

The Story of Arachne and Athena

Arachne was a beautiful young woman and the most wonderful weaver. People traveled great distances to see her work at her loom. Her skilled fingers wove detailed multicolored tapestries and rugs. Her skill was truly a work of art, and people paid large amounts of money for her creations. Eventually, all of the attention went to her head. Arachne started to brag and become boastful of her talents.

“Athena, the great goddess, has given you an amazing gift, Arachne,” the villagers would often say.

This comment made Arachne angry. “Athena did no such thing. I taught myself to weave. No one can weave as well as I—not even Athena, who invented weaving!”

Athena, the goddess of wisdom, watched the boastful Arachne from her throne high on Mount Olympus. One day she decided that she’d had enough of Arachne. Athena disguised herself as an old woman and went to visit Arachne.

“I hear that Athena has given you great gift—the skill of weaving,” said the old woman.

“I am the best weaver, but Athena has nothing to do with how good I am. Her skill is no match for mine,” stated Arachne.

“You are a talented weaver, Arachne, but you are a foolish girl. You should ask Athena for forgiveness,” the old lady said becoming angry.

“What? Ask for forgiveness! You are the foolish one! I am telling the truth, and if Athena is offended by my claims, she is more than welcome to pay me a visit. I would be more than willing to show her what real weaving looks like. I know that she could learn a thing or two from me,” Arachne said confidently.

With that, the old woman filled with rage and in the blink of an eye, transformed back into the magnificent goddess—Athena. All of the village people gathered around the powerful goddess and fell to their knees to honor her. All of the people except Arachne, for she seemed unimpressed by Athena’s presence.

“You think you are better than I, Arachne? Well, let the competition begin,” Athena proclaimed.

Droves gathered to watch the weaving contest. Arachne and Athena both began to weave. Their fingers moved fluidly across the colorful threads.

Athena wove glorious pictures of the gods and goddesses performing kind and heroic deeds. They were the most beautiful images the mere mortals had ever seen.

Arachne's weavings were also gorgeous and perfectly constructed. Her cloths were also images of the gods, but they portrayed them as angry and foolish.

Athena was enraged when she saw how Arachne had depicted the gods. She was even more infuriated when she realized that her own skill was only marginally better than Arachne's.

"You are too boastful and rude, Arachne. How dare you make fun of the gods!" Athena, beside herself, ripped Arachne's weavings to shreds. Then she grabbed a stick and hit the girl repeatedly with it.

At that moment, Arachne ran from Athena. "Oh, no you won't run from me," Athena shouted. "I will make sure that you, your children, and your children's children suffer."

She magically altered Arachne. Arachne began to shrink until her body was a small black bead. She sprouted eight legs and grew black hair. Arachne became the world's first spider. She scurried to the highest place she could find and began weaving a web.

"Now you will be able to weave all day long," Athena said proudly. "But from now on, no one will care about your talents. In fact, your delicate woven webs will be destroyed when people see them."

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Based on a version told by Nicole Shelby.