

Arachne the Spinner

1 There was a beautiful, young girl in Greece whose name was Arachne. She had a lovely face and long hair that looked like gold. Arachne was famous in her town for being a very talented spinner. Her work was amazing and people from all over came to watch Arachne's skill with her loom. She would sit in the sun and spin from morning until night.

2 There was only one problem with Arachne, she was very arrogant and proud. She bragged every day about her work. She would say, "In all the world there is no yarn as fine as mine and there is no cloth so soft and smooth. My cloth is the rarest around with all its brightness and beauty." Arachne claimed that she had learned the skill by herself any time someone would ask her about who taught her to spin and weave so well? "No one taught me," she said. "I learned how to do it as I sat in the sun and the shade, but no one showed me."

3 One day, she was boasting again saying, "Athena, the queen of the air? Bah!" said Arachne. "How could she teach me? Can she spin such bundles of yarn as these? Can she weave cloth like mine? I should like to see her try. I can teach her a thing or two." All of the sudden, a tall woman wrapped in a long coat appeared at Arachne's door.

4 The woman's face was attractive, but stern, very stern! She had gray eyes that were so sharp and bright that Arachne could not meet her gaze. "Arachne," said the woman, "I am Athena, the queen of the air, and I have heard your boast. Do you still want to claim that I have not taught you how to spin and weave?" Arachne very foolishly denied once again that anyone had taught her.

5 Athena went on to question Arachne further as to whether Arachne thought she was able to spin and weave as well as Athena could. Arachne started getting a little nervous but her pride kept her claiming that she could spin as well, if not better than Athena. Athena was shocked at the arrogance of Arachne and so challenged her to a contest.



6 “Let me tell you what we will do,” said Athena. “Three days from now we will both weave; you on your loom, and I on mine. We will ask the entire world to come and see us and even invite the great Zeus, who sits in the clouds, to be the judge. There is one catch, if your work is the best, then I will never weave again but if my work is the best then you will do the same.” Arachne gulped and then agreed to the contest.

7 When the day came for the contest in weaving, the entire world was there to see it, and great Zeus sat among the clouds and looked on. Arachne had set up her loom in the shade of a mulberry tree, but Athena set up her loom in the sky, after all she was the queen of the air. Arachne took her bundles of finest silk and began to weave. She wove a web of marvelous beauty, so thin and light that it would float in the air, and yet so strong that it could hold a lion. Everyone who saw the cloth was filled with delight, including the great Zeus.

8 Arachne, after seeing how pleased everyone was, sat down very proudly and looked up to Athena with challenging eyes and a slight smile on her face. Athena began to weave, but not with threads from flax, wool or silk but instead she took the sunbeams that lit up the mountaintop and the softness of summer clouds along with the blue from the sky. With these she mixed the green from the fields and purple from the autumn woods. Athena wove the most beautiful picture and those who looked upon Athena’s work stood in awe and wonder. Their delight in her creation made the people forget the beautiful web Arachne had woven.

9 Arachne felt ashamed and afraid when she saw it and she hid her face in her hands and wept. “Oh how can I live,” she cried, “now that I must never touch a loom or spin again?” Arachne kept on weeping and saying, “How can I live?” Athena saw that Arachne would never have any joy unless she was allowed to weave, she took pity. Athena said to Arachne, “I would free you from your agreement if I could, but that is something which no one can do. You must hold to your agreement to never touch a loom or spin again.” Arachne began to cry louder and told Athena how sorry she was for her boastfulness and regretted her pride. She begged Athena to come up with some way to take this agreement off of her.

10 Athena felt such pity for Arachne and said to her, “Since you will never be happy unless you can spin and weave, I will give you a new form and touched Arachne with the tip of her spear. Arachne was changed at once into a spider, which ran into a shady place in the grass and began merrily to spin a beautiful web. There have been rumors since that day that Arachne is still alive and spins and weaves happily.

