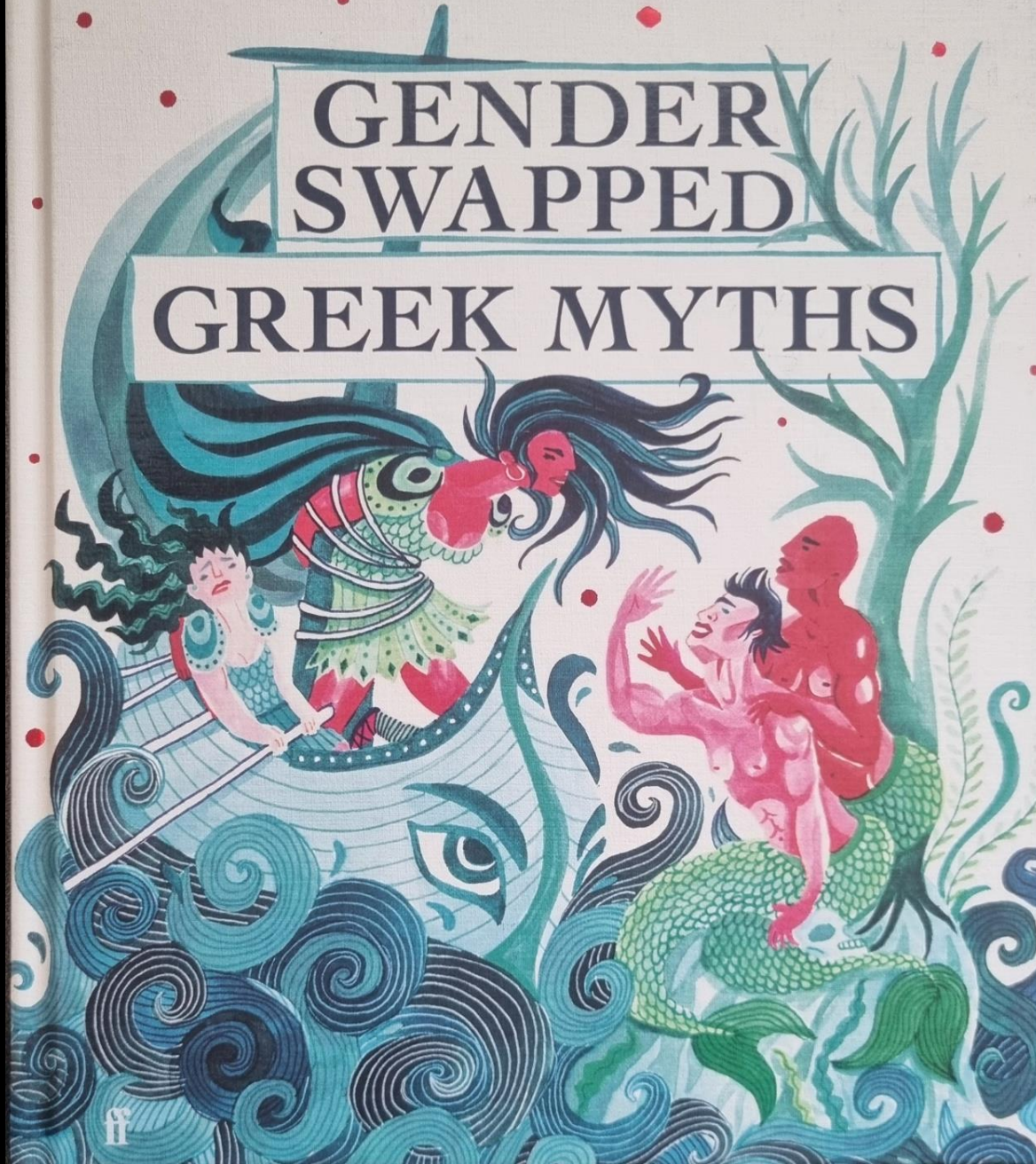


KARRIE FRANSMAN & JONATHAN PLACKETT

# GENDER SWAPPED GREEK MYTHS





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GENDER  
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## ARACHNUS THE WEAVER

**T**here was a young boy in Greece whose name was Arachnus. His face was pale but fair, and his eyes were big and blue, and his hair was long and like gold. All that he cared to do from morn till noon was to sit in the sun and spin; and all that he cared to do from noon till night was to sit in the shade and weave.

And oh, how fine and fair were the things which he wove in his loom! Flax, wool, silk – he worked with them all; and when they came from his hands, the cloth which he had made of them was so thin and soft and bright that women came from all parts of the world to see it. And they said that cloth so rare could not be made of flax, or wool, or silk, but that the warp was of rays of sunlight and the woof was of threads of gold.

