The Sirens’ Song (a story of Jason and the Argonauts)

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ason stood at the bow, looking at the horizon ahead of them. Aceunus was belowdecks, and Euphemus steered the *Argo* along the alternate route they had worked out after talking to the sorceress Circe. It would take weeks longer to go this way, but it would keep them out of the grip of the sea monsters Scylla and Charybdis. The main downside to this route was that it wasn’t terribly well charted. Ships seldom returned from it.

The only thing that was interfering with the quiet that Jason wanted to enjoy on deck, was that Butes, who fancied himself a ladies’ man, wouldn’t stop going on and on to Philoctetes and Peleus about the beauty of Circe. About how she was probably lonely on that island by herself with only the animals to talk to, and how he kind of wished he’d stayed behind to “comfort” her.

Medea came up from belowdecks, and overheard the laughter and conversation. Jason was afraid she’d be offended at how they were talking about her aunt, but instead, Medea burst out laughing and wouldn’t tell anyone why. Butes also seemed to be a little more interested in Medea than Jason was quite comfortable with.

“Have you seen Euphemus?” Medea asked Jason.

“He’s at the helm,” Jason told her.

Medea went over to the helm and stood by Euphemus as he steered. “Sometimes I have visions,” the sorceress told the son of Poseidon. “They don’t always turn out the way one would imagine, and are often disjointed, but I ought to tell you what I saw.”

Euphemus looked at her and said nothing, holding the wheel of the *Argo* steady. Euphemus often didn’t say a lot.

“I had a vision last night which suggests that you will one day father an entire country. A country that will be called Libya.” Medea looked at him very directly. “The vision was mysterious. It involved a clot of earth.”

“I have a bridge in Athens I’m trying to sell,” was all Euphemus said.

With that, Medea went below, leaving him to ponder her words.

Greek pattern.jpg

The *Argo* was tied up at a harbour by the outlet of Lake Tritonis. Argonauts were getting on and off the ship on various errands, when Butes announced that a stranger stood at the bottom of the gangplank and was asking for Euphemus. Euphemus went down the gangplank to see what the man wanted.

The man smiled slowly. “My name is Eurypylus. Do you accept this sacred clod of earth?” The stranger held it out to Euphemus.

Euphemus took it. Hearing about the vision from Medea involving a clot of earth made him take the stranger more seriously than he otherwise would have. Some very strange people hang around the docks, after all.

“You wouldn’t lie to me?” Euphemus asked the man. “You’re not looking for money?”

“I have lied only about my name. And I did that only to hide my true nature so that we might speak freely,” the stranger said.

“Who are you really?” Euphemus asked, slightly annoyed. He had his suspicions.

“I am Triton,” the man told him.

“Triton, as in my *half-brother* Triton, messenger of our father Poseidon?” Euphemus asked. “Triton who this very lake is named for?”

Triton shrugged. As he did, Euphemus could then see the trident his half-brother was carrying, and the fact that instead of legs, Triton’s lower body was a large, muscular tail with flukes. Triton had been using magic to hide his appearance so he could pass unnoticed among the regular human beings in the harbour, but there was no fooling his own half-brother.

“Anyway, here’s this sacred clot of earth,” Triton said. “Your descendants will live on it. Entrust it to the care of the Nereids until its time has come.”

“What?!” Euphemus asked. “I didn’t really get any of that. Are you sure you aren’t a couple of bananas short of a bunch?”

“That’s all I was told,” Triton said, allowing himself to fall off the edge of the dock into his lake, and disappearing beneath its waves after saluting Euphemus with his trident.

Euphemus was left holding the big clot of earth. It was about the size of his head. He was pretty sure it was magic, but he didn’t know anything beyond that.

Greek pattern.jpg

The *Argo* was heading down the coastline again, on a humid, sultry day. Medea walked away from Butes, who had been asking her a barrage of questions about Circe. “Do you *hear* that?” she asked Jason.

Euphemus was at the helm again, while Aceunus was down below sleeping. Jason could hear nothing but the wind, the surf and the calls of gulls, and he said so.

Medea grabbed Orpheus by the shoulder as he was walking past and said “Stop. Can *you* hear that?”

Orpheus listened intently, and then said “I think I hear something, just at the edge of my ability to hear. But I don’t know what it is.”

