Of

Myths

And

Mortals

By

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Of Myths And Mortals

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Characters

Alex - nominally female, young storyteller

Mum - loving and gentle woman

Dad - kind man with a frayed temper

Toni - self-indulgent teenager

Ash - energetic child

Pip - very young and innocent child

Celia - cautious, but persevering woman who has recently become a stepmother

Curator 1 - confident and methodical tour guide

Curator 2 - much calmer tour guide

Guard - tremendously scary guard of the museum

Florist - one-line role

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Of Myths And Mortals

Prologue - Origin Of The Myth

(Darkness, there is a cacophony of sounds; snippets from the play to come i.e. Mum and Dad arguing, Celia pleading with Alex to open the door, snide comments from Toni, etc., layered with the Curators’ museum tour spiel. The Cast enter during this soundscape. It crescendos with a loud door slam. The Cast freeze Onstage around Alex. Lights up on Alex who is Centrestage, in a cupboard.)

**Alex:** So I’m locked in a cupboard… the way many good stories start. Well this isn’t actually the start. Right now, the stepmother is outside, my mum and dad will probably be arguing and who knows what my brothers and sister are doing.

(Alex takes a dusty Greek vase off the shelf. Alex inspects it for a while, then realises she hasn't introduced herself.)

**Alex:** Oh, and I’m Alex. Where do I start…? I don’t want to get your hopes up… It’s a pretty normal story… quite boring in parts, just a story of a child…

**Mum:** A mum.

**Dad:** A dad.

**Celia:** A stepmother.

**Toni: }**  **(Together)**

**Ash: }**

**Pip: }** Some really annoying siblings.

**All:** And a cupboard.

**Alex:** See I told you. Nothing out of the ordinary; nothing magical, nothing legendary, no monsters or flying horses, no gods or goddesses…

(Alex looks at the vase again. Blows dust off it and rethinks the situation.)

**Alex:** That would make it more interesting. Okay… let’s start again.

(The Cast suddenly move into their positions for the next scene.)

Scene 1 - The Museum

(The Curators confidently stride across the stage leading a tour around the museum. The group includes Alex, Mum, Dad, Celia, Ash, Pip and Toni who is mooching around at the back of the Group.)

**Curator 1:** And here we are in the most popular exhibit of the museum, Ancient Greece. This exhibit has been going strong for the past three years now.

**Pip:** Four years!

**Curator 2:** I’m sorry?

**Pip:** Four years.

**Toni:** Shut up! You’re so embarrassing.

**Curator 1:** It’s been going for three years my dear.

**Alex:** It’s actually been going for four. My mum and dad brought me here on my seventh birthday, when it had just opened and we’ve been coming every September since… I’m eleven now… that’s four years.

**Mum:** She’s right Jo.

(Cast freeze. Alex speaks to the Audience.)

**Alex:** That’s my mum, she calls the tour guide Jo, because she knows him. My mum works at the museum you see, that’s why we come here so often… well one of the reasons. That’s my dad; he’s not with my mum any more, he’s with Celia. **(Pulls a face of disgust.)**

**Dad:** Here, keep an eye on Ash and Pip will you.

**Alex:** This is Ash and Pip my younger brother and sister and that **(searches for Toni)** is Toni, my older brother. This still isn’t the start of the story. As a family, before Celia, we would have a tour around the museum on the first weekend of every September. The summer holidays have finished, children have gone back to school and the museum is empty, so we’d come along to keep Mum company and wander around on her lunch break. And we’d get to pick a toy from the gift shop; me and Toni are too old for that now.

**Toni:** Yeh, that stuff is for kids!

(Ash enthusiastically has an imaginary sword fight using a plastic toy.)

**Alex:** Ash still gets something, normally a weapon of some kind.

**Mum:** And it usually ends up with something breaking.

**Dad:** Or in tears.

**Mum: }** **(Together)**

**Dad: }** Why do we let him pick those things?

**Curator 1:** Eh hem… can I continue?

**Alex:** Oh yes sorry, carry on.

**Curator 1: }** **(Together)**

**Alex: }** Let me take you back.

(Cast move to the first display with Curators, leaving Alex talking to the Audience.)