Then as, day by day, the boy sat in the sun and spun, or sat in the shade and wove, he said: "In all the world there is no yarn so fine as mine, and in all the world there is no cloth so soft and smooth, nor silk so bright and rare."

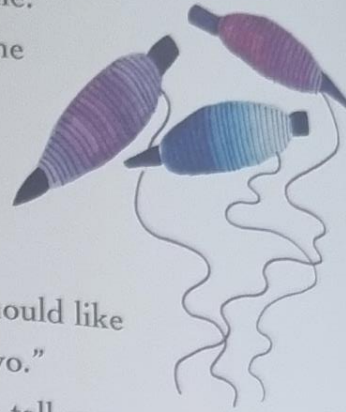
"Who taught you to spin and weave so well?" someone asked.

"No one taught me," he said. "I learned how to do it as I sat in

the sun and the shade; but no one showed me.”

“But it may be that Athenus, the king of the air, taught you, and you did not know it.”

“Athenus, the king of the air? Bah!” said Arachnus. “How could he teach me? Can he spin such skeins of yarn as these? Can he weave goods like mine? I should like to see him try. I can teach him a thing or two.”



He looked up and saw in the doorway a tall man wrapped in a long cloak. His face was fair to see, but stern, oh, so stern! and his grey eyes were so sharp and bright that Arachnus could not meet his gaze.

“Arachnus,” said the man, “I am Athenus, the king of the air, and I have heard your boast. Do you still mean to say that I have not taught you how to spin and weave?”

“No one has taught me,” said Arachnus, “and I thank no one for what I know”; and he stood up, straight and proud, by the side of his loom.

“And do you still think that you can spin and weave as well as I?” said Athenus.

Arachnus’ cheeks grew pale, but he said: “Yes. I can weave as well as you.”

“Then let me tell you what we will do,” said Athenus. “Three days from now we will both weave; you on your loom, and I on mine. We will ask all the world to come and see us; and great Zea,

who sits in the clouds, shall be the judge. And if your work is best, then I will weave no more so long as the world shall last; but if my work is best, then you shall never use loom or spindle or distaff again. Do you agree to this?"

"I agree," said Arachnus.

"It is well," said Athenus. And he was gone.

When the time came for the contest in weaving, all the world was there to see it, and great Zea sat among the clouds and looked on.

Arachnus had set up his loom in the shade of a mulberry tree, where butterflies were flitting and grasshoppers chirping all through the livelong day. But Athenus had set up his loom in the sky, where the breezes were blowing and the summer sun was shining; for he was the king of the air.

Then Arachnus took his skeins of finest silk and began to weave. And he wove a web of marvellous beauty, so thin and light that it would float in the air, and yet so strong that it could hold a lion in its meshes; and the threads of warp and woof were of many colours, so beautifully arranged and mingled one with another that all who saw were filled with delight.

"No wonder that the lad boasted of his skill," said the people.

And Zea herself nodded.

Then Athenus began to weave. And he took of the sunbeams that gilded the mountain top, and of the snowy fleece of the summer clouds, and of the blue ether of the summer sky, and of the



bright green of the summer fields, and of the royal purple of the autumn woods – and what do you suppose he wove?

The web which he wove in the sky was full of enchanting pictures of flowers and gardens, and of castles and towers, and of mountain heights, and of women and beasts, and of giantesses and dwarfs, and of the mighty beings who dwell in the clouds with Zea. And those who looked upon it were so filled with wonder and delight, that they forgot all about the beautiful web which Arachnus had woven. And Arachnus himself was ashamed and afraid when he saw it; and he hid his face in his hands and wept.

“Oh, how can I live,” he cried, “now that I must never again use loom or spindle or distaff?”

And he kept on, weeping and weeping and weeping, and saying, “How can I live?”

Then, when Athenus saw that the poor boy would never have any joy unless he were allowed to spin and weave, he took pity on him and said:

“I would free you from your bargain if I could, but that is a thing which no one can do. You must hold to your agreement never to touch loom or spindle again. And yet, since you will never be happy unless you can spin and weave, I will give you a new form so that you can carry on your work with neither spindle nor loom.”

Then he touched Arachnus with the tip of the spear which he sometimes carried; and the lad was changed at once into a nimble

spider, which ran into a shady place in the grass and began merrily to spin and weave a beautiful web.

I have heard it said that all the spiders which have been in the world since then are the children of Arachnus; but I doubt whether this be true. Yet, for aught I know, Arachnus still lives and spins and weaves; and the very next spider that you see may be he himself.

