

# A PETRIFYING QUEST

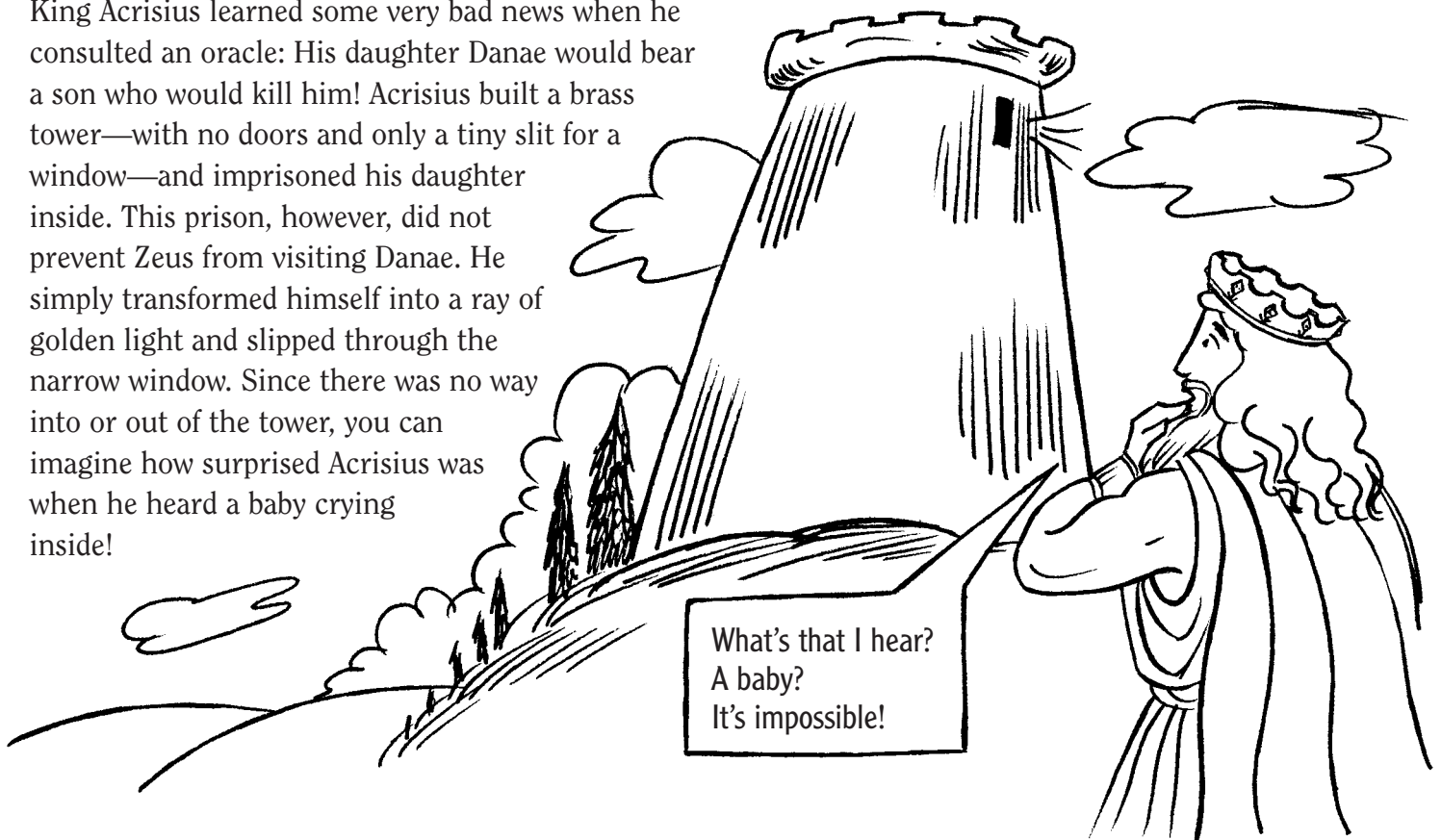
## The Story of Perseus and Medusa



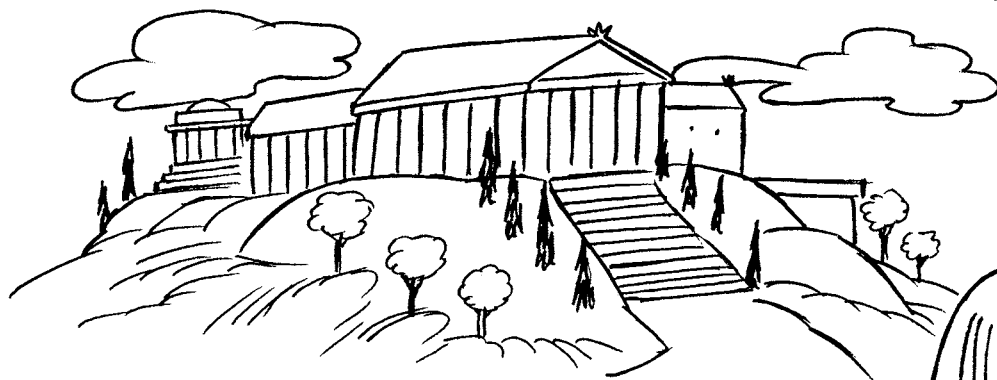
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King Acrisius learned some very bad news when he consulted an oracle: His daughter Danae would bear a son who would kill him! Acrisius built a brass tower—with no doors and only a tiny slit for a