Scene 2 - Persephone And Hades

**Curator 2:** And so here we have a vase with the illustration of Persephone and Hades…

**Alex:** So we all used to live together; me, my mum, my dad, Toni, Pip and Ash. Mum and Dad were happy and we were best friends.

(Mum and Dad are talking and Alex, Pip, Ash and Toni are playing.)

**Pip:** The best part of Mum living with us was that the house was always colourful and filled with flowers.

**Alex:** Daffodils to be precise.

**Ash:** And her cooking filled every room with the richest of smells, every herb and spice imaginable.

(Dad, Alex, Ash, Pip and Toni react to Mum’s cooking.)

**Curator 2:** Persephone is known as the goddess of vegetation; of springtime and of harvest. Her abduction by Hades, the king of the underworld happened when Persephone was out picking flowers.

**Alex:** When it happened I knew something wasn’t right. The night before I had heard Mum and Dad shouting…

**Pip:** Me too…

**Ash:** We all had…

**Alex:** And today they weren’t speaking at all. Mum and I used to love picking flowers from the market, but that day she wasn’t really interested… she just kept zoning in and out.

**Pip:** What do you think of these ones, Mum?

**Mum: (Distant)**  Sure darling… they’re nice.

**Florist:** I’ve kept some daffodils behind for you today; I know how much you like them.

**Pip:** They’re beautiful. Thank you! Mum look. Mum!

**Mum:** Sure darling… they’re nice.

**Alex:** This went on for some time… and the silence grew.

**Curator 1:** Hades, like a black shroud rising from the earth enveloped the gentle Persephone, carrying her to the darkness of the underworld.

**Alex:** She was spending less time in the house. It didn’t seem to bother Dad. I could tell it was upsetting Toni.

**Toni:** Shut up; no it wasn’t. **(To Audience)** It wasn’t!

**Alex:** Dad said she had a new friend… I still haven’t met him. He’d pull up outside our porch and beep his car horn, to which my mum would kiss me and Toni on the forehead and dash out. He never got out of the car, so I’ve only ever known him as this shadowy figure that appears and goes off with my mum.

**Curator 1:** Persephone was eventually rescued by Hermes, but because she had tasted the fruits of the underworld she was obliged to spend a third of the year with Hades, neglecting the earth, leaving the world with winter and then returning to the gods for the remainder of the year, bringing with her fertility and the warmth of spring.

**Alex:** My mum and dad split up, my mum now lives with the shadowy figure.

**Pip:** The house doesn’t smell the same and there’s a definite lack of colour.

**Alex:** But we do see her every weekend and she never forgets to bring me a handful of flowers… daffodils are my favourite now.

(Alex takes flowers from the vase in the display and smells them.)

**Celia:** Alex, you can’t touch things from the display.

(Alex is not listening.)

**Celia:** Alex. Alex!

**Dad:** Alex, Celia is talking to you.

**Alex:** What? Oh right… yeh… sorry.

**Dad:** You go off into your own little world that much nowadays, you’re turning into your brother. **(Gestures towards Toni.)**

**Toni: (Sarcastically)**  Aw, right, thanks Dad!

**Dad:** Oh so you are with us then?

**Toni:** Err yeah of course I was… what you might see as stupid and bored is actually me intellectually processing all the information around me.

**Dad: (Sarcastically)** Oh sorry, how silly of me. So what exhibit have we just been looking at?

**Toni:** Erm… well obviously… it was about this girl called Stephanie, and her… ladies… making underwear…

**Alex:** *Persephone* and *Hades* in the *underworld*, you idiot.

**Toni:** Oh whatever, same thing!

**Curator 2:** If you’d like to move on to our next display you can see some Ancient Greek crockery featuring the myth of Theseus and the Minotaur.

**Mum:** Come on petal, we’ll pop those back and get you some of your own on the way home.

(Cast move on to next display.)

Scene 3 - Theseus And The Minotaur

**Curator 1:** Crete was at war with Athens, in an attempt to keep the peace, the King of Athens vowed a promise to King Minos of Crete. Every nine years he would send over offerings of people, from his city to go into King Minos’ labyrinth as bait for the Minotaur that the king kept under his castle.

