

TURN TO FLESH

Emily C. A. Snyder

© 2011

Excerpt

(PERSEUS dodges away from MEDUSA.)

MEDUSA.

O! You heroes – *why*
Do you torment me? Seek me out to slaughter me?
Taunt me, bait me, call me murderer and *bitch*
When I have done no wrong to you? See me
As I am: vainglorious victim
Of a petty vengeful god. Look on me, mortal!
Thou coward, fleet-foot, whey-faced hero – Look!

(With a primal scream, MEDUSA knocks PERSEUS to the ground. He lies pinned beneath her arms, his head turned to one side and his eyes shut tight against her scrabbling fingers.)

MEDUSA.

Blink, thou hero! Thou canst not help but blink!

PERSEUS.

I'll be blinded first.

MEDUSA.

Then I will pry
Thine eyelids up; claw them from their sockets;
Swallow their thick juices – as a weasel
Sucks out eggs. Now, godling, look on me.

PERSEUS.

I will not look! Then tempt me not!

MEDUSA.

Hast been a while since my looks tempted man.

PERSEUS.

And you're less tempter than a tempest. I fear thee not. Let go!

(PERSEUS rolls from her embrace and to his knees, his eyes still screwed shut, his sword just at his fingertips, his face a breath from the Gorgon's own. The waves wash out the time as MEDUSA looks him in the face.)

MEDUSA.

You're always lovely, you heroes come to kill me.

(Wonderingly, MEDUSA'S hand reaches up to touch PERSEUS' hair; slip down the contour of his cheek. There is no sound but the washing of the surf, and the drip of the stalagmites, and the hero's shallow breath. If he dared to look, he would see MEDUSA'S smile. She grips his sword arm.)

MEDUSA. Come, hero, let's be friends. I would not harm thee.
Thou art too beautiful to harm, I know –
Thy beauty will undo me. Nay listen:
I'll make of thee a god, keep thee forever
Young, thy name renowned as one who fell
Before his prime. I'll place thee on an altar,
Make of thee a church, and crown thy brow
With morning roses and sweet lavender.
I'll speak to thee, and though thy lips are naught
But freckled stone, I'll hear thy faint response.
Is this not faith?

PERSEUS. I would not be your god.

MEDUSA. Yet I'd keep faith with thee, if thou'lt but look.

PERSEUS. And turn to stone? I've seen the company
You keep, and would not join their ranks.

(He reaches once more for his sword, but MEDUSA stops him.)

MEDUSA. Thou shalt not leave this cave unchanged.

PERSEUS. It was my hope to leave a different man.

MEDUSA. Then ope thine eyes and turn thy heart to stone.

PERSEUS. O, it is stone already. Or else I'd pity thee.

MEDUSA. Pity me, thou nameless wretch?

PERSEUS. Aye,
Thou mad enchantress. As much as e'er I pitied
She whom I saw bound upon the rock.

MEDUSA. A maid?

PERSEUS. Or so she seemed.

MEDUSA.

Her name.

PERSEUS.

Andromeda.

I saw her as I voyaged to this place,
My shield, my sail; a seat-trunk my ship.
She smiled at me, although I had no name
And wished me well as waves nipped at her fingers.
She may be dead by now, swallowed by Poseidon.
I hope she lives.

MEDUSA.

And so you came for love.

PERSEUS.

I came to make my name. If that name
Can 'gender love, if by Medusa's alchemy
My name is writ in stone, I am content.

MEDUSA.

Yet I must die.

PERSEUS.

You must. You are a monster.

MEDUSA.

Truly. You are blinder than the rest.
Begone, you foolish braveling. You'll murder
What you do not understand – begone.
Before you blink and find yourself foresworn,
Begone. Go find your maid before you sleep
And leave her to the groping Triton's waves.
Begone! I am aweary of you heroes.
I am weary of your deaths, weary
Of your cold companionship. Be gone.

PERSEUS.

Begone? To have come so far and then to flee?
I'll have no name if I be not baptized
By your green ichor blood. Come weary monster,
I'll be thy death an' thou wilt give me life.

(Scene continues.)