

# JASON AND THE GOLDEN FLEECE

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By

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JASON

ATALANTA, a god, daughter of Artemis

SOLDIER

PELIAS, King of Thessaly

HERCULES, strongest man in Thessaly

ARGOS, a ship-builder

ORPHEUS, a poet

PHINEUS, a seer

THE HARPY, head of a hawk, body of a woman, black wings

SORCERESS

HIPSYPYLE, Queen of Lemnos

A SEA BIRD

ARACHNE, a thief

AETES, King of Colchis

MEDEA, daughter of Aetes

THE SERPENT GUARDIAN

INOS, a swamp creature

The above are played by a company of five to eight actors.

Thousands of years ago, when the world was charged with magic.

(At rise: the banks of the River Anaurus, in Thessaly, near the city of lolcus. JASON, wearing rough peasant's clothing and a single sandal, enters. He carries a WOMAN slung over his shoulder. He staggers from the weight, his bare foot slapping the floor, legs shaking)

JASON:  
You're... so... heavy!

(He sinks to his knees, gasping for breath. The WOMAN stands, facing him, smiling. JASON look up, sees her and reacts, jumping up)

Oh! Where, where did the old lady go? I carried her through the River Anaurus, she was old, and, and frail, and she asked me to help her, so I said sure, and I picked her up, and I slung her over my shoulder and she was light, like a bunch of dry sticks, but then she got so heavy, and I—

WOMAN:  
Jason.

JASON:  
—lost my sandal!

WOMAN:  
Jason.

JASON:  
What?

WOMAN:  
The old woman is I.

JASON (after a brief pause):  
What?

WOMAN:  
I am the old woman.

JASON:  
You?

WOMAN:  
Yes.

JASON (stares for a moment):  
But you're beautiful.

WOMAN:  
Thank you.

JASON:  
Who are you?

WOMAN:  
I am Atalanta, daughter of Artemis, guardian of wild things.

JASON:  
You're... a god?

ATALANTA (nods)

JASON (suddenly laughs):  
Oh, that's ripe! "I'm a god. Atalanta, daughter of Artemis".

ATALANTA (lets him laugh, then quietly says):  
I know what you intend to do.

JASON (stops laughing, steps back):  
No, you don't.

ATALANTA (looks at him calmly)

JASON:  
He killed my father. His own brother. And my mother. Slew them. Put himself on the throne of Thessaly. My throne. Thessaly is mine. The fields, the vineyards, Mount Pelion, the city lolcus. Mine. I am Jason, son of Aeson, and—

(Shouts)

—I am coming! Do you hear me, Uncle?! I'm coming!

ATALANTA:  
How do you know this?

JASON:  
I remember it. All these years I thought it was a dream, the look on my mother's face when she gave me to Nurse, the sound of her screaming as Nurse carried me down the secret passage. But I remember. And yesterday, when I reached my age, Nurse came back and told me what happened, and now I'm—

(Shouts again)

JASON, con't:

—coming back, Pelias, you slayer of kings and mothers, I'm coming for you!

(Suddenly panicky)

Are you saying it's not true? You'd know. I mean, if you're really a god. Isn't it true?

(Pulls a talisman from under his shirt)

I have an amlu, an amru— A thing.

ATALANTA:

An amulet.

JASON:

It belonged to my mother. See? The royal seal. This is proof. This makes me king of Thessaly.

ATALANTA:

Does it?

JASON:

Yes.

(ATALANTA looks at JASON appraisingly for a long moment)

ATALANTA:

So, Jason, son of Aeson, what are you going to do?

JASON:

Take my throne.

ATALANTA:

How?

JASON:

I'll show Pelias my amulet. He'll have to step down.

ATALANTA:

I think you've been out of touch up there on Mount Pelion, living with the old man in that little hut. I don't think you know what sort of king Pelias has become. I'll show you.

(KING PELIAS and a SOLDIER enter)

PELIAS:

Seize him!

(The SOLDIER grabs JASON roughly. ATALANTA steps back, watching)

Bind him.

(The SOLDIER lashes JASON's hands together. PELIAS notices something)

Where is your other sandal?! Where is it?!

JASON (stares at PELIAS with hard hatred)

PELIAS:

Kneel him.

(SOLDIER kicks JASON's feet, forcing him to his knees)

Who are you?

JASON:

Your nephew.

(PELIAS goes to JASON, examines the amulet, then yanks it off JASON's neck)

PELIAS:

My brother had no children. You are an impostor, a spy.

(To the SOLDIER)

Take him to the temple. We'll offer his steaming heart to the gods at dawn. Get him out of my sight!

(Shift: the temple. Night. The SOLDIER shoves JASON forward. We hear the booming of a thick door, the sharp snap of a lock. JASON sinks to his knees as the SOLDIER exits)

JASON:

Oh, father, you must be so ashamed of me. Defeated before I even reached Iolcus.

(Bows his head. Moment. ATALANTA enters)

ATALANTA:

Jason.

JASON:

How did you—? Oh. You really are a god. Can you help me? Slip the lock and open the door? Or fly me. I'd really like to fly. Please. It can't end like this.

ATALANTA:

I'm going to tell you a story.

JASON:

I die at dawn, and you're going to tell me a story?

ATALANTA (points):

There. Do you see?

JASON:

What?

(Soft music)

ATALANTA:

A young boy, Phrixus, shivering in a temple  
This temple  
Waiting to die upon the morn  
Sacrificed to end Thessaly's drought  
Dry clouds seeded with the mist of his sweet young blood

JASON:

I don't like this story.

