medea now emptied her container of powerful drugs, and she stored them within the folds of her waistband. Meanwhile, tears flowed freely from her eyes. "How my heart floods with grief to leave everyone I love!" the maiden silently exclaimed. "For I must now go forth with a stranger to a strange land. And stranger, how I wish the salt sea had swallowed you before you ever reached Colchis!"

So Medea mused. And with these words, the maiden stole into her little brother's room and gathered his sleeping form into her arms. And just as a female captive is forced to leave her wealthy home—and she must now depend on the warrior who has claimed her and his wedded lady's harsh hands—so Medea now left her home and her city and went forth to find Jason and the well-benched Argo. And as she fled from the royal palace and the towers of Aea, she hid her brother beneath her robe.

Upon reaching the Phasis River, the maiden spied her nephews as they celebrated Jason's victory with him on the opposite shore, and so she called to the sons of Phrixus. And led by Jason, they rowed forth to meet her. As soon as Jason stood before her, Medea knelt at his feet. She clasped his knees. And she reached up to take his chin in her hand, for her heart flooded with anguish.

"Jason, see how, as a suppliant, I now clasp your knees and take your chin in my hand. For you must save me from my father! And you must save yourself, my brothers, and all your companions, for Father is aware of our treachery! And we must escape before Blushing Eos makes the new day light! Now, swift as the wind, I will lead you to the Golden Fleece, and there I will put the great deathless dragon that guards it to sleep. You must take your own prize, for Father will never give you the wondrous fleece!

"In return, I ask but this of you, Jason. Before the deathless gods and all your companions, promise me that you will remember that I helped you perform all the tasks my father demanded of you. Promise me that you will remember that I helped you capture the Golden Fleece. For far from home, I will be a stranger in a strange land. I will have no family to protect and defend me. And so Jason, you alone will stand between me and all who will look upon me with contempt.

"And so Jason, promise me that, once we have reached Hellas, your mind will not flood with the thought that I am a traitor to my family and my homeland. Promise me that your heart will not flood with contempt for me and that you will not abandon me. Promise me that you will uphold my honor and that you will protect me from any danger."

So Medea spoke to Jason. And these words caused tears to flow freely from her eyes.

And it came to pass that Medea's words caused Jason's heart to flood with waves of gratitude and love. He raised the maiden to her feet and embraced her. "Medea, I give you my sacred promise—with Far-seeing Zeus, Lord of Escape and Protector of Strangers, and with White-armed Hera, Protector of the Wedding-bond, as my witnesses—that once we have reached my home in Hellas, I will make you my wedded lady. There I will keep you safely at my hearth. And there I will love you until Thanatos embraces me!"

So Jason gave Medea his sacred word. And his promise reassured Medea. And it came to pass that Jason now declared, "I hope that your little brother now lies hidden beneath your cloak, for we must keep watch over him."

"He sleeps cradled in my arm, Jason," replied Medea. "But what thoughts now flood your mind? For surely you are hiding something behind your words!"

"Lovely maiden, your brother's heart now floods with love for you. But I assure you it will not always be so. He is a great threat to us. He may remain at home, or he may go forth with us. But he is a threat to us, for—as I know all too well—a son must always avenge any wrongs against his father. Your brother is the prince of Colchis. And so the time will surely come when he must avenge the loss of the wondrous Golden Fleece. So we may be safe now, but we will only be truly safe once Thanatos has embraced him, for your brother must give up light and life!"

So Jason spoke. And in reply, Medea exclaimed, "Do my ears deceive me, Jason? Can it be that you want to kill my little brother? Is it not enough for you, Jason, that I helped you perform all the tasks my father demanded of you? And that I am about to help you capture the wondrous Golden Fleece? By helping you I have forsaken my family, my home, and my homeland! Do not ask more of me than this, Jason! To

everyone in Colchis, I am a traitor. But I have acted so as to save lives. I have not destroyed them! Thanatos can wait until my brother is an old man, or until he becomes a valiant warrior. Surely we do not have to invite that dreadful god's embrace!"

So Medea spoke. And to her words, Jason replied, "Then we will speak no more of this. For now is the time for other deeds. And words, too, are a threat to us now. Swift as the wind, we must capture the Golden Fleece and leave Colchis. Gleaming Selene's silvery beams can guide our way. Indeed, they must! For too soon, Blushing Eos will make the new day light. And then Aeetes will pursue us. So lead us toward the wondrous prize, lovely maiden!"

So Jason spoke. And so it came to pass that Medea directed the well-benched Argo toward the sacred grove of Ares the Death-dealer. Nyx still covered Mother Gaea with her star-filled robe. But in time a golden glow became visible in the distance, and the hearts of the Argonauts flooded with joy, for the wondrous Golden Fleece hung from the leafy branches of the great oak tree like a cloud that blushes beneath the sparkling eyes of Blushing Eos. And now it was only a shore distance away.

The Argonauts rowed their well-benched ship into a small cove, and there they anchored her. Then they remained aboard while Medea and Jason went ashore to capture the fleece from the great deathless dragon that guarded it.

The sleepless serpent soon spied Medea and her companion. And it hissed at them with such fury that, throughout the royal city of Aea and the surrounding countryside, the hearts of newborn infants flooded with fright, causing their mothers to awaken in sudden terror at the sound of their screams and to rush to shelter them protectively in their arms. And just as countless swirling wreaths of smoke rise from the fire that smolders beside a sleeping shepherd—climbing one after the other to form a tall column—so the dragon's countless, scale-covered coils now slithered behind its menacing head, causing Mother Gaea to tremble as they scraped her.