**Alex:** When my mum and dad did get divorced they sat us down and told us all about how it was going to work.

**Ash:** And how we were still going to be one big family.

(Alex, Ash, Pip, Toni, Mum and Dad flashback to that conversation.)

**Dad:** Is that okay?

**Mum:** Do you understand where we are coming from?

**Toni:** Yeh… whatever… that’s fine.

**Alex: (To Audience)**  Fine? That’s fine? It wasn’t fine… it was the complete opposite of fine. They had it all wrapped up and we hadn’t had our say. **(To Mum and Dad.)**  No it’s not fine. If we are still one big family, then there’s a promise you need to make, to us all, we keep the tradition of us going to the museum.

**Toni:** Out of everything you could have picked, that’s what you go for, the museum?

**Alex:** Every September, on the first weekend, no matter what’s been going on, we keep the tradition of going around the museum together.

(Mum and Dad think and mumble to themselves.)

**Alex:** Promise.

**Mum: }** **(Together)**

**Dad: }** We promise.

**Curator 2: }** **(Together)**

**Alex: }** The promise was kept.

(The Cast snap back to being in the museum.)

**Curator 1:** But one year the King of Athens let his son Theseus go to Crete and enter the maze with the intention of killing the Minotaur.

**Alex:** So every September…

**Ash:** Let me tell this part! **(Clears throat and addresses the Audience.)** So every September Alex makes me, Mum, Dad, Pip and Toni walk around these corridors, down the long hallways, looking at the same old things we’ve done time and time again.

**Alex:** Ash will you stop it; this is my story!

**Ash:** It’s boring, *this* is boring. I’m just trying to liven things up, put a bit of fun back into it.

(Ash begins to excitably swing the sword around; trying to get a reaction out of Alex.)

**Alex:** Will you be careful.

**Ash:** Or what?

**Alex:** We’ll get thrown out.

**Ash:** You better come stop me then.

(Ash runs Offstage, still swinging the sword. Alex follows.)

**Curator 2:** After a night of rest, Theseus entered the labyrinth in search of the Minotaur. Cold walls lead on to darker halls…

(Alex and Ash run back Onstage. They are in a much darker, forgotten area of the museum.)

**Alex:** Stop messing around will you, we’ll get into trouble!

**Ash:** Come and stop me.

(Ash swishes the sword around even more enthusiastically.)

**Curator 1:** And then from out of the blackness came the most horrible of beasts; with hot breath and steam coming from its nostrils.

**Toni: (False outrage.)** That’s no way to speak about Celia!

**Dad:** Oi!

**Mum:** Watch your mouth.

(During Curator 2’s next line the Guard appears, looming over Ash and Alex.)

**Curator 2:** Theseus turned the corner and could feel the enormity of the monster looming over him. He turned and there it was…

**Ash: }** **(Together)**

**Alex: }** *Argh*!

**Guard:** What do you think you’re playing at?

**Ash:** She started it.

**Alex:** No I didn’t; it was you.

**Ash:** Was not!

**Alex:** It was, you started messing around, making fun of me and swinging that stupid thing around. **(Takes sword and imitates Ash.)**

**Curator 1:** And with a mighty strike of his dagger Theseus struck the monster sending it crashing to the ground.

(Alex swings sword around and hits Guard in the stomach.)

**Guard:** *Argh*!

**Ash:** Quick!

**Alex:** Run!

(There is a chase of Alex and Ash by the Guard over the Curator’s next speech.)

**Curator 1:** Theseus had been clever and had laid a trail of wool so he could trace his steps back to the entrance and flee the terrors of King Minos’ reign.

(Alex and Ash run and hide behind Mum and Dad as the Guard runs past. The Guard cannot find them and exits. Ash and Alex giggle.)

**Mum:** What’s so funny?

**Alex:** Nothing.

**Ash:** See I told you I could liven things up.

**Curator 2:** This way to the next display.

(The Cast follow the Curators to the next display, except for Toni who is engrossed in texting. Ash notices and runs back to Toni.)

Scene 4 - Narcissus

**Ash:** Toni, Toni! You should have seen it. It was so funny! Toni!

**Toni:** What?

**Ash:** Oh… never mind.

(Ash walks away.)

