

The story of Arachne

Once there was a girl called Arachne who made the most beautiful tapestries. She really was very clever! The only trouble was, Arachne just couldn't help showing off!

When people said, "Arachne, you weave the best tapestries in the country," Arachne would say:

"How dare you? You mean I weave the best tapestries in the whole world."

And when people said, "Your work is so beautiful, Arachne. Did the goddess Athena teach you to weave?" Arachne would snigger and say:

"I taught myself to weave without any help at all thank you!"

Arachne was such a show off, she thought she was better than the Gods themselves!

Late one afternoon, when Arachne was sitting outside working, a crowd of people gathered round.

"I wonder what she'll make today?" said one man.

Arachne smiled. She loved being the centre of attention, and quickly she began to weave the brightly coloured threads together. Before long, she was holding up another wonderful tapestry. The crowd gasped in astonishment. They had never seen anything quite so stunning.

"So it is true," cried a farmer's wife. "Athena did teach you to weave."

The smile disappeared from Arachne's face, to be replaced by an angry frown.

"Will you stop saying that?" she cried. "How many times do I have to tell you? Athena did not teach me to weave. She could never make tapestries as beautiful as this. Mine are, by far, the best!"

Just then, an old woman dressed in rags pushed her way to the front of the crowd.

"Are you saying that you are a better weaver than Athena herself?" she asked.

"Yes!" said Arachne confidently. "Now go away, and if anyone sees Athena, tell her I challenge her to a contest."

"Very well," snapped the old lady. "Let the contest begin."

She started chanting a spell and, in an instant, her hair turned from lifeless grey to a dazzling, shining gold. The wrinkles disappeared from her face. The crowd fell back.

"It can't be..." gasped a farmer.

But it was! There in front of them was the great goddess Athena herself.

"May the best weaver win," said Athena and she took a selection of brightly coloured threads and started to weave.

"I'll be the best!" said Arachne and she too, picked up her brightly coloured threads.

In no time at all, the contest was over. Athena held up her work for the crowd to see. It was truly beautiful, with silver clouds, shooting stars and moonlit hills.

"Breath taking," said a little old lady.

"Wonderful," agreed another man.

Then it was Arachne's turn. With a smile on her face, she held up her work for everyone to admire. The crowd fell silent. It was obvious straight away that Arachne's work really was better than Athena's.

"See, I told you," said Arachne smugly. "I am by far the best weaver. You Gods think you're special. Well you're not!"

The crowd couldn't believe what they were hearing. No-one insulted the Gods like that.

"Shut up, you fool," snarled Athena. "It's true, you are the best weaver, but you have no respect for anyone. You need to be taught a lesson. From now on, you will only weave in the dark. No-one will admire your work. Instead, they will just brush it away as soon as they've seen it."

As Athena laughed out loud, Arachne felt a terrible pain running through her body.

"What's happening to me?" she cried. Everyone around her seemed to be getting bigger and bigger. Then she realised. The people around her weren't getting bigger, she was getting smaller - much smaller!

Now Athena's laugh was so loud that Arachne tried to cover her ears - but her hands had disappeared!

Instead, she had eight long fingers, each covered in thick, black hair. Athena had turned her into a spider!

Arachne hid under the loom, terrified and lonely.

"Will I ever be able to weave again?" she wondered.

When it got dark, she scuttled up a wall and started working. She worked all through the night, weaving away with her eight hairy fingers. She was still good at her work, and by morning, she had spun a beautiful web across a window.

"Look what I've made!" she called to her father. But her father couldn't hear her tiny voice.

"There's a spider web in the window," he complained to his servant. "Sweep it away now!"

Arachne ran to another corner and started spinning a new web. But no matter how hard she tried, people never stopped to admire her work. Ever.

Poor Arachne. How she wished she hadn't been so rude to the great goddess Athena.