Jason now stood silent and still, for the sight of the great deathless dragon flooded his eyes. And so, swift as the wind, his heart now flooded with terror. "Why this serpent is longer and broader than the well-benched Argo!" he silently exclaimed. "And the white foam that drips from its jaws will surely kill me! I dare not go any closer, for the fiery fumes that flood the air will choke me long before the serpent's tongue stings me!"

But for Medea I would give up my quest for this fleece. Swift as the wind, I would return to the Argo and sail back to Hellas!"

So Jason mused. And while his heart overflowed with fear, Medea's heart flooded with confidence. For the sight of the fearsome serpent flooded her eyes, as well. But Medea did not stand silent and still. Instead, swift as the wind, she sweetly began to sing a chant. In part of it, she asked Night-wandering Hecate to help her capture the wondrous fleece.

And so it came to pass that the great deathless dragon found itself fighting off an overpowering need to sleep. Under Medea's gaze, it relaxed its wreathed coils, but it raised its menacing head, for it expected to capture Medea and Jason between its fiery and venomous jaws. But Medea's heart remained flooded with confidence. She continued her chant. And while she sang, she cut a sprig of juniper. Then she dipped it into one of her drugs, and she shook the sprig over the serpent's eyes.

And it came to pass that, swift as the wind, the deathless dragon now fell into a deep sleep. Then Medea began to rub the juniper charm into its head. And as she rubbed, she told Jason how to remove the Golden Fleece from the great oak tree on which it hung.

And so it came to pass that Jason removed the wondrous fleece from the leafy branches of the great oak tree. And his heart flooded with joy as he gathered the heavy fleece in his arms. "What a prize I have won!" he silently exclaimed. "To gain this wondrous fleece, Pelias sent forth the greatest heroes of Hellas aboard the well-benched Argo. And Aeetes—surely the greatest of kings—had a great deathless dragon protect it. But now the Golden Fleece is mine!"

This thought caused Jason's mind and heart to overflow with pride. Remembering how Heracles liked to wear the hide of the Nemean lion across his shoulders as a trophy, Jason now placed the hide of the Golden Ram across his own shoulders. And he wore the Golden Fleece like a great cloak. And with Medea at his side, he now set forth for the well-benched Argo. Silver-horned Selene's silver-yoked chariot still sent forth silvery beams to guide them. And the shining fleece cast its own glow upon the path before them. And so he walked with bright eyes and a happy smile.

But now and again fearful thoughts would flood Jason's mind and cause his heart to flood with dismay. "A great prize like this brings with it the burden of great risk!" he silently exclaimed. "Now if one of Aeetes' warriors tries to take the wondrous fleece from me, swift as the wind, he will surely give up light and life! But what if one of the deathless gods appears and commands me to give up the fleece? What then?"

So Jason mused. And with these thoughts, he would gather the fleece between his arms and clutch it tightly to his chest, lest anyone should try to take it from him. So it came to pass that—now with his heart flooded with pride, and now with his heart flooded with fear—Jason made his way back to the well-benched Argo. He and Medea arrived just as Blushing Eos with her sparkling eyes was making the new day light. And swift as the wind, the Argonauts gathered around Jason. But they stood silent and still, for the sight of the wondrous Golden Fleece flooded their eyes.

"Friends, we may now return to our homes in Hellas," Jason announced. "For with Medea's help, I have performed all the tasks King Aeetes demanded of me. And with her help, I have captured the Golden Fleece. But we are taking more than Aeetes' wondrous fleece, for he has even greater treasures! His daughter—this beautiful and wise maiden—has agreed to return to Iolcus with me. There, I will make her my wedded lady. And Medea's little brother and the sons of Phrixus have also joined us.

"And so, my friends, you must now help me save Medea from her father and his warriors. But for Medea, Aeetes already would have stretched forth his hands against us. And already he would have pushed us into the grasping hands of Thanatos! And so, one and all, we must thank the great Colchian gods of earth and sky—Mother Gaea and Gold-helmeted Helios—for they welcomed us here. And they helped us with our quest! Aeetes discovered Medea's plans too late!

"But while we remain here, Aeetes' heart is overflowing with rage over the loss of his treasures. And as surely as Shining Helios follows Blushing Eos at the start of each new day, he will now gather his warriors and pursue us. Before the Argo enters the great salt sea, he will try to reclaim all that we have taken from him. And if he succeeds, he will surely kill the strangers from Hellas who captured them. So we must leave at once! For every delay brings Aeetes and his warriors closer. Swift as the wind, half of you must now take your places at the benches and begin to work the oars. The rest of

you must now put on your armor, gather your shields and your weapons, and prepare for battle.

"And as we prepare to fight Aeetes and his warriors, we must flood our hearts with courage, we must flood our hands with strength and skill, and we must flood our minds with one thought: How we meet the Colchians in battle will determine whether we win—for ourselves, for our families, and for all of Hellas—the lasting fame of victory or the lasting shame of defeat."

So Jason spoke to his companions. And so, swift as the wind, the Argonauts left Colchis. Medea, little Apsyrtus, and the four sons of Phrixus were safely aboard the Argo. And together, they all set forth for Hellas .