ATALANTA:

Comes the dawn sun  
Golden light gleams on the priest's bright blade

(Music crescendos, then stops)

JASON:

What happens?

ATALANTA:

A ram

(Music returns)

A wondrous ram with fleece of golden crystal  
Blinding!  
Down he swoops and gathers young Phrixus on his back  
He flies high, higher than any mortal has ever flown  
He flies Phrixus from Thessaly to the country of Colchis  
On the Unfriendly Sea

ATALANTA, con't:

The Black Sea

There, when Phrixus reaches his age he sacrifices the ram and hoards the golden fleece for his own use

(Light, rich, golden and liquid, plays over JASON's face)

JASON:

Ohhhhhhhhhhhhhhhhhhhhhhh....

ATALANTA:

Do you see it, Jason?

JASON:

Yes.

ATALANTA:

He rules Colchis for four hundred years  
His son Aetes is now king

ATALANTA:

Aetes is three hundred years old  
The golden fleece gives life  
The golden fleece gives power  
The golden fleece makes kings

(JASON reaches out for the fleece — the source of the light. ATALANTA stands, and the light normalizes)

Good-bye, Jason.

JASON:

What? Please, no, don't go. I need you.

ATALANTA:

When you need me, look to the sky.

JASON:

I need you now, they're going to cut out my heart at dawn, don't go!

(ATALANTA leaves)

No!

(Shift: dawn)

Oh.



(PELIAS enters, carrying a dagger)

PELIAS:

I don't want to kill you.

(Approaches JASON)

They must have hidden you well. I had soldiers looking for you everywhere. I'd convinced myself you were dead. When the oracle warned me, beware a man wearing a single sandal, I dismissed it as a hag's superstition.

(Moment)

I don't want to kill you. Do you know what it will mean? For me, the usurper, to kill my brother's son? Kill the true heir? The rebellion will never stop. I will have to devote every minute of the day, every drachma of treasure, to quell it. I don't want to kill you!

JASON:

Then give me the throne.

PELIAS:

I should. I'm tired of it. The sullen hatred the people give back to me every time I face them. The endless plots, assassination attempts, the horrific things I must do to keep order. And it's poisoning me. I feel something coiling inside me, like a snake. It's growing, growing. Yes, I will let you be king.

JASON:

Good.

(PELIAS unsheathes his dagger. It gleams in the dawn light)

PELIAS:

I don't want to kill you, but I must.

(Thrusts at JASON. JASON dodges. They circle each other, thrusting and dodging. Then PELIAS comes close enough to make JASON fall. JASON tries to scramble away but PELIAS straddles him and holds him fast. He raises the dagger for the death blow)

JASON:

If I bring you the golden fleece of Phrixus will you give me the throne?

PELIAS:

What?

JASON:

I will bring the fleece back to Thessaly, if you promise to let me take my place as king.

(PELIAS stares in astonishment, then laughs)

PELIAS:

The fleece is in Colchis.

JASON:

Yes.

PELIAS:

No one has ever gone there.

JASON:

I'll go. I will.

(PELIAS sheathes his blade)

PELIAS:

Yes. I give you the oath of a king: if you bring the fleece back to Thessaly, back where it belongs, then, with humble forbearance, I will step aside and make you king.

JASON:

I'll, I'll need a ship. And... provisions for the journey.

PELIAS:

Of course. Anything. You can depend on me, nephew.

(PELIAS laughs again.

Shift: bright sunlight. JASON blinks. PELIAS orates:)

People of lolcus! I bring great tidings! The golden fleece of Phrixus will return to Thessaly! The golden ram was ours! Its fleece belongs to us! With the fleece hanging in the temple Thessaly will be the most powerful nation on earth! This man, Jason, son of Aeson, will bring the golden fleece home! Jason!

(Grabs JASON's hand and raises it high. We hear percussive music as JASON receives the crowd's acclamation.

Slow shift: a beach. JASON approaches a small derelict ship. He brushes sand and grime away to read the name on the prow)

JASON:  
Hesperia. This is my ship? I'll never get to Colchis.

(A MAN enters, a worn canvas bag slung over his shoulder. He sees JASON, smiles, assumes a heroic stance)

MAN:  
Jason, son of Aeson, your troubles are over.

JASON:  
They are?

MAN:  
I'm here.

JASON:  
And who are you?

MAN:  
I am the strongest man in the world.

JASON:  
You are?

MAN:  
I can break large rocks in half with my head.

(Goes to the wrecked ship, spits on his hands, then lifts it high into the air)

Arrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrr.... Do you see? Strong.

JASON:  
Please be careful. That's our ship.

MAN:  
This?

JASON:  
Put it down, carefully, please.

(The MAN does)

MAN:  
My name is Hercules. I've come to join your brave band of adventurers.

JASON:  
There's no "band". You're the only one.

HERCULES:

No.

JASON:

I'm afraid so.

HERCULES:

This is the greatest adventure in history. I'd've thought Thessalians from all over would heed the call.

JASON:

You'd be wrong.

HERCULES:

They're cowards.

JASON:

No, just smart. No offense.

HERCULES:

They're coming. I'm sure of it.

JASON:

Everyone is afraid of Pelias. Afraid of what he might do to their families if they join me. Look at the ship he's given me.

(HERCULES claps a hand on JASON's shoulder.  
JASON staggers)

HERCULES:

Courage, Captain. Courage.

