

★ **Medusa****Jessie Burton****Olivia Lomenech Gill, Illustrator**

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Jessie Burton's *Medusa* is a dazzling, engrossing retelling of a classic that's delivered with a profound feminist twist.

Eighteen-year-old Medusa has been exiled to an isolated, rocky island by Athena, who cursed her and turned her hair into a crown of snakes after Poseidon raped her and desecrated Athena's temple. When a handsome young sailor, Perseus, arrives on the island, Medusa befriends him—and falls in love. Separated by cave walls, Medusa and Perseus have intimate heart-to-heart conversations. Their relationship takes a tragic turn, however, when Medusa and Perseus reveal their true identities to one another.

Told from Medusa's point of view, this is a sympathetic, compassionate tale. Medusa is a woman wronged; her self-reliance and beauty result in scorn and objectification from the townsfolk. Their misogyny contributes to Medusa's curse and banishment. But Medusa herself is vulnerable, wistful, and scared; she struggles with self-esteem. Her conversations with Perseus draw out her confidence and feminist beliefs.

As the book's focus moves to Perseus, its tone shifts to one of veiled unease. Perseus cannot see beyond what's physical, and Medusa's suffering is made even more urgent as their conversations progress. Still, though Medusa's tale could end in tragedy, it's given a twist, tying Medusa to the modern #MeToo movement and empowering young women to live on their own terms, and in their own skins. Gorgeous hand-drawn illustrations of Medusa reinforce the lyrical text, which states that "you cannot break up a myth or wedge it on top of a cliff. A myth finds a way to remember itself. It makes a new shape, rising out of a shallow grave in glory."

NANCY POWELL (January / February 2022)

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