



# *The Quest of Medusa's Head*

## *Part I: The Wooden Chest*

James Baldwin

Greek

---

*Intermediate*

*6 min read*

There was a king of Argos who had but one child, and that child was a girl. If he had had a son, he would have trained him up to be a brave man and great king; but he did not know what to do with this fair-haired daughter. When he saw her growing up to be tall and slender and wise, he wondered if, after all, he would have to die some time and leave his lands and his gold and his kingdom to her. So he sent to Delphi and asked the Pythia about it. The Pythia told him that he would not only have to die some time, but that the son of his daughter would cause his death.

This frightened the king very much, and he tried to think of some plan by which he could keep the Pythia's words from coming true. At last he made up his mind that he would build a prison for his daughter and keep her in it all her life. So he called his workmen and had them dig a deep round hole in the ground, and in this hole they built a house of brass which had but one room and no door at all, but only a small window at the top. When it was finished, the king put the maiden, whose name was Danaë, into it; and with her he put her nurse and her toys and her pretty dresses and everything that he thought she would need to make her happy.

“Now we shall see that the Pythia does not always tell the truth,” he said.

So Danaë was kept shut up in the prison of brass. She had no one to talk to but her old nurse; and she never saw the land or the sea, but only the blue sky above the open window and now and then a white cloud sailing across. Day after day she sat under the window and wondered why her father kept her in that lonely place, and whether he would ever come and take her out. I do not know how many years passed by, but Danaë grew fairer every day, and by and by she was no longer a child, but a tall and beautiful woman; and Jupiter amid the clouds looked down and saw her and loved her.

One day it seemed to her that the sky opened and a shower of gold fell through the window into the room; and when the blinding shower had ceased, a noble young man stood smiling before her. She did not know-nor do I-that it was mighty Jupiter who had thus come down in the rain; but she thought that he was a brave prince who had come from over the sea to take her out of her prison-house.

After that he came often, but always as a tall and handsome youth; and by and by they were married, with only the nurse at the wedding feast, and Danaë was so happy that she was no longer lonesome even when he was away. But one day when he climbed out through the narrow window there was a great flash of light, and she never saw him again.

Not long afterwards a babe was born to Danaë, a smiling boy whom she named Perseus. For four years she and the nurse kept him hidden, and not even the women who brought their food to the window knew about him. But one day the king chanced to be passing by and heard the child's prattle. When he learned the truth, he was very much alarmed, for he thought that now, in spite of all that he had done, the words of the Pythia might come true.

The only sure way to save himself would be to put the child to death before he was old enough to do any harm. But when he had taken the little Perseus and his mother out of the prison and had seen how helpless the child was, he could not bear the thought of having him killed outright. For the king, although a great coward, was really a kind-hearted man and did not like to see anything suffer pain. Yet something must be done.

So he bade his servants make a wooden chest that was roomy and watertight and strong; and when it was done, he put Danaë and the child into it and had it taken far out to sea and left there to be tossed about by the

waves. He thought that in this way he would rid himself of both daughter and grandson without seeing them die; for surely the chest would sink after a while, or else the winds would cause it to drift to some strange shore so far away that they could never come back to Argos again.

All day and all night and then another day, fair Danaë and her child drifted over the sea. The waves rippled and played before and around the floating chest, the west wind whistled cheerily, and the sea birds circled in the air above; and the child was not afraid, but dipped his hands in the curling waves and laughed at the merry breeze and shouted back at the screaming birds.

But on the second night all was changed. A storm arose, the sky was black, the billows were mountain high, the winds roared fearfully; yet through it all the child slept soundly in his mother's arms. And Danaë sang over him this song:

“Sleep, sleep, dear child, and take your rest  
Upon your troubled mother's breast;  
For you can lie without one fear  
Of dreadful danger lurking near.

Wrapped in soft robes and warmly sleeping,  
You do not hear your mother weeping;  
You do not see the mad waves leaping,  
Nor heed the winds their vigils keeping.

The stars are hid, the night is drear,  
The waves beat high, the storm is here;  
But you can sleep, my darling child,  
And know naught of the uproar wild.”

At last the morning of the third day came, and the chest was tossed upon the sandy shore of a strange island where there were green fields and, beyond them, a little town. A man who happened to be walking near the shore saw it and dragged it far up on the beach. Then he looked inside, and there he saw the beautiful lady and the little boy. He helped them out and led them just as they were to his own house, where he cared for them

very kindly. And when Danaë had told him her story, he bade her feel no more fear; for they might have a home with him as long as they should choose to stay, and he would be a true friend to them both.

Read more fairy tales on [Fairytalez.com](http://Fairytalez.com)