(A MAN, bent with age, enters)

There, do you see? Have you come to join us, old fellow? Hahahahaha!

(The MAN ignores HERCULES, goes to JASON. He grasps his shoulders, his arms, JASON's hands)

OLD MAN:

You have your father's hands. Strong hands. But you have your mother's eyes.

(Lets JASON's hands go)

Your father and I built the greatest fleet in the world. He had a great instinct for ships. My name is Argos.

(Looks at the Hesperia)

OLD MAN, con't:

This is the ship Pelias has given you?

(Examines it)

This is a good ship.

HERCULES:

Ha!

ARGOS:

Do you see this mark, here, under the prow? I built this ship. It's a good ship. I will make it seaworthy.

JASON:

Will it be strong enough to take me to Colchis?

ARGOS:

No one has ever gone there, so I can't answer that.

JASON:

How long will it take you to get it ready?

ARGOS:

Three days.

HERCULES:

Hail, Argos! Hail! Your heart is true, and though you are old and decrepit, you are... skilled. I am certain beyond any doubt that your brave ship will carry us—

ARGOS:

Excuse me. You are...?

HERCULES:

Hercules!

ARGOS:

Country boy, are you?

HERCULES:

Do you insult me, old man?

ARGOS:

I wouldn't dare. But I do have some advice: be careful. Pelias's spies are everywhere. Keep to yourselves — and be quiet.

(Shift: the beach, several days later, late at night.  
JASON and HERCULES are sitting by a small fire)

JASON:

Hercules, how is that you're so strong, when you're... not all that... big?

HERCULES:

When I was a boy I decided to be the world's strongest man.

JASON:

You decided?

HERCULES:

Like you decided to be king.

JASON:

I didn't "decide" to be king. My father was king. The greatest king Thessaly has ever had. And I'm... his son.

HERCULES:

And you decided to take his place, and that's why we're embarking on this grand suicidal adventure, bringing the golden fleece of Phrixus back to Thessaly.

(Suddenly stands, goes into the shadows, then returns, dragging a young MAN)

Skulking in the shadows, Captain. Should I kill him?

JASON:

Please stop calling me "Captain". All right? And no, don't kill him.

(HERCULES searches the MAN, roughly)

MAN:

Hey!

HERCULES:

No weapons.

JASON:

Who are you?

MAN:

My name is Orpheus.

HERCULES:

What do you want?

ORPHEUS:

To go to Colchis with you. To bring the golden fleece of Phrixus back to Thessaly.

HERCULES:

Do you see? I told you men would come. Orpheus, eh? What can you do, Orpheus?

JASON:

Can you sail a ship?

ORPHEUS:

Never been on one before.

JASON:

Oh.

HERCULES:

Are you good with a bow and arrow? A spear? I know. You possess the sword of Theseus, the hardest, sharpest blade in the world. With a sword like that you can slice a fly in half.

ORPHEUS:

Weapons make me ill.

JASON:

Can you read the stars? We need a navigator.

ORPHEUS:

Sorry.

HERCULES:

I bet you're a fast runner, fleet as wingéd Mercury.

ORPHEUS:

Hardly.

HERCULES:

Can you cook?

ORPHEUS:

No.

JASON:

What do you do?

ORPHEUS:

I'm a poet.

HERCULES (after a moment, bursts out laughing):

A poet! What possible use do think we would have for a poet? We need men. Brave men, stout-hearted men.

(Shoves him)

HERCULES, con't:

Get out of here, poet. Go play your lyre for the ladies.

ORPHEUS:

Don't you want to be famous? Don't you want the world to celebrate your courage, your ferocity of spirit? I will compose an epic that will endure through the ages. You will become gods among humankind. Ages hence, in a shining city by the sea, where buildings pierce the stars, your exploits will be celebrated.

HERCULES:

Welcome, Orpheus!

JASON:

Welcome, yes. Come, make yourself comfortable. Sit. Eat. We sail at dawn.

(They sit)

ORPHEUS:

Where are the others?

JASON:

There are no others.

ORPHEUS:

It's just us three?

JASON (nods)

ORPHEUS:

Well, Captain, three is—

JASON (quickly):

Don't call me "Captain".

ORPHEUS:

Three is a very lucky number. If we had a huge warship, bristling with weapons and dozens of sailors, it would attract attention. Our enemies would send dozens of ships to meet us. But three sailors on a small craft, with finesse, and resourcefulness, and... a lot of luck, can go wherever they want.

(Stands)

We three, we intrepid three. Jason. Orpheus.

(Looks at HERCULES)



HERCULES:  
Hercules.

ORPHEUS:  
Hercules. We are, and I say this of course with deep humility, Thessaly's pride. I tell you true, my friends, when the gentle fingers of dawn pinch the cheeks of the sky to bring forth the first blush of day we will sail upon the vast Sea of Pontus where lurk dangers and monsters and powers unknown. Are we frightened?

HERCULES:  
No!

ORPHEUS:  
Of course we are frightened, but we know that the fire of our resolve will melt fear away.

(Shift: the next morning. ARGOS enters)

ARGOS:  
She's ready. I've given her a new hull of Mount Pelion oak. New decking. A white pine mast. New sails. New rudder. She's tough, maybe the toughest craft I've ever built. But... there's something else.

JASON:  
What?

ARGOS:  
I believe this ship is alive.

JASON:  
Alive?

ARGOS:  
I can feel it in my feet as I stand on her deck, like a tightly coiled animal ready to spring forward.

ORPHEUS:  
We must give her a new name.

