

Arachne

from *I Am Arachne*

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Adapted by Fishtank Staff



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SPINNING, I can't stop spinning, so stay a minute, and I, Arachne, will spin a story for you. . .

Long ago, I was a simple girl who lived in the country. I wasn't beautiful or rich, but I had one great talent—I could spin and weave better than anyone in the world. Soon word got out, and travelers came from far and wide to watch me at my loom, marveling at my skill.

I admit that the attention made me a little vain. I began to boast that I was more skilled at weaving than the goddess Athena, and that was a mistake!

Soon after that, a bent old woman showed up at my doorstep, wrapped from head to toe in a tattered gray cloak. She leaned heavily on a cane and pointed a long, bony finger at my nose.

"Are you Arachne?" she asked in a raspy voice. When I said yes, she said, "I have heard that you spin better than Athena. Can this be so? Weigh your words carefully my girl, before you answer yes or no."

With a toss of my head, I made my boast, that yes, I could outdo Athena in any spinning contest.

Suddenly there was a terrific flash and a BANG!

The old woman's cloak lay in a crumpled heap on the ground, and there stood Athena, absolutely furious. I should have apologized that very second, but foolishly I didn't, so she challenged me to a contest.

Athena went first. With shimmering gold and silver threads, she wove a tapestry of all the gods and goddesses on Olympus, resplendent on their thrones. They seemed to breathe, they were that real, and I wondered how on earth I could do better.

Weave, weave, what could I weave? Suddenly I knew. I looked out the window and wove a tapestry of spring—red-lipped roses, tulips graceful as swans, flowering dogwoods, winding blue-green rivers, rolling meadows, and stately mountains. Why, the flowers alone looked so real that a butterfly flew in the room and tried to suck the nectar from one!

Oh, I almost forgot, I put myself in the picture as a beautiful young maiden wearing a golden crown, as if I were a goddess, too. Yes, that's what vanity will do. I'm sure my tapestry was as good as Athena's. (I won't say better, but it might have been.)

But it didn't matter. A mortal should NEVER challenge a god. If I've learned one thing, I've learned that. Athena was so angry when she saw my beautiful scene that she destroyed it with one well-aimed lightning bolt. Then she beat me over the head with her shuttle.

"Foolish, vain Arachne, will you never learn!" she screamed. "You want to spin? You'll spin all right until you die, your lines a silken trap for things that creep and fly."

And with her words, I began to shrink, until my body was no bigger than a thumb, my eyes two dots in a tiny head. Horrified, I looked down and counted eight legs instead of two, all black as night.

Spin, spin, you foolish girl, the words whirled in my brain. And dizzy, I knew that I must spin.

So now I spin my tale for *you*. See what I have spun? A web of words, a beautiful web. Do you like what I've done? My lines glisten and shimmer like diamonds in the sun.

Oh, don't worry. I've learned my lesson. Always now I bow to Athena, the greatest weaver. I am Arachne. I must spin.