window—and imprisoned his daughter inside. This prison, however, did not prevent Zeus from visiting Danae. He simply transformed himself into a ray of golden light and slipped through the narrow window. Since there was no way into or out of the tower, you can imagine how surprised Acrisius was when he heard a baby crying inside!



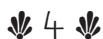
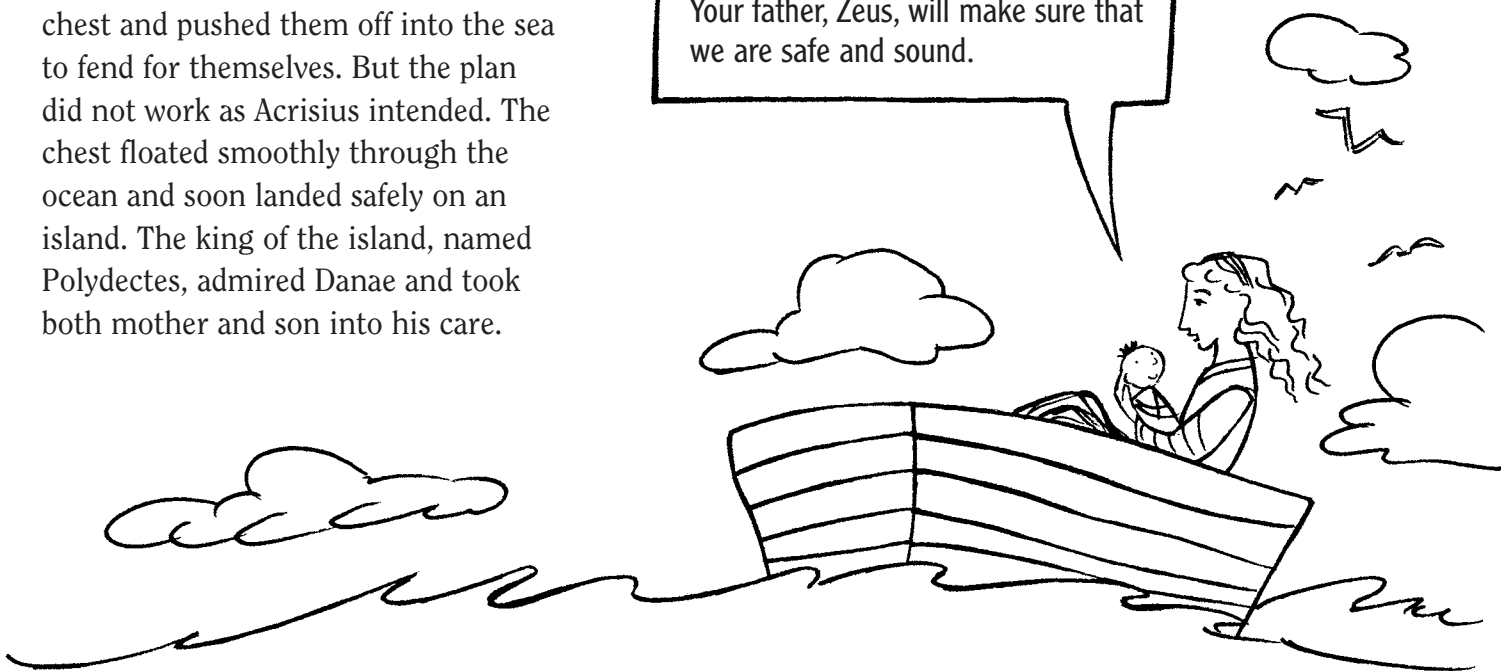
In ancient times, kings were always worrying about the future. Would they fall from power? And if so, who would replace them? To find out the answers to their questions, the kings consulted oracles. If they learned bad news, they foolishly thought maybe—just maybe—they could try to change their fates. But fate is fate, and even the most powerful kings could not change it.