(Everyone looks at JASON. Moment)

JASON:  
We'll call her the Argo, after her maker.

ARGOS:  
I'm honored.

ORPHEUS:  
And we are the Argonauts.

(ARGOS gives JASON an old rolled up parchment)

ARGOS:

This has been in my family for generations.

JASON (unrolls it):

What is it?

ARGOS:

A map of the world. Colchis is...

(Points)

Here. Or so it's thought. Ten degrees north of the rising sun.

JASON:

This is a great gift, Argos.

ORPHEUS:

See how the sun rises. The sea gives back thousands of sun reflections.  
Like, like... jewels.

HERCULES (to JASON):

The Argonauts await your orders.

JASON (after a moment):

Let's... shove off.

(The ARGONAUTS board the Argo)

Hercules, take the, the...

ARGOS:

Tiller.

(HERCULES obeys. ARGOS gives them a push.  
We hear a sound, like a deep trumpet blast)

It's the Argo! I told you, she's alive!

(We hear it again. ARGOS backs away as the ship  
moves into the sea)

The people of Thessaly pray for your safe return!

(ARGOS is gone. HERCULES is at the rudder)

HERCULES:

She skips over the sea!

JASON:  
Hold it steady!

ORPHEUS:  
Look! People gathering on the shore.

JASON:  
No one's waving. They're just watching.

HERCULES:  
They're frightened. Pelias will string them up if they wave.

ORPHEUS:  
Well, we can wave.

(Waves, shouts)

Good-bye, Thessalians! We will return and when we do you'll have a new king, a good king!

(The Argo trumpets again and surges forward)

JASON:  
Watch those rocks!

HERCULES:  
Rocks?

JASON:  
Turn her to, to, to port.

(The Argo lurches)

No! Star, starb— That way!

(The rocks shoot past, dangerously close)

Ohhhhhhhhhhhhhhhh....

HERCULES:  
Whoo! Argos was right, this is a good ship.

ORPHEUS:  
The world is ours!

(Again we hear the trumpeting of the Argo. Music surges)

ARGONAUTS:

Whoooooooooooooooooooo!!!

(Slow shift: dense, impenetrable darkness.  
ORPHEUS is in the prow, taking soundings)

ORPHEUS:

Fifteen feet.

JASON:

Shallower. We must be approaching an island. Buy why isn't it on the map?

HERCULES:

It's an old map.

JASON:

Islands don't sprout like mushrooms.

ORPHEUS:

Twelve feet.

JASON:

And why is it so dark? It's not past mid-day. Strange.

ORPHEUS:

Nine feet.

JASON:

We're going to run aground.

HERCULES:

Do you hear that?

JASON and ORPHEUS:

What?

HERCULES:

Waves lapping on a beach.

ORPHEUS:

Seven feet. Five. Three.

(We hear the soft sound of the ship's prow hitting  
sand)

Land ho.

(The ARGONAUTS jump out, pull the Argo up onto  
the beach)

JASON:

What now?

HERCULES:

I'm hungry.

ORPHEUS:

That bread was stale ten days ago.

JASON:

We should look for food. But it's so dark.

(Hesitates, then decides)

Hercules, stay with the Argo. Orpheus and I will see what we can find.

HERCULES:

No!

JASON:

I, I, I need you to guard the ship. If something were to happen to the Argo...  
Okay?

HERCULES:

Yes, sir.

JASON:

Come on, Orpheus.

(Shift: another part of the island)

ORPHEUS:

Ow!

JASON:

What, what happened?!

ORPHEUS:

Stubbed my toe.

JASON:

Oh. This way. I think I can see a path.

ORPHEUS:

I see it, too.

HARPY (offstage, screeching, very loud):

Caw! Caw! Caw!

JASON:

What was that!?

ORPHEUS:

It sounded like... a bird. A rather big bird.

JASON:

Let's get out of here.

(Lights reveal a table laden with food: fruit, olives, fish, meats, jugs of wine)

ORPHEUS:

Look.

(Goes to the table)

Grapes, apples, smoked meats.

JASON:

Don't touch it.

ORPHEUS:

Oysters, still briny from the sea.

(Sniffs the jugs)

Wine. What's it doing here?

JASON:

I don't know. And I don't understand why it's so dark.

(ORPHEUS is staring at the food)

No, Orpheus.

ORPHEUS:

I'm so tired of tepid water and flatbread dry enough to break your teeth.

MAN'S VOICE:

Help yourselves.

JASON and ORPHEUS (startled):

Aaaagggghhhh!

(A MAN enters, bent, and shuffling — from weakness more than age)

MAN:

It's quite delicious, I'm sure. She brings it every day. The smell of it wafts

MAN, con't:  
into my cave. I can almost taste the salt of the cheese—

(As he draws closer we see that he's blind)

—the tender goat meat, the sweet grapes. I can feel, even in my cave, the warmth of bread just out of the oven.

ORPHEUS:  
Ohhhhhhhhhhhhhhhhhhhhh...

MAN:  
Help yourselves. She won't mind.

ORPHEUS (looks pleadingly at JASON)

(JASON nods. ORPHEUS goes to the table and tears into the food)

JASON:  
Who are you? And what is this island called?

MAN:  
Hell. For me.

JASON:  
It's not on the map.

MAN:  
It floats. Drifts. My name is Phineus.

ORPHEUS:  
Phineus the Seer?

PHINEUS:  
Yes.

ORPHEUS:  
Aren't you dead?

PHINEUS:  
If only. If only.