**Alex:** Toni never used to be like this. In fact, Toni was quite the opposite. He was the big brother every kid dreams of.

**Pip:** Would stop any fight from happening, stand up to Mum and Dad for us and play all of our silly games.

(The above is acted out.)

**Alex:** We’d hang out every night after school before he went to see his friends. Ash idolised him and would copy everything Toni would do.

(Sequence of Toni going through everyday tasks and Ash copying.)

**Curator 2:** Here we have a tapestry from the Hellenistic period portraying the tale of Narcissus and Echo.

**Curator 1:** Echo adored Narcissus and would do nothing but talk about how much she loved him, but Echo was a mischievous nymph and her wicked ways saw her cursed by the goddess Juno; stripping her of her freedom of speech, only allowing her to speak when spoken to.

(Toni is sitting, talking on his phone. Ash is close by and is mimicking some of the conversation.)

**Toni:** Yeh I’ll be over in like ten minutes.

**Ash:** Like ten minutes…

**Toni:** I know it was like well embarrassing!

**Ash:** Like well embarrassing…

**Alex:** Now this would happen quite often with no tears, no teenage tantrums, but after *that* conversation where Mum and Dad sat us down, you remember the one…

(They flashback to the conversation from Scene 3.)

**Dad:** Is that okay?

**Mum:** Do you understand where we are coming from?

**Alex:** And Toni said…

**Toni:** Yeh… whatever… that’s fine.

**Alex:** Well it wasn’t, he obviously wasn’t fine with it. He barely spoke to Mum and Dad after that, didn’t spend time with us after school and was ‘too cool’ to join in with our silly games, as it’d make him look stupid, and so when this happened, this was the reaction Ash received…

(They snap back into the phone conversation.)

**Toni:** Yeh I’ll be over in like ten minutes.

**Ash:** Like ten minutes…

**Toni:** I know it was like well embarrassing!

**Ash:** Like well embarrassing…

**Toni:** Will you shut up? *Will you just shut up*?

**Ash:** What?

**Toni:** Just leave me alone, get out of my room and stay out of my way!

(Ash leaves and sits away from Toni, sulking.)

**Curator 2:** Echo would wait in the woods for Narcissus, but could only repeat his words back to him and whether it was out of selfishness or frustration, Narcissus banished Echo from his sight. Echo vanished and became part of the mountains and can still be heard when passers-by call out.

(Ash mumbles some of Toni’s words with bitterness.)

**Curator 1:** This set Narcissus on a very self-indulgent downward spiral. He became self-obsessed, infatuated by his own looks and cared for no-one else but himself.

(Sound of car horn.)

**Mum:** Toni, can you come down here sweetheart, I’m just off out. Toni? Will you come down please I need you to keep an eye on Pip.

(Toni is preoccupied looking at himself in the mirror.)

**Mum:** Did you hear me?

**Toni:** Yes.

**Mum:** Then why didn’t you answer me?

**Toni:** I’m busy too you know.

**Mum:** What? Doing your hair? You’ve been up there for hours.

**Toni:** I’m going out.

**Mum:** You are not!

**Toni: (Walking Offstage.)** Too late!

**Curator 1:** The gods were not happy with Narcissus’ behaviour. They wanted him to feel what it would be like to love and not be loved in return. One day as he was walking through the mountains he came across a pool. As he gazed into it he saw what he thought was a beautiful water spirit looking back at him. He fell in love with this vision, not realising it was his own reflection.

**Alex: (To Audience)** Now, obviously that can’t happen here. Toni might be a bit slow and stupid, but he’s not a complete moron.

**Pip:** So we’ll have to try something else.

(The action moves back into the museum. Alex moves Ash towards Toni, who is checking out his hair in a mirror. Toni eventually realises that Ash is there.)

**Toni:** What you looking at?

**Ash:** Not sure any more.

**Toni:** What?

**Ash:** You used to be my cool big brother, and now you don’t have time for me… you hardly ever speak to me nowadays.

**Toni:** I’m speaking to you now aren’t I?

**Ash:** You’re not the same.

**Toni:** Oh shut up! You’re so annoying!

**Ash: (Exiting)**  *You’re* so annoying!

**Mum:** Now look what you’ve done!

**Toni:** What?

**Mum:** Exactly, you’re so busy looking at yourself that you don’t even realise what’s going on.

(Toni goes back to texting on his phone.)