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Suspecting that the gods might be involved, Acrisius did not dare to harm the infant. Instead, he placed both Danae and her baby in a large wooden chest and pushed them off into the sea to fend for themselves. But the plan did not work as Acrisius intended. The chest floated smoothly through the ocean and soon landed safely on an island. The king of the island, named Polydectes, admired Danae and took both mother and son into his care.

There, there, baby Perseus, don't cry. Your father, Zeus, will make sure that we are safe and sound.



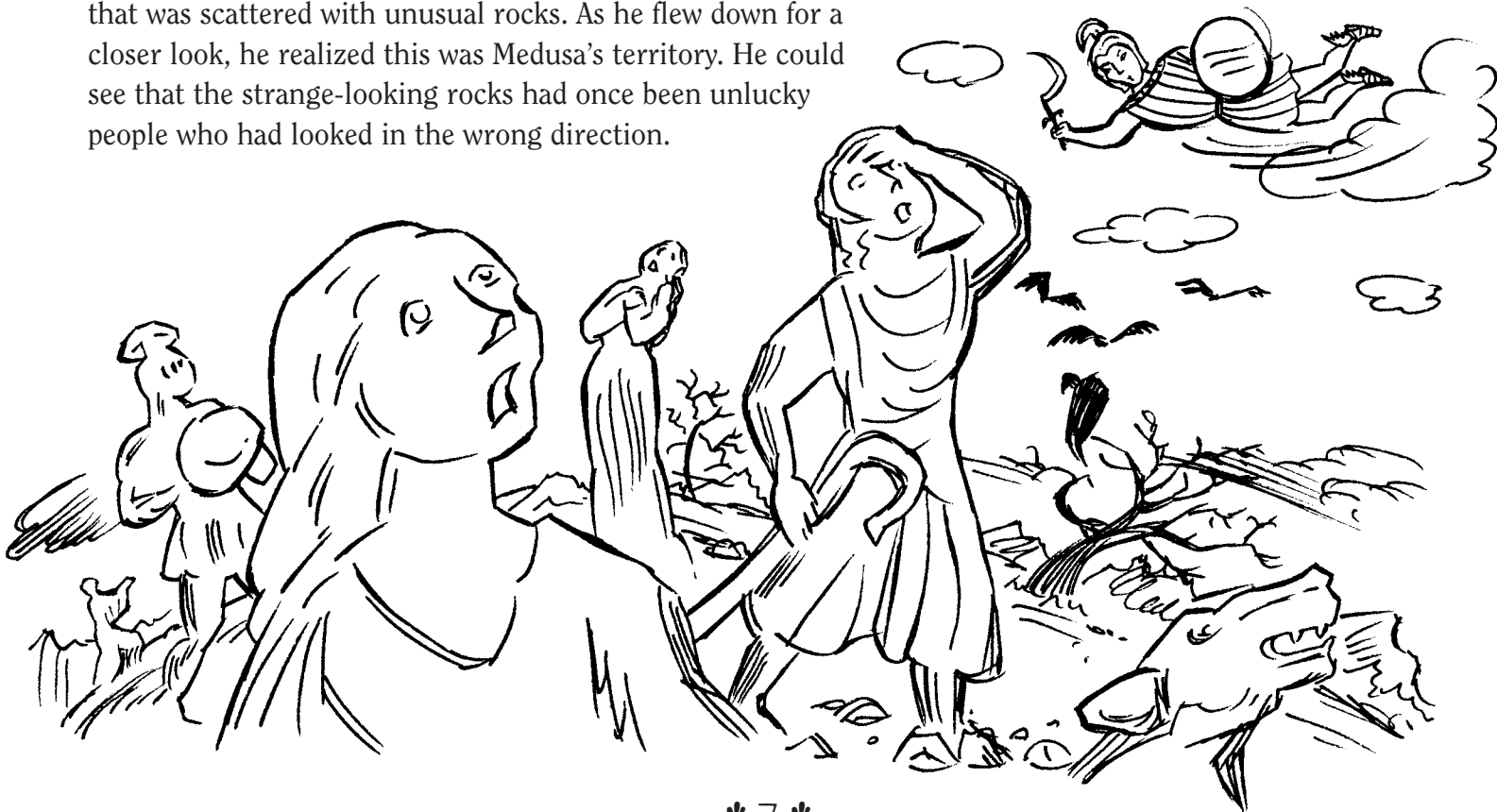
Years passed, and Perseus grew into a noble young man. Unfortunately, King Polydectes was less than noble. He had a sneaky plan to marry Danae and wanted to get her protective son out of the picture. Appealing to Perseus's sense of bravery and adventure, the king challenged Perseus to fetch the head of Medusa. Perseus accepted and asked the gods for help.

