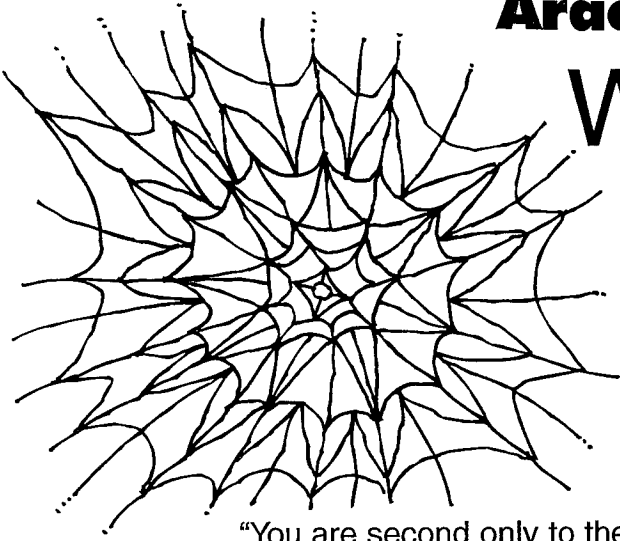


Arachne's Web



When the wind carried the sound of Arachne's spinning song to the villages and forests, people stopped their work. They came to admire her woven pictures. Even the nymphs from the forest sat at Arachne's feet and watched her hands card and spin delicate wool threads. All agreed that no other mortal could produce such beautiful weavings.

"You are second only to the goddess Minerva, the patron of weaving," said a nymph as she watched Arachne weave a picture of the creatures of the sea. "She has given you a special gift. No other mortal can do as well with the shuttle and needle. I can only guess that you visit Minerva's temple often and set out offerings to receive such blessings from her."

"Blessings from Minerva? I should say not!" answered Arachne. "You insult me with those words. My work, as you can see, is better than Minerva's. I could teach her the true art of weaving if she came here. Look what my needle can do. I embroider each scene. No one, goddess or mortal, can compare her work to mine."

Minerva, who heard Arachne's boasts, decided to teach Arachne a lesson. She disguised herself as an old woman, and, wrapped in a large cloak, paid a visit to the young woman's house. She stood behind Arachne, watching her work. After a time, she tapped her cane on the ground and hummed a little tune.

"Be off, old woman!" Arachne yelled. "Your noise breaks the rhythm of my song. I can't finish this picture if you continue to sing and tap your cane."

"It's just my way of admiring your work," answered the old woman. "Your picture is almost as beautiful as the weavings of the goddess Minerva. She would be proud that you have learned these skills from her. But it is said that you boast of being a better weaver than that goddess. Surely no mortal's work can compare with that of the gods. If you bring offerings to her altar and take back your words, I am sure that Minerva will forgive you and continue to bless your work."

"Old woman, don't talk to me about Minerva," answered Arachne. "If she were here at this time, she could see that I am a better weaver than all mortals and goddesses. If Minerva and I were to compete, it's clear that I would be the winner," answered Arachne. "Now leave me to my work."

"Old woman, you say!" Minerva threw off the cloak. "Look again and see who hears your words."

Arachne stood and drew back in fear when she saw Minerva. Even then, she didn't apologize or take back what she had said.

"If you insist, we shall have a contest and the nymphs will judge our work," challenged Minerva. "Beware! If you lose, you will pay for your boasts."

"I will not lose," answered Arachne. "You will see the beauty of my work. I will prove that I am the greatest weaver of all."

The two weavers set their looms. Their shuttles wove pictures of the gods and goddesses. Even in her designs, Arachne was boastful. She pictured the gods with angry, vengeful looks. She often stopped to see Minerva's tapestry. Minerva's weaving seemed so real that Arachne could hear the roar of the waves in her wind-swept sea. She showed the gods and goddesses on Mount Olympus looking lovingly down on the earth. It was a picture that was fine enough to decorate the walls of the house of the gods. Even so, Arachne believed her weaving was equal to Minerva's. The goddess worked so quickly that her hands were a blur. Arachne wove faster, trying to keep up with her.

Minerva and Arachne put down their shuttles just before sunset. The nymphs and all who watched the contest declared Minerva the winner. They agreed that Arachne's tapestry was a work of art, but in Minerva's weaving the sea, the earth, and the gods themselves seemed alive.

When Minerva saw the spiteful way Arachne had portrayed the gods, she ripped Arachne's tapestry and threw her shuttle at Arachne. The shuttle hit Arachne on the head. Immediately, Arachne began to change. She shriveled into a small, round shape. Four long, yarn-sized legs grew on each side of her body. Ashamed, Arachne scurried into a dark corner and hid under a chair.

Minerva threw a piece of webbing from Arachne's picture at the transformed woman. "Now you will pay for your boastful words. You will spin webbing for the rest of your life. You will never be able to add the colorful scenes you have pictured in the past. Here you will stay, hanging on the threads of your webbing forever."

Even today, all of Arachne's children spin webs in hidden corners. They move about attached to strands of webbing just as Arachne did. Their work is never finished. Only the web is set. No shuttle weaves scenes into their webs.

