Betrayal in the Night (a story of Jason and the Argonauts)

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L

ate that very evening, when Jason was sitting at table, drinking fine wine with his father, the newly reinstated King Aeson, Medea heard a knock on the door of the side chamber where she and Jason were staying. When she opened it, Pisidice, Antinoe, and Asteropeia stood outside, their faces veiled to disguise themselves from anyone watching.

Asteropeia was tall and willowy, with light brown hair, while Pisidice and Antinoe were shorter and stouter, with dark hair. Pisidice wore her dark hair in elaborate braids piled on top of her head. Antinoe wore her hair loose. Although they were all the daughters of Pelias, they all had different mothers, of course.

“What are you three doing here?” demanded Medea, holding her robe closed with one hand at the neckline. “My husband should have had all of you killed!”

“We need a favour,” Asteropeia said quietly, her head bowed slightly. “And we’re willing to pay gold for it.”

“A favour?” Medea asked, filled with disbelief. “What do you mean?”

“Our father Pelias languishes in a dank cell,” Pisidice joined in. “We don’t ask that he be released, of course...”

“Well, obviously not,” Medea replied. “Now leave the palace or I’ll have you killed.”

“He will not live long in that place. Now, we are willing to pay you your weight in gold if you will do for him what you did today for his brother, Aeson,” Antinoe spoke up.

“Revivify his blood?” Medea asked. “And you said you’ll pay me my weight in gold to do it?”

“Most assuredly,” Pisidice told her.

“Weeeeeell...That will take some planning. And for it to work, you have to really, truly love your father,” Medea warned them.

“We would not be standing here before you, risking our lives and offering a fortune in gold, if we did not” Asteropeia told her.

“I will need to stay up all night preparing my magics,” Medea told the three sisters. “Meet me at your father’s cell this time tomorrow evening, bringing the gold of which you speak, telling no one of what we plan to do.”

The three unmarried daughters of Pelias assured the sorceress that this would be so, and left Medea to get things ready.



Outside Pelias’ cell, Medea met the three sisters a night later while Jason drank more wine in the palace with his father Aeson and discussed how the kingdom ought to be run. Each sister carried a third of Medea’s weight in gold. Medea did not weigh a great deal, but each sister gasped under the weight.

Medea carried only a small bundle under her arm, and the ancient Thessalian flint knife which had been used in human sacrifices since before anyone could tell.

There had been a guard set to watch Pelias’ cell, of course, but Medea had put him to sleep using a powder she had blown into his face, after offering to whisper a secret in his ear. Then she had taken from his unconscious hand the key ring which had the key to Pelias’ locked cell.

“As tokens of your love for Pelias your father, you must each wear one of these magically-treated robes which I have prepared,” Medea told them, once she’d checked the gold. “They are saturated with magical tinctures and solutions to help with what I’m doing tonight. To work, they must touch nothing but your bare skin.”

The three sisters left their fine dresses, underthings and sandals in the corner, and soon stood before the cell wearing only the heavy magic robes. The robes had a strong, pungent odour to them and felt somewhat waxy to the touch. Medea gestured in the air in front of each sister, muttering guttural words that sounded disturbing. The skin of each sister tingled when the sorceress did this.

The bronze tub that Medea had used to enact her spell for Jason’s father was still outside the cell that Aeson had occupied, and which Pelias now served time in. Medea unlocked the door to the cell and the three sisters took their father Pelias by the hand and led him slowly and stumblingly to the tub. They helped him into it and looked at Medea.

“Are you certain you truly love him?” Medea asked them.

They assured her that they did. Pelias lay back, gritted his teeth and closed his eyes tightly.

“Are you certain that you are ready to do to his flesh what my husband Jason did to that of his own father?” she continued.

They told her that they were.

Handing Asteropeia the jagged flint knife, Medea began to make twisting shapes in the air with her fingers, and to mutter to herself. Then she directed Asteropeia to make an incision in the old man’s flesh. Once this had been done and blood was gushing out, Medea took the flint knife and gave it to each of the other two sisters, and directed them to make further incisions.

Once it was done, Medea dipped her fingertips in the blood and made arcane symbols on the sides of the tub, muttering evil-sounding words and making guttural sounds all the while, once taking a fistful of sand from a leather sack and blowing on her open hand so that it drifted into the air above Pelias’ unmoving body.

Pelias, now lay still and cold in the tub, eyes staring sightlessly upward. The three daughters looked at Medea with very large eyes.

Medea stood with her head bowed, eyes closed, very still and very quiet. She stood that way for some time.

Finally, Pisidice spoke. “What now?” she asked, a tremble in her voice.

“Now nothing,” Medea answered, opening her eyes and looking very directly at Pisidice.

“What do you *mean*?” Antinoe demanded, panic in her voice, the bloody flint dagger trembling in her grip.

“Now Pelias is dead,” Medea told the three sisters. “And you three were the ones who killed him.”

A wail went up from all three women, and Pisidice, the last one holding the knife, looked at it for a moment, then raised it and stepped forward, her gaze as flinty as the stone blade. Antinoe and Asteropeia stepped forward with her, murder in their eyes.

Medea simply waved one hand, fingers twisted into an odd sign, and spoke one word:

“Burn.”

At that, the specially treated robes of all three sisters burst violently into flames, blackening the ceilings and almost immediately leaving nothing but three small, smouldering heaps on the floor.

Medea picked up the Thessalian flint and one of the piles of ingots, and walked contemptuously back to her chamber. She’d send some servants down for rest of the gold later.