Yikes! Isn't Medusa the snake-haired monster who turns anyone who sees her into stone? Maybe my father, Zeus, will help me out.



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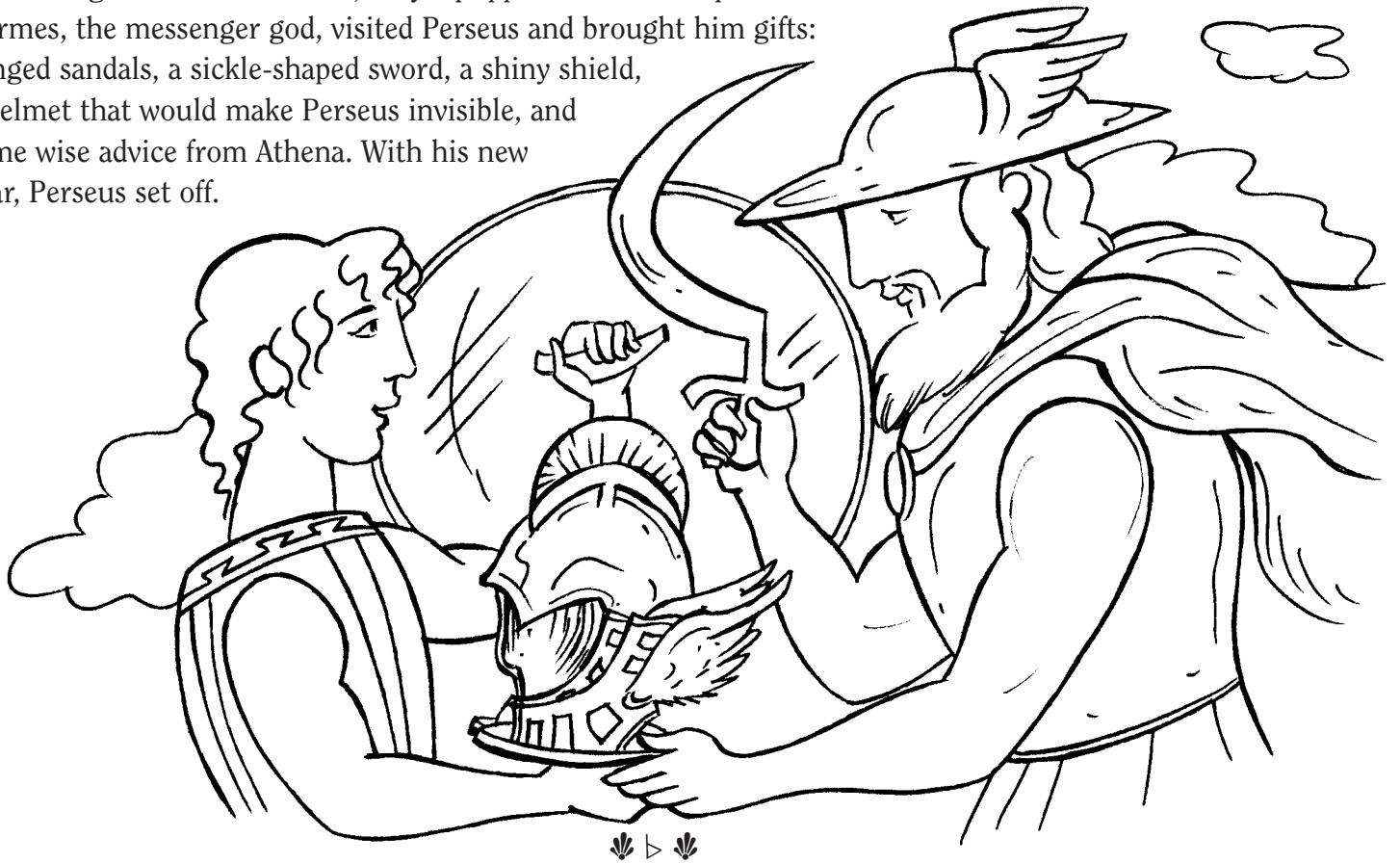
Perseus flew north until he reached a bleak, gloomy landscape that was scattered with unusual rocks. As he flew down for a closer look, he realized this was Medusa's territory. He could see that the strange-looking rocks had once been unlucky people who had looked in the wrong direction.



