

THE GREAT BEAR

The Story of Callisto and Arcus



ONE day Jupiter, god of the skies, fell in love with a lovely forest maiden named Callisto. Later, when Jupiter's jealous wife, Juno, heard that Callisto had given birth to Arcus, Jupiter's son, she flew into a terrible rage. The goddess quickly descended from Mount Olympus and searched the woods until she found Callisto playing under a tree with her small child.

When Callisto saw Juno, she cried out in fear, for all mortals knew about Juno's jealous rages.

"So, your beauty has captivated my husband!" Juno shouted. "Well, let's see how he likes you *this way!*"

As Callisto begged forgiveness, her skin became covered with coarse black hair. Her hands and feet turned to giant paws with sharp claws springing from them. Her mouth became filled with huge terrible teeth, and her voice turned into a deep growl — for Juno had changed the lovely maiden into a ferocious-looking bear.

Callisto still loved her small son, but as she lumbered toward him, he screamed in fear. Then the nymphs rushed from the woods and snatched the boy away from the giant bear.

Everyone was afraid of Callisto now that she was a huge black

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bear. No one knew that she was just as kind and loving as she'd always been. Hunted by men and dogs, she was forced to wander the woods and hide. She also fled from other wild animals — even bears like herself — for she didn't know how to fight, and she had no desire to learn.

At first Callisto tried to stay close to the hut where her son now lived with his new parents. Whenever Arcus took solitary walks, she lumbered close by, staying hidden among the trees. And at dawn, she crept to his window and watched him sleeping. Arcus often told his new parents that he was being watched by a giant black bear, but they told him he was only dreaming.

The great bear, pursued more and more by hunters and dogs, was finally forced to hide deep in the woods, far from her child.

But one winter night, many years later, the bear had a dream about Arcus, her son; and when she woke, she deeply yearned for him. As soon as spring came, she left her cave in the forest and journeyed back to the land where she had once lived.

One twilight, as the bear wandered the familiar woods, remembering her past, she came upon a young hunter aiming his arrow at a distant bird. She froze — for she instantly knew that this was Arcus, her son by Jupiter. Overcome with love for the boy, the bear watched him pull back his bowstring and shoot the arrow at the bird.