ORPHEUS (goes to JASON):  
He has the gift of prophecy.

PHINEUS:  
No point in whispering, boy, I have the hearing of a hawk. Yes. I have the gift, or the burden, of prophecy. I know what Zeus is going to do even before he does. Quite naturally he resents this, and so finally he punished me.

JASON:

Made you blind?

PHINEUS:

Oh, I was always blind. But I was strong. Not the pathetic creature you see now. Life surged through my veins. Now I'm so weak it's all I can do to move.

JASON:

What...?

PHINEUS:

I'll show you. Be sure to stay back. She won't hurt you if you stay back.

(Goes to the table, picks up an apple)

HARPY (offstage, closer):

CAW! CAW! CAW!

(Enters. The HARPY is a creature with fierce eyes, a sharp beak, claws of a hawk, a woman's breasts, and wide black wings)

Phineussssss! Phineussssss!

(She rushes at PHINEUS and whips her wings at him, knocking him down)

PHINEUS:

You see? She sets the table but won't let me eat!

HARPY (a cackling laugh):

Heeheeheeheeheeheehee!!!

(Picks up a piece of stale bread and crumbles it over PHINEUS's face)

PHINEUS:

Crumbs, tiny pieces of rotted fruit, is all I'm allowed.

ORPHEUS (charges forward):

Let him eat!

PHINEUS:

Stay back!

HARPY (faces ORPHEUS and JASON):

And what have we here? Mmmmmm, fresh human meat, always nice for a change.





(The darkness dissipates, replaced by rich warm sunlight)

PHINEUS:

Ohhhhhhhhhhhhhhhhh...

(JASON goes to the table, gets some food, brings it to PHINEUS)

JASON:

May I offer you some cheese?

(Shift: another part of the island, later. PHINEUS tilts his face upward. JASON and ORPHEUS watch him, smiling)

PHINEUS:

It's been so long since I've felt the sun on my face. Take me to the overlook. I want the sea in front of me.

(JASON helps PHINEUS move to the edge of a cliff)

JASON:

There.

PHINEUS:

I can smell it. Sharp and pure. Describe it.

JASON:

Describe the sea? Well, it's... blue, and... wet.

PHINEUS:

Yes, yes.

JASON:

Orpheus. Tell Phineus about the sea.

ORPHEUS (comes forward):

There's a freshening breeze today — do you feel it?

PHINEUS:

Oh, yes.

ORPHEUS:

It's riffing the water in the bay. Below us the shallows are clear, but farther out you can see dark fingers, coming from the Deep, waiting to pull us down. Oh, it's almost to be desired, to let the sea pull you down, down, down.

PHINEUS:

The sea won't take you, Orpheus. Your old age will pain you, but you'll have memories you can wrap yourself in, like a soft blanket.

ORPHEUS (stares)

PHINEUS:

Continue.

ORPHEUS:

The horizon... shines.

(HERCULES enters, carrying tools)

HERCULES:

She's not going anywhere, believe me.

PHINEUS:

You must leave, then. I will be fine here. I can tend my garden, my goats.

JASON:

May I ask of you a favor?

PHINEUS:

Anything.

JASON:

Will you look into my future?

PHINEUS:

Do you really want me to show you what is waiting for you?

JASON:

I can face it, I know I can.

PHINEUS:

You say that as if looking at the future takes courage.

JASON:

Doesn't it?

PHINEUS:

A truly courageous person faces his future blind.

JASON:

I want to know see something. Something. I need to.

PHINEUS:

Come close. Kneel.

(JASON obeys. PHINEUS puts his hands on JASON's head. Slow shift: the lights grow darker, ominous. Then a sound is heard, a low soft hissing.)

Soft eerie music. A SORCERESS appears, dressed in sumptuous flowing robes)

SORCERESS:

Jason. Jassssssson. I can almost see you.

SORCERESS:

Ah. There you are. Jassssssssssssson.

(Reaches for him. The hissing grows louder, louder, suddenly peaking in a vicious snarl)

JASON:

Ohhhhhhhhhhhhhhh!!!

(Jumps to his feet. Lights normalize. JASON's gasping for breath)

HERCULES:

What was it, Captain? What did you see?

JASON:

A... woman.

(Smiles)

A beautiful woman.

HERCULES:

Well, there you have it. Beautiful women loom in our futures. Let's go, eh? We don't want to keep the ladies waiting.

(Exeunt HERCULES, ORPHEUS and PHINEUS.  
JASON stands, alone, hesitating.)

Slow shift: The Argo, some weeks later. A hot still day. HERCULES is at the helm, steering. ORPHEUS is in the prow, on lookout. JASON sits, lost in thought)

HERCULES:

Captain!

JASON (starts):

What? What?

HERCULES:

Did you ever imagine the world was so big?

JASON:

I had no idea.

HERCULES:

How long since we've seen land?

JASON:

Weeks.

HERCULES:

I bet if you dove into the sea here and swam straight down, you'd end up...

ORPHEUS:

Dead.

HERCULES:

Captain, tell us about your vision woman.

JASON:

Ohhhhhhhhhhhhhhhhhhh...

HERCULES:

Come on. What did she say?

JASON:

I... don't remember.

ORPHEUS:

Land!

JASON (jumps up, goes to ORPHEUS):

Where?

ORPHEUS:

You see? To port?

JASON:

Yes.

(Finds the parchment map, unrolls and studies it)

HERCULES:

It's Colchis. I know it is. Our journey's nearly over, thanks be to great Zeus.