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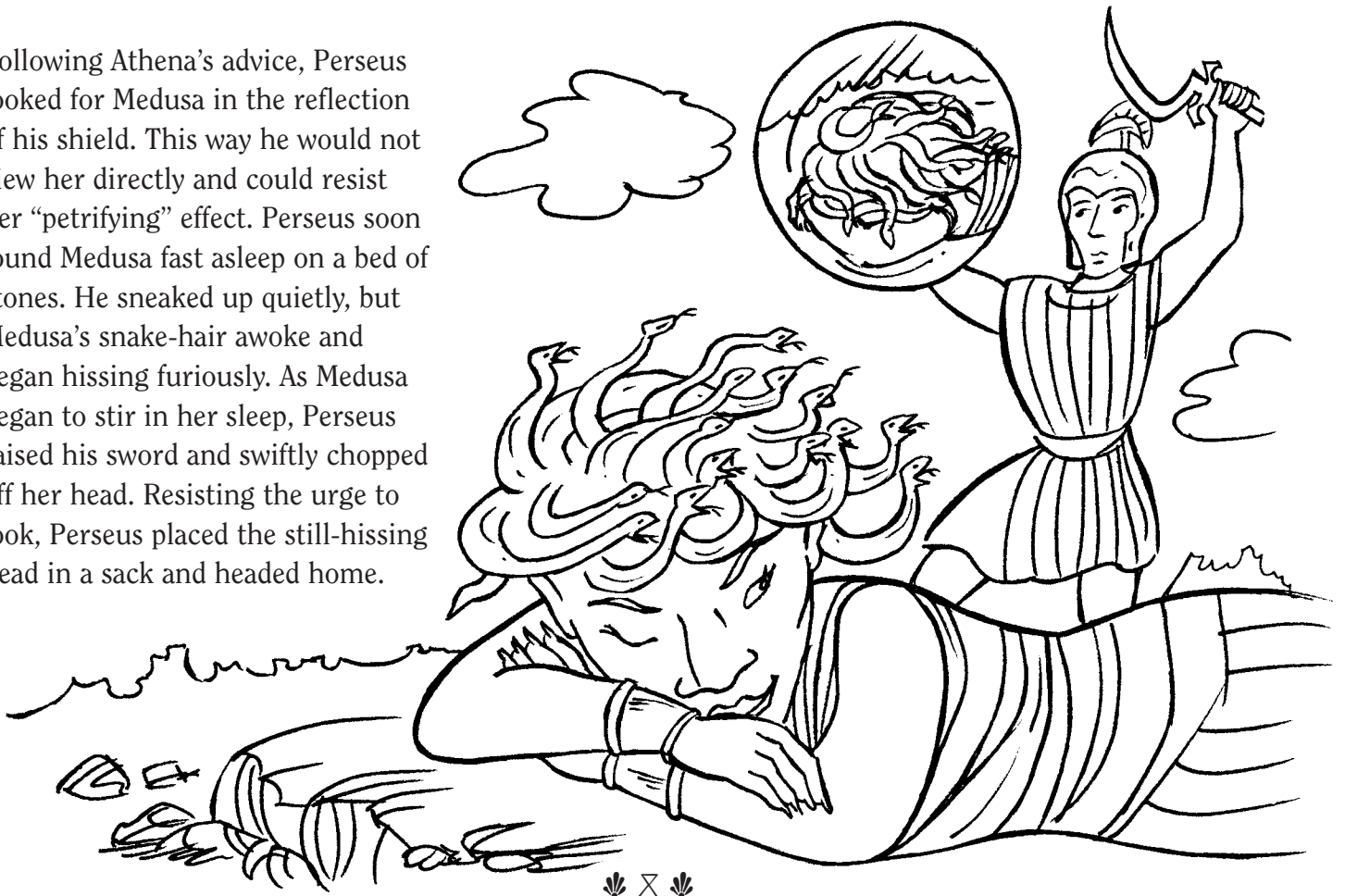
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Since the gods favored Perseus, they equipped him for his quest. Hermes, the messenger god, visited Perseus and brought him gifts: winged sandals, a sickle-shaped sword, a shiny shield, a helmet that would make Perseus invisible, and some wise advice from Athena. With his new gear, Perseus set off.