**Dad:** Are you listening to your mum?

**Pip:** Will you get off that thing. **(Pip takes the phone off Toni.)**

**Toni:** Give it back!

**Mum:** Go apologise to your brother.

**Toni:** Give it back!

**Dad:** Now!

**Toni:** Pip!

**Alex: (Taking phone from Pip.)** What is wrong with you? Ash is upset and you’re too busy, worrying about a phone or looking at yourself in every mirror we pass.

(Alex gestures with exasperation. She accidentally throws the phone through the mirror. Everyone stops, silent in the shock of what has just happened.)

**Alex:** I’m so sorry.

**Toni:** My phone!

**Guard: (Entering)**  What’s going on here?

**Pip:** Run!

(The same cacophony of sounds from the beginning. With a chase of Alex by the Guard. The rest of the Cast create the sounds with repetitive movements, that lead them back to the positions they were in at the beginning of the play. It ends with the cupboard door slamming again. Lights up on Alex in the cupboard as in the prologue.)

**Alex:** So I’m locked in a cupboard… the way many good stories start, well this isn’t actually the start. Right now, my mum and dad will probably be arguing, who knows what my brothers and sister are doing, there’s a guard chasing after me…

(Celia knocks on the cupboard door.)

**Celia:** Alex… it’s Celia.

**Alex:** And my evil stepmother is now on the other side of the door.

**Celia:** I heard that!

**Alex: (Whispering)** Let me tell you about Celia.

Scene 5 - Medusa

**Curator 2:** A legend was told of a Gorgon monster; a hideous and evil creature.

**Alex:** Let’s call her Celia.

(Through the next speech Celia is transformed into Medusa with Cast Members operating the snakes on her head.)

**Curator 1:** *Medusa* was her name and she had the form of a woman but had snakes as hair and could turn people to stone with just one glance.

**Alex:** We were introduced to her a few months back. Toni didn’t even look at her, just walked right past and out the front door. Ash and Pip were polite enough, but when I looked at her I felt this huge lump in my throat and I felt my heart sink into my stomach. What was she doing to me? I went to my room and tried to keep all contact with her to a minimum. I didn’t want to feel like that again.

(Alex walks past Celia a few times avoiding eye contact. Celia waves in an attempt to get Alex’s attentions.)

**Curator 2:** Many a hero had tried to slay the monster, none as brave as Perseus. For all she was hideous, she was a cunning creature and would lure men to look at her.

**Celia:** Hi Alex.

(Alex walks past ignoring her. The snakes hiss and look at Alex.)

**Celia:** How’s your day been?

(Alex walks past ignoring her again. The snakes hiss and look at Alex.)

**Celia:** Let me know if you want to chat about anything.

(Alex walks past ignoring her again. The snakes hiss and look at Alex.)

**Curator 2:** But Perseus was clever too and brought with him a silver shield which would reflect Medusa’s face so he would not look at her directly.

(Celia stops Alex.)

**Celia:** I just want to talk to you. Get to know you a bit better… and you can get to know me too.

**Alex:** What’s that? **(Points over Celia’s shoulder.)**

**Celia:** What? **(Looks in the direction Alex pointed.)** I don’t see any…

(Alex runs away, back to the cupboard. Celia turns back to see that Alex has gone. Celia disappointedly walks away and settles back outside the cupboard door.)

**Celia:** Oh.

**Curator 1:** Using gifts from the gods, Perseus beheaded the wicked Medusa.

**Alex: (To Audience)** I think if I were to do that I’d be in more trouble than I am already.

**Celia:** You’re not in trouble… just come out and we can sort it.

**Alex:** There’s nothing to sort. You’re with Dad, Toni hates me, I can’t help Ash and… I miss my mum being around.

**Celia:** Oh sweetheart I know you do… of course you do… I totally understand.

**Alex:** No you don’t!

**Celia:** My mum and dad split up when I was roughly your age and I hated it. I hated them, I hated their new partners… everything, but I learned it was best for them both… and for me too.