ORPHEUS:

I see two mountains, big ones.

JASON (looking at the map):

Lemnos.

HERCULES:

I've heard of Lemnos. It's famous for its honey. They use it to baste roasting meat, and for honey tea, honey cakes.

ORPHEUS:

I can smell it!

(HERCULES and ORPHEUS look at JASON imploringly)

JASON:

Steer us a course for Lemnos.

(Shift: a telescoped series of scenes as the Argo approaches the island)

Ease us off to starboard, Hercules, do you see that bay?

ORPHEUS:

What a beautiful city. Every building is white.

JASON:

Take us past the breakers.

ORPHEUS:

Soldiers!

JASON:

What?

ORPHEUS:

Gathering on the shore, there, do you see? Hundreds of them.

HERCULES:

Behind us, ships! We're trapped in this bay!

JASON:

They won't hurt us. We've done no harm.

ORPHEUS:

They're all women.

HERCULES:

What?

(HERCULES joins ORPHEUS and JASON at the prow)

JASON:

Steer the ship, Hercules.

(HERCULES returns to the helm)

HERCULES:

They're beautiful.

ORPHEUS:

Yes. Well, as beautiful as women armed with swords, spears, clubs, bows and arrows can be. Visions of loveliness.

JASON:

Take us to the beach.

(HIPSYPYLE enters, beautiful but intimidating,  
carrying a bow in one hand and a sword in the other)

WOMAN:

I am Hipsypyle, queen of Lemnos.

JASON:

Why do you greet us armed with swords and archers? Why do your ships hem us in and prevent our escape?

HIPSYPYLE:

Who are you?

JASON:

I am Jason. These are my companions, Hercules and Orpheus. Our ship is the Argo. We come from Thessaly. We are peaceful men.

HIPSYPYLE:

You're a long way from home.

JASON:

Are we your prisoners?

HIPSYPYLE:

Come ashore, Jason of Thessaly. You've nothing to fear from an island of women.

JASON:

Are there no men?

HIPSYPYLE:

None. A curse took hold of them. There was great strife between the women and men. Finally the women mastered the men and drove them off. It was a terrible time. I was but a child.

HERCULES:

How do you live without men?

HIPSYPYLE:

Step onto the beach.

(JASON hesitates, glancing at HERCULES and ORPHEUS. Then he steps off the Argo. HIPSYPYLE kneels before JASON)

You are most welcome, most welcome in Lemnos.

(To HERCULES and ORPHEUS)

You look hungry.

HERCULES:

You're right there, your majesty.

HIPSYPYLE (shouts):

Maidens of Lemnos! Light the fires! Send runners to the far ends of the island! We feast! Music, wine, laughter! Let the feasting go on and on! Light the fires!

(Celebratory music. HIPSYPYLE goes to JASON, grasps his shoulders)

Jason.

(Shift: night. A feast in progress. Music continues. JASON, ORPHEUS and HERCULES sit, bright firelight dancing on their faces. HIPSYPYLE brings in garlands of flowers and crowns the ARGONAUTS)

HERCULES:

Orpheus! What will you call this part of the epic?

ORPHEUS:

"The Honey-Scented Vales of Lemnos". Oh, it will be a long and sweet interlude. Our weary salt-cured heroes will rest, bathing in warm flower-water, eating peeled grapes and fat oysters, wearing garlands of lemon blossoms and lavender, and dancing!

(Stands and dances, as the music builds)

Dancing with the lithe and beautiful Lemnian maidens. Argonauts! Dance!

(HERCULES lumbers to his feet and dances)

Captain!



(JASON smiles, shakes his head. Music builds. ORPHEUS and HERCULES dance with increasing abandon. Then, layered over the music, we hear the serpentine hissing we heard with the SORCERESS, building, as before, to a frightening snarl.

Shift: a villa in Lemnos. Night. JASON is alone, breathing shallowly, struggling to shake off the effects of a nightmare. HIPSYPYLE enters, opposite)

HIPSYPYLE:

Jason, are you all right? I heard a shout.

JASON:

I was... dreaming.

HIPSYPYLE:

Are you comfortable? Your room, your bed?

JASON:

My suite of rooms, yes, they are luxuriously comfortable.

HIPSYPYLE:

What was your dream?

JASON:

It was a, a, a...

HIPSYPYLE:

Yes?

JASON:

A dream.

(HIPSYPYLE draws closer, then reaches out to touch JASON)

Like this palace, these endless feasts, these astonishingly beautiful women, this whole island.

HIPSYPYLE:

Lemnos is no dream. The golden fleece of Phrixus, that is a dream. A bedtime story that became a legend, and now the legend is seen as fact. But it was never anything but a child's fantasy.

(Touches him again)

Jason. I want you to be my king.

JASON:

I am king. Of Thessaly.

HIPSYPPYLE:

Then why aren't you there? Why are you sailing in that ridiculous ship, chasing a delusion?

JASON:

The fleece exists. In Colchis.

HIPSYPPYLE:

There is no golden fleece.

JASON:

Atalanta told me there is.

HIPSYPPYLE:

Atalanta? A god? You believe in gods?

JASON:

Yes.

HIPSYPPYLE:

Did she descend in a fiery chariot? Did you see her face emblazoned across the sky?

JASON:

She was a... woman.

HIPSYPPYLE:

She was some servant girl sent by Pelias to trick you into leaving Thessaly. Don't you see that?

