

Myth of the Spider and its Web

A myth is a story that people long ago made up to explain how or why something happened. Myths are fictitious (not true, or factual). A collection of myths is called a mythology. Many old civilizations have their own mythologies, among them are the Greek, Indian, and Chinese civilizations. The story you are going to read below is a Greek myth (from the country of Greece).

The Greeks believed in many gods and goddesses. According to Greek mythology Athena was the goddess of war, wisdom, and arts and crafts.

Long ago there lived in Greece a girl called Arachne [pronounce Arak ni], who was a great weaver. People came from far and wide to see the beautiful designs she created on her loom. And so, her fame spread, and even reached the gods.

One day an old woman came to visit her. She saw Arachne weave an exquisite tapestry, but told her, “Your designs are good, though not as splendid as the goddess Athena’s.”

The girl was angry. She said proudly, “No one can do better work than mine. I wouldn’t mind having a weaving contest with Athena. That will prove once for all whose work is better.”

The old woman who was actually Athena herself, threw off her disguise, hoping to frighten Arachne. But Arachne, a proud and confident girl, was not easily frightened. There and then, she invited Athena to compete with her.

So, the girl and the goddess held a contest. Athena wove splendid pictures of her fellow Greek gods and goddesses, holding grand banquets, and dashing around in magnificent carriages and chariots. But she also wove in designs of humans as poor, inferior creatures.

Arachne was furious. In her turn she too wove brilliant pictures, but her work showed the gods at their worst, doing things which were hideous, like eating too much and lolling on the floor, holding their stomachs. By contrast, her humans were brave men and women, doing glorious deeds.

Of course, Athena was offended. She picked up Arachne's work and tore it to bits.

Now, the girl could not have punished the goddess. So, angry and humiliated, she picked up a rope and pretended or intended to kill herself.

Perhaps, the goddess felt a little pity for her, for she pulled off the rope from Arachne's neck, and turned it into a web—a spider's web. She then cast a spell on the girl which changed her into a spider. Not just that, Athena's powerful curse transformed all Arachne's future descendants into spiders as well. They too would spend their lives spinning spiders' webs!

Abridged and rewritten by

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