Arachne

Everyone knew that the goddess of wisdom, Athena, was talented at weaving and other crafts. She was a proud goddess and expected others to show her respect. However, there was a mortal girl named Arachne who was such an excellent weaver that many people admired her talent.

Arachne was a very proud girl and would often boast that she was a better weaver than the goddess Athena. One day, Athena disguised herself as an old woman and visited Arachne at her home. The goddess admired the young woman’s weaving and complimented her on it. Arachne boasted of her abilities and bragged to the old woman that she, Arachne, could weave more beautifully than the goddess Athena. Although the old woman warned the girl about being too arrogant and claiming to be as talented as a goddess, Arachne paid no attention. Arachne said, “If Athena thinks that she is a better weaver then let her prove it in a weaving contest.” The old woman revealed herself as Athena and accepted the girl’s challenge to a weaving contest.

Athena and Arachne took their positions at their looms and began weaving. Athena’s stitches showed pictures of the gods doing good deeds and helping mortals. Arachne’s weaving told of the gods being selfish and cruel. When the contest was over, Athena examined Arachne’s work. The piece was flawless; each stitch was perfectly formed. However, Athena grew angry at the way the girl had pictured the gods in her weaving. Athena’s fury at Arachne’s insults and arrogance was so great that she demanded an apology. Arachne refused and almost instantly began to feel her head shrink and her fingers grow into long legs. Athena said, “Since you love to weave, you can now do it as a spider.” Athena had turned Arachne into a spider so that she and her descendents would remember the lesson that Arachne had learned forever.

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Persephone

Demeter, the goddess of all growing things, loved her only daughter, Persephone. Whenever Demeter tended to her plants in the fields, Persephone came along. On one such day, Persephone wandered away from her mother. Suddenly, a hole opened in the ground and a chariot drawn by four huge black horses emerged. Hades, the god of the underworld, was the driver. The chariot thundered toward Persephone. Hades, the god of the underworld, was the driver. The chariot thundered toward Persephone. Hades grabbed her, pulled her into the chariot, and quickly vanished back into the ground.

When Hades and Persephone arrived at Hades underground realm, he explained why he had kidnapped her. “I am lonely. I need a beautiful queen like you to keep me company and help me rule the underworld.” The frightened Persephone said nothing but began to cry. Hades saw this and grew worried. “Persephone, take these beautiful clothes. They are for you.” Persephone refused and cried harder. Hades tried again. “Persephone, taste this food. It is the most delicious food you will ever eat.” Again, Persephone refused. Hades decided to leave her alone to get used to her new home. He took her to her new room in his palace and left her with the clothing and food.

Meanwhile, back on earth, Demeter noticed that her daughter was missing. When Persephone did not respond to her cries, Demeter became worried, went to her brother, Zeus, and pleaded with him to tell her what had happened. Zeus told her that Hades had kidnapped Persephone and made her queen of the underworld. Demeter became hysterical and demanded that Zeus force Hades to return her daughter. Zeus, trying to calm Demeter, told her that he would try but stated that if Persephone had eaten any food, she would never be able to return to earth. He explained that no one who eats the food of the underworld can ever come back. He then journeyed to the underworld.

By this time, Persephone was tired and hungry. The food Hades had left did look delicious. She decided to try some of the pomegranate fruit. She discovered that Hades was right; the food was delicious. As she swallowed her first taste, she heard a commotion in the palace. Zeus had arrived to try to convince Hades to let Persephone return to her mother. Zeus asked her if she had eaten any food. Sadly, Persephone nodded her head. “I ate six seeds of the pomegranate fruit.”

Hades heard this and told Zeus, “See, now she must remain here with me.” Zeus shook his head and told Hades, “She will remain with you for six months of every year, one month for each seed she swallowed. For the other six months, she will return to her mother.”

Hades had to obey Zeus, the ruler of the gods. Thus, Hades returned Persephone to her mother, Demeter, who was overcome with joy. However, for the six months out of each year that Persephone had to return to the underworld, Demeter was deeply saddened and did not allow plants to grow on earth. This is how the change of the seasons first began.

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