(Moment)

You're here now, and here is where you must stay. You will be my king. Hercules and Orpheus will be lords, with huge estates. You will never have to work again. We have been too long without men.

(Another moment)

Your nightmares will fade.

JASON:

Will they?

HIPSYPPYLE:

I promise.

(Again reaches out to touch him but this time JASON steps back)

JASON:  
Argonauts! Hercules! Orpheus!

(HERCULES and ORPHEUS rush in)

HERCULES:  
What is it?!

JASON:  
Queen Hipsypyle has made us an offer. That we stay here on Lemnos. It means a throne for me, enormous estates for you, honey, fruit, rich cheese, sweet wine. What do you think?

ORPHEUS:  
And in return for this paradise?

HIPSYPYLE:  
You will never leave this island.

(ORPHEUS and HERCULES look at each other)

HERCULES:  
It sounds... lovely.

ORPHEUS:  
It does.

HERCULES and ORPHEUS (after a beat, simultaneously):  
No.

HIPSYPYLE:  
A shame. Unfortunately, I cannot allow you to leave Lemnos.

(Raises her arm, in a signal. We hear the deep throaty bellow of the Argo. ORPHEUS rushes to a balcony)

ORPHEUS:  
The Argo! They are trying to burn her!

JASON:  
Stop them!

(HIPSYPYLE pulls a dagger from her robes and rushes at the ARGONAUTS. There's a brief struggle, then HERCULES disarms her, holds the dagger to her throat)

JASON, con't:

Tell your women to stand back from our ship.

HIPSYPYLE:

Get back from the Argo.

JASON:

Douse the torches in the sea.

HIPSYPYLE:

Put out the torches.

JASON:

If your archers harm any of us, you die. Tell them.

HIPSYPYLE:

Let the Argonauts depart.

JASON:

Louder.

HIPSYPYLE:

Let the Argonauts depart!

HERCULES:

Another thing, your majesty: Lemnian honey is mediocre.

(There's another trumpeting bellow from the Argo.  
The ARGONAUTS jump on board)

JASON:

Set the sail! Let's go!

(With a bellow the Argo takes off, moving fast)

ORPHEUS:

This is going to be brilliant! In a cloud of whistling arrows did the heroes depart the moonlit isle of Lemnos, with the Lemnian maidens, they of such shocking beauty, hurling vile curses from the cliffs in their exquisite voices!

HERCULES (bereft):

I lied to Queen Hipsypyle. I loved that honey.

(Slow shift: The Argo, some weeks later.  
Desolation. The sun is bright but the air is cold and the ARGONAUTS shiver. ORPHEUS is at the prow on lookout. HERCULES dozes at the tiller and JASON sits on the deck)

JASON:  
Orpheus, are you awake?

ORPHEUS:  
Yes, Captain.

JASON:  
Anything?

ORPHEUS:  
Believe me, if I saw something besides this endless wall of rock I would let you know.

(JASON stands, joins ORPHEUS in the prow)

JASON:  
Have you taken a sounding?

ORPHEUS:  
The water is leagues deep. And cold. Nothing can live in water like this.

JASON:  
There aren't even any birds.

ORPHEUS:  
Or clouds.

(Glances at HERCULES)

Is he all right?

JASON:  
He's hungry.

ORPHEUS:  
I'm worried about him. He hasn't spoken for days.

HERCULES (eyes still closed):  
Keep your worries to yourself, poet.

(HERCULES slowly stands and faces JASON and ORPHEUS)

We're going to die out here. We've no food. No fresh water.

JASON:  
No.

HERCULES:

This is the end of the earth.

JASON:  
Colchis is beyond this cliff.

HERCULES:  
Colchis doesn't exist. The Lemnians were right. We're chasing a fantasy.  
There is nothing beyond this cliff.

JASON:  
There is a way through.

HERCULES:  
There isn't.

JASON (with as much authority as he can muster):  
Hercules. Go back to the helm. Steer us along the face of this cliff.

HERCULES:  
No.

JASON (after a pause):  
Orpheus. Take the tiller.

(ORPHEUS hesitates. Then he moves toward the  
stern. HERCULES blocks his way)

Hercules.

HERCULES (voice now has a crazed edge):  
Don't you understand? We've discovered what this world really is: a prison,  
enclosed by an endless wall of cold blank stone.

ORPHEUS:  
No.

HERCULES:  
We've seen it, and now we're doomed to go insane, because we know the  
horrible truth.

ORPHEUS:  
This world is not a prison.

HERCULES:  
It is.

ORPHEUS:  
No. If all this is a cold stone prison, then why can we imagine a world filled  
with gods, where golden rams can fly? There is magic everywhere.

HERCULES:

You're going to tell me Zeus is sending a gigantic eagle to scoop us up in his talons, carry us to Colchis.

ORPHEUS:

Why not? This world burns with god fire.

JASON:

I can feel it.

ORPHEUS:

Thank you.

JASON:

No, I mean I can really feel it, in my feet. Can't you?

(Moment)

HERCULES:

A current! A strong current!

JASON:

Keep us steady!

(HERCULES leaps into the stern while ORPHEUS and JASON rush to the prow)

ORPHEUS:

It's pulling us straight in, we're going to smash on the rock!

JASON:

Hercules, tack us back and forth, maybe we can see what's there!

(HERCULES steers, pulling hard against the current)

ORPHEUS (points):

There! An opening!

(We hear the sound of rushing seawater)

The current's pulling us straight in!

JASON:

It's too narrow!

HERCULES:

I can't control it!