Medea let him go and went below, brow furrowed. Aceunus came up on deck shortly after Medea had gone below, and replaced Euphemus at the helm. It was Euphemus’ turn to get some sleep.

Greek pattern.jpg

*He holds the clot of earth in his two hands. It gets larger and larger until he can barely hold it. His hands get wet and when he looks down at them, he sees that the clot is weeping warm milk. Soon his hands and forearms are dripping with it.*

*The clot grows, more and more, and by the time it is almost as large as he is, he finds he is holding in his arms a beautiful, smiling woman. She is unclothed and they begin kissing. Soon they are on the floor together.*

Greek pattern.jpg

Euphemus put on his tunic and came back up on deck, looking for Medea. He had to tell her his dream.

But Medea’s thoughts were elsewhere. “Do you *hear* that?” she asked him.

Euphemus looked out at the orange-pink sky, at the sun setting, and tried to hear what Medea was talking about. He could almost hear…music. There *was* something.

“What *is* that?” he asked her.

“Something that sounds like magic,” Medea said. “Something that isn’t safe. Tell Orpheus to get his lyre.”

But no one was listening to Medea. The *Argo* sailed into the channel. In the golden glow of the setting sun, everyone came up on deck and began to listen.

“*I* don’t hear anything” Idas said. He was about to spit over the rail, but then he stopped. “Wait… what’s *that*?”

The song, carried across the waves to them, didn’t just touch their hearing. It spoke to their other senses as well. It felt like a warm, lingering caress on the cheek and hip. It looked like the orangey-pink sunset it accompanied. It tasted of honey, cream and strawberries. And it smelled of orange blossom and sun-warmed skin.

“Do you *hear* that?! Where *are* they?” demanded Butes.

“I *see* them!” exclaimed Philoctetes, delighted. No one had eyes as sharp as Philoctetes did. “They’re all sitting on a big rock there in the distance across the channel!”

“*Where?!*” Butes almost shouted at him.

“*What*…are sitting there” asked Medea very levelly, as if talking to a small child.

“Women! Beautiful, lovely, wonderful ladies!” Philoctetes answered, a distracted note in his voice.

“Are they *singing* ladies?” Medea asked levelly.

Philoctetes didn’t answer, being too busy looking and listening. All the other male Argonauts were trying to get a glimpse too.

“Are they *naked* ladies?” Medea asked more firmly. “Who just happen to be sitting on some *very dangerous rocks*?”

No one was paying her any attention, apart from Atalanta, who looked at Medea, confused, then tried to see what exactly it was all the men were trying to see.

Medea sighed, then slapped Philoctetes, *hard*, right across the face. His intense eyes lost their thousand yard stare and focused on Medea for a moment, then he started to turn back to the source of the singing. Medea grabbed him by the cheeks and asked her questions again, looking deeply and piercingly into his eyes.

Philoctetes answered in a distracted tone “*Yes*, they’re lovely, singing, naked ladies who just happen to be sitting on big dangerous rocks in the middle of the sea with no land around, and I’ll bet they’d really like me if they met me; I’m quite nice, you know, and I’m funny and have a good beard and great abs, and so I think maybe…”

Medea let go of Philoctetes’ face and grabbed Jason and Orpheus by their upper arms. “Those are *sirens*!” she told them. “Their magical song lures sailors to their deaths! They lure ships in the wreck on the rocks! If you men listen to their song a moment longer, you will certainly throw yourself into the waves, trying to swim after them and be drowned in these treacherous waters.”

Jason didn’t answer. Jason didn’t hear her. He was as entranced by the sirens as the rest of the Argonauts.

“I could *walk* out to them,” Euphemus said in a distant voice. “In fact, I think I’ll just...”

“Atalanta, grab Orpheus’ lute!” Medea barked at the female Argonaut.

Shaking her head to clear it of the magical distraction, Atalanta went and got the instrument.

When Atalanta returned, Medea shoved the lute into Orpheus’ hands. “You’d better be as good as they say, son of Morpheus... Your playing has to be more magical to this ship full of lonely heroes than the singing of a rock full of lusty, unclothed *sirens*. Play loudly and well.”

Distractedly, Orpheus struck a chord on the instrument, and once it rang out, he got drawn into the familiar movements of picking out a melody. He played more and more loudly, making it harder and harder to hear the sirens’ singing over his notes.