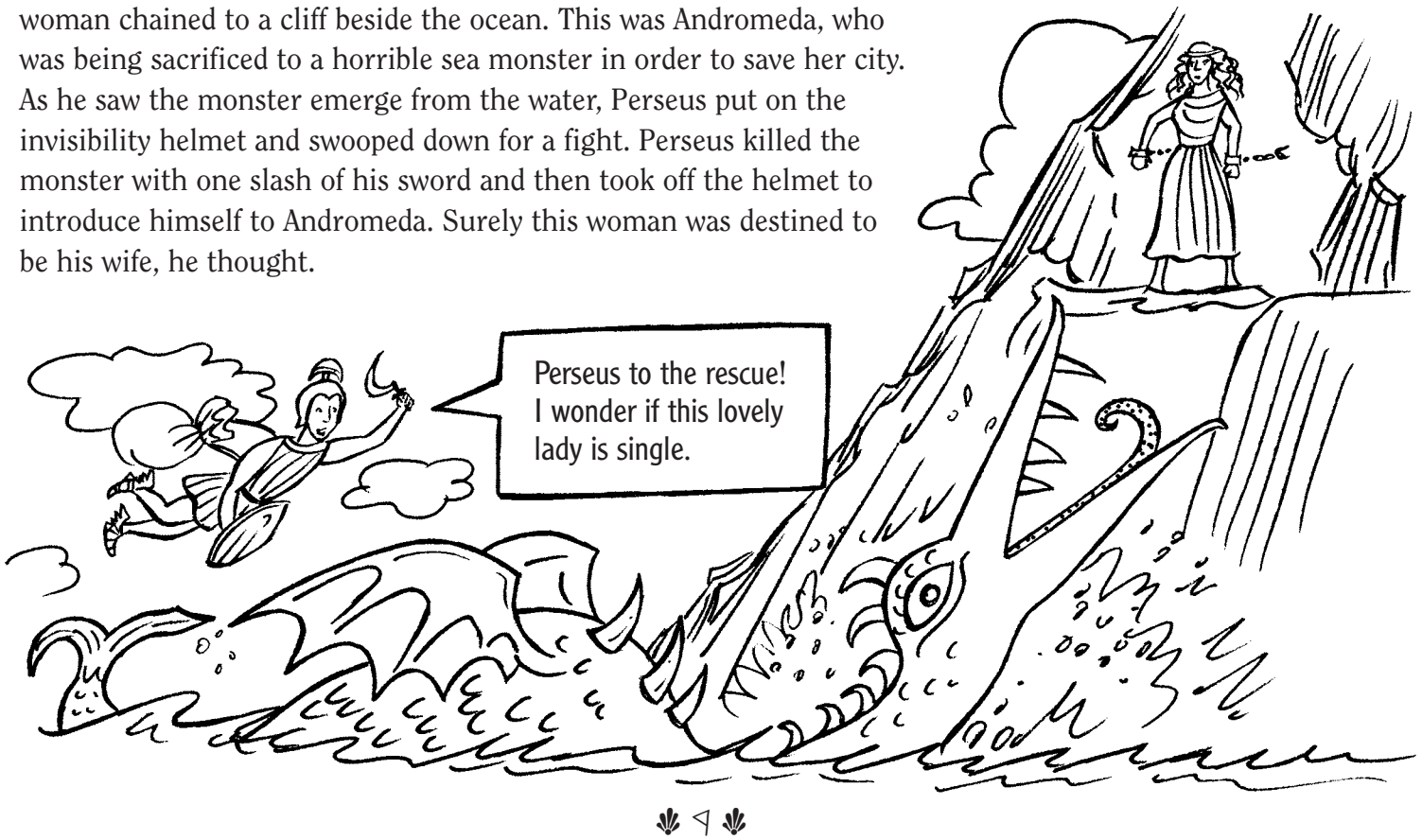
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Following Athena's advice, Perseus looked for Medusa in the reflection of his shield. This way he would not view her directly and could resist her "petrifying" effect. Perseus soon found Medusa fast asleep on a bed of stones. He sneaked up quietly, but Medusa's snake-hair awoke and began hissing furiously. As Medusa began to stir in her sleep, Perseus raised his sword and swiftly chopped off her head. Resisting the urge to look, Perseus placed the still-hissing head in a sack and headed home.