**Alex:** How?

**Celia:** They were happier, which meant they were happier around me. They loved me just the same, that part didn’t change.

**Alex:** Doesn’t feel like it.

**Celia:** It might take time for you to get used to it, but you will. **(Pause)** Are you going to come out now?

**Alex:** No!

**Celia:** Can I come in then?

**Alex:** I guess.

(Celia goes in and sits next to Alex.)

**Celia:** You never know… you might even get to like me.

**Alex:** I don’t want a new mum.

**Celia:** Oh no, your mum will always be your mum… it would just be nice if we could be… friends… maybe.

**Alex:** Maybe.

**Mum: (Moving closer to the cupboard.)** Alex! Alex where are you?

**Celia:** We’re in here.

**Dad:** What are you doing in a cupboard?

**Alex:** Oh it’s a long story. **(To Audience.)** And I’m not going from the start again.

**Dad:** Come on get out of there.

**Alex:** Where’s the guard?

**Mum:** Oh he needed a sit down…

**Ash:** Toni had to look after me and Pip, while Mum and Dad were looking for you. And then Toni started playing with the sword…

**Alex:** You were playing our silly games?

**Toni:** Yeh, whatever!

**Ash:** And when he was doing it the guard ran past… right into the path of the sword.

**Alex:** Not again!

**Dad:** What do you mean, “again”?

**Ash: }**  **(Together)**

**Alex: }** Nothing!

**Mum: (To Celia)** Thank you.

**Celia:** It’s okay, you’ve got some good kids there.

(Alex, Ash, Pip, Toni and Dad are all having a play sword fight. Mum and Celia both watch and smile.)

**Mum:** Come on now!

(The Cast freeze.)

Epilogue - Leaving It In The Past

**Curator 1:** Our last artefact shows the story of a very talented poet and storyteller. He enjoyed life, was happy and was loved, but when his happiness was in jeopardy he took off into a world of monsters and gods to get it back.

**Alex:** Thanks.

**Curator 2:** What? No. His name was…

**Alex:** Alex!

**Curator 1:** No not you, Orpheus. Who went after his love Eurydice.

**Alex:** Oh, so what happened there?

**Curator 2:** After Eurydice died, Orpheus travelled to the underworld and charmed Hades into releasing her. This wish was granted on the condition that Orpheus did not look back at Eurydice until they reached Earth, but he did and she was lost forever.

**Alex:** No point in looking back is there?

**Curator 2:** Well… there is, as long as you can still see what you have now and what exciting things might happen in the future.

(Alex looks at her family and then back to the Curators. Alex smiles.)

**Alex:** I get ya.

(The rest of the Cast unfreeze.)

**Mum:** Come on Alex we best get going.

**Alex:** So yeah, that’s my story. No monsters, no mazes, no heroes, no magic, just me and my slightly extraordinary family… I guess when it’s put like that; they are kind of magic.

**Ash:** Alex, hurry up we have to get going!

**Alex:** Why?

**Toni:** The guard’s found us.

**Celia:** And he’s coming this way.

**Dad:** And he does not look happy.

**Mum:** Quick!

**All:** *Run*!

(The Guard enters and All take their first step to run. All freeze.)

(Curtain)

Production Notes

Props

Prologue:

Dusty Greek vase (Onstage)

Scene 1:

Mobile phone (Toni)

Toy sword (Ash)

Scene 2:

Greek vase (Onstage)

Bunch of daffodils (Onstage)

Scene 3:

Toy sword (Ash)

Scene 4:

Mirror (Onstage)

Scene 5:

Snakes (Offstage)

Author’s Note

The production should be very minimal in terms of set and props, but very rich with imagination and ingenuity, one prop becomes many things, the arrangement of a few items or different lighting states changes the location, actors can create the exhibits in the museum, performing as the characters from the museum displays etc. There should be a sense that nothing happens until Alex instigates it with her story and then the other characters have to respond with whatever is close at hand, as best as they can.

Alex, Toni, Ash, Pip, Curator 1, Curator 2, Guard and Florist can be played by male or female actors, with pronouns changed accordingly. Guard and Florist can be doubled.