ORPHEUS:

We're gonna smash!

ARGONAUTS:

AaaaaaaaaaggggggghhhhhhhhhHHHHHHHHHHHH!

(The sound of water crescendos, then cuts out.

Shift: silence. The Argo is in a narrow passage between two sheer walls of rock. Light is weird, dancing water shadows)

ORPHEUS:

Look, we can touch both walls of rock.

JASON:

Take a sounding.

(ORPHEUS throws in the sounding rope)

ORPHEUS:

Deep.

(Shouts)

Hello!

ORPHEUS'S ECHO VOICE:

Hello, hello, hello, hello....

JASON (at the prow, peering forward):

Look, it twists to the left. Orpheus, lets grab the rock, pull the Argo forward. Hercules, hard to port.

(The Argo moves, twisting, as JASON and ORPHEUS pull it along)

Starboard!

(HERCULES moves the tiller)

ORPHEUS:

How far does this go?

JASON:

Hercules, starboard again, just a bit.

HERCULES:

We're going to drop off the edge of the world.

JASON:



Quiet.

HERCULES:  
This is the end.

JASON:  
I hear something.

(A still moment)

ORPHEUS:  
What is it?

JASON:  
There.

(We hear deep rumbling, soft and far away, but disturbing: Boom. Boom. Boom)

What was that?

HERCULES:  
We've no business here. This is insanity.

(More rumbling, louder, closer)

ORPHEUS:  
Look, up ahead! The cliffs are coming together!

JASON:  
Pull us back! Back! Back!

(ORPHEUS and JASON frantically pull the Argo back as the sound of crashing rock crescendos: Boom! Boom! Boom!)

ARGONAUTS:  
Aaaaaaaaaaagggggggghhhhhhhh!!!

(The Argo lurches, nearly capsizes. More Boom! Boom! Boom! But now it's coming from behind the Argo)

ORPHEUS:  
The cliffs are crashing together behind us!

JASON:  
Pull forward!

(They struggle to move the Argo out of harms way as the sounds crescendo: Boom! Boom! Boom! The sound reverberates, fades. HERCULES sinks to his knees)

HERCULES:

We'll never get out of here!

JASON:

Quiet! Quiet!

(Moment)

It's stopped. For now.

ORPHEUS:

Maybe... the cliffs can, can hear us. Maybe, if we move quietly...

JASON:

It's not the noise we make.

HERCULES:

What if the walls of rock right here smash together? We'll be crushed.

JASON:

Quiet. Look, I need to... to be alone.

ORPHEUS:

Hard to be alone on a ship this size, Captain.

JASON:

Just... give me a moment.

HERCULES:

What're you going to do, pray?

JASON:

Yes.

(HERCULES and ORPHEUS move away from JASON.)

Shift: lights isolate JASON. He kneels)

Look to the sky.

(Looks up)

There isn't much sky here, just a blue slash between black cliffs. It'll have to do. Atalanta. If you're listening... The Argonauts need you. Are we really at

the edge of the world? At the moment of our deaths? Are you there? I need you, Atalanta. Look to the sky. To the sky. Look to the sky.

(A white bird comes fluttering through the narrow passage, glowing with otherworldly light. It lands on the prow. JASON sees it, reacts)

JASON, con't:

You came down the passage. You're from the other side.

(The bird trembles, flaps its wings)

No, no, no. Don't fly. Not yet.

(Stands. Lights expand)

Argonauts. Prepare to move.

HERCULES:

Move? Are you insane?

JASON:

Hercules, if you value your life you'll do exactly as I say. Orpheus, when I say pull we'll move the ship down the passage as fast as we can. Understood?

HERCULES and ORPHEUS:

Yes, Captain.

(The bird begins flying down the passage)

JASON:

Pull! Pull! Hercules! Do you see that bird?!

HERCULES:

Yes!

JASON:

Don't lose sight of it! Our lives depend on it! It'll show us when it's safe to move.

(The Argo moves, following the bird. Suddenly the bird stops moving forward. We hear the approaching Boom! Boom! Boom! of the Clashers)

Stop!

HERCULES:

We're going to be crushed!

JASON:

No, we won't!

(The booming stops)

ORPHEUS:

That was close.

(The bird starts flying again)

JASON:

It's safe to move forward! Pull! Pull!

(They begin pulling the Argo through the passage, following the movement of the bird, stopping when the bird hovers, moving forward when the bird does. The Boom! Boom! Boom! continues, and now music is layered into it, as the Argo twists its way through the passage. Finally, it emerges into bright warm sunlight. As the Argo trumpets in triumph:)

ARGONAUTS (whoop in wild joy):

Whoooooooooooooooooooo!!!

(The bird hovers briefly, then flies away.  
HERCULES sinks to his knees, shaking)

JASON (to the sky):

Thank you. Thank you.

ORPHEUS (at the prow):

Land! To port, an island! Do you smell that?

JASON:

What is it?

ORPHEUS:

Flowers.

HERCULES:

Flowers.

(Stands, his spirit returning)

Where there's flowers there's honey, and where there's honey...

(Shift: the SORCERESS appears again, still dressed in bejeweled flowing robes. JASON sees her, reacts. HERCULES goes to the tiller)

Should I steer us a course for the island?

SORCERESS:

I can see you clearly now. Very clearly indeed.

HERCULES:

Captain?

JASON (after a moment, nods vaguely):

Yes. Yes.

HERCULES:

To the island!

SORCERESS:

Welcome to Colchis.

END OF ACT ONE