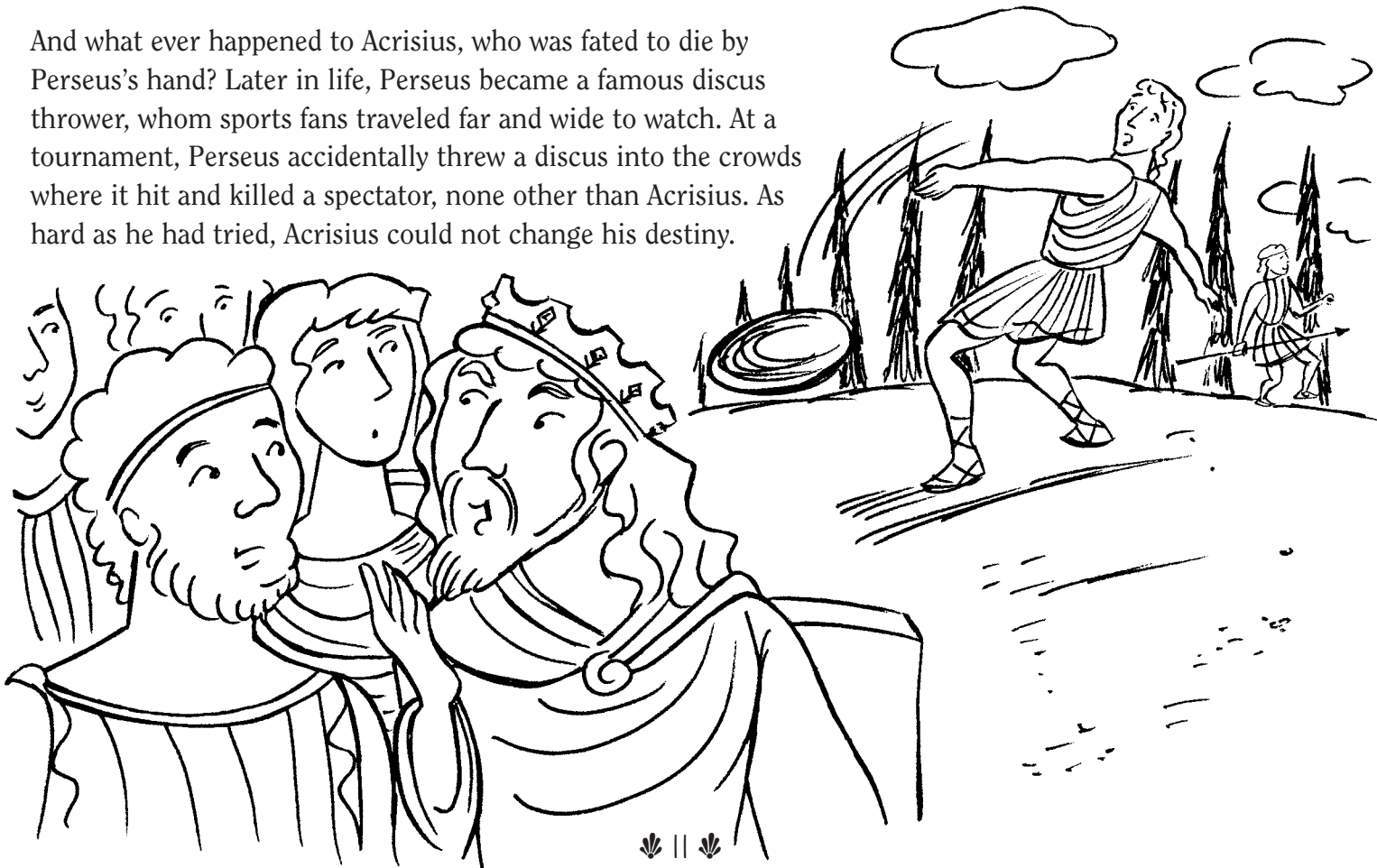


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As he was flying home, Perseus spotted an unusual sight: a beautiful woman chained to a cliff beside the ocean. This was Andromeda, who was being sacrificed to a horrible sea monster in order to save her city. As he saw the monster emerge from the water, Perseus put on the invisibility helmet and swooped down for a fight. Perseus killed the monster with one slash of his sword and then took off the helmet to introduce himself to Andromeda. Surely this woman was destined to be his wife, he thought.



And what ever happened to Acrisius, who was fated to die by Perseus's hand? Later in life, Perseus became a famous discus thrower, whom sports fans traveled far and wide to watch. At a tournament, Perseus accidentally threw a discus into the crowds where it hit and killed a spectator, none other than Acrisius. As hard as he had tried, Acrisius could not change his destiny.



Carrying Andromeda in his arms, Perseus arrived home just in time to halt the wedding that was planned for that day. Danae told Perseus how she was being forced to marry Polydectes. Perseus stormed to the castle and found him. Before Polydectes could get over his surprise at seeing Perseus still alive, Perseus pulled Medusa's head from the sack and held it right before the king's beady eyes.