Orpheus’ music spoke of the Argonauts being lonely men, easily led astray by seductive magic. Of being far from home and missing loved ones who were waiting for them still. Of sailing on to see them. Of how nice it would be to soon see everyone again, back home. Of how better home would be than anything *here*.

At first no one listened, but then the competing music started to cause the Argonauts to turn toward Orpheus one by one. And Orpheus began composing words to a song on the spot, singing along with the lute to really get his message across:

*The sirens’ song rings out ‘cross ocean calm*

*To lonely men, whose hearts are open books*

*As fish to hooks, the Argonauts will leap*

*Unless their hearts enraptured I can keep*

*Lest you would drown, pray heed my hasty tune*

*Past them we sail, and best had leave them soon*

*Or we’ll go down to chilly, darksome depths*

*So sail we on, to live and still draw breath*

*To home! To home!*

He kept going like that, as Euphemus and Aceunus between them just barely managed to steer the *Argo* past the deadly rocks that were all around them now. The urge to steer the *Argo* right into *and over* the rocks to somehow get to the sirens was nearly irresistible. The sirens had chosen a rock across the channel from them, which no ship could safely navigate to, and lay sunning themselves upon it in the last rays of the setting sun which made languid tangles of arms and legs seem kissed by gold.

“If you’ve got this,” Euphemus told Aceunus “I could just take a walk *over* to those ladies of easy virtue and give them the time of day...”

“Both hands on the wheel!” Aceunus told him, and focused his attention on Orpheus’ playing.

As the *Argo* sailed down the channel, they all caught a distant glimpse of the sirens lounging on the rock across it from them, but with Orpheus’ tune mostly drowning out the sirens’ song, the Argonauts were able to hold themselves back from leaping into the sea.

As they began to move out of range of the siren’s deadly song, Orpheus continued to play, and then a loud *splash* drew everyone’s attention. Orpheus had to keep playing, but the others looked over the side.

Butes had leaned too far out while trying desperately to catch a glimpse of the sirens in the fading light, and had fallen into the chilly sea. Instead of being pulled back aboard ship, he was now swimming *away* from the ship, and back to the rocks with the sirens on them. It was much too far for anyone to swim. And they couldn’t risk sending Euphemus after him.

“Butes! Get *back* here!” Jason called after him. “You lusty idiot!”

“No!” they could all just barely hear Butes shout.

“You’ll *drown*, you lunatic!” Medea shouted. “Fish will nibble the flesh from your moldering bones, while they lie in the chilly depths of this channel!”

“Don’t care!” they could hear in response.

“You always did think with your πέος!” Idas yelled after the enraptured Argonaut. “Get *back* here before you drown!”

“Butes!” Peleus shouted after him.

“…”

And that was that. They dared not turn the *Argo* around after Butes and sail into the rocks. Now that they were sailing away from the sound of the siren song, they were starting to snap out of the trance, like men awaking from a dream. Even as they sailed a safe distance away, though, there was a wistful longing seen in everyone’s eyes.

Telamon went over to Orpheus and clapped him on the shoulder. “Now *that* is why the centaur Chiron said it was very important to bring you along...you saved our lives!” he said.

Orpheus played a last ringing note, looked at the rising moon and said nothing.

Idas took a pull from his wineskin and then spat over the edge where Butes had recently fallen.

Greek pattern.jpg

*The love goddess Aphrodite is sprawled across her luxuriant bed, wearing something gauzy and barely there. She looks lazily into Butes’ eyes, one of her own eyes hidden behind a curly, dangling lock of her flowing hair. She pats her bed with a tanned arm. There are no chairs in Aphrodite’s rooms. Only couches and beds.*

*Butes is soaking wet, and coughing. He has barely escaped drowning. He falls into the warm, yielding bed of the goddess of sensual delights. The goddess begins plucking at his wet clothing.*

*“I have been following your adventures aboard the* Argo*,” Aphrodite tells him, flinging his sodden tunic onto the floor. “I looked down and saw you hoisting sails in the sun when Cupid was at Colchis for me. So when I saw that you were drowning today, I sent some of my people to pull you out and bring you to Olympus. You are, by far, too beautiful and too lusty to die today. I thought we could... get to know each other.”*

*Butes cannot believe his ears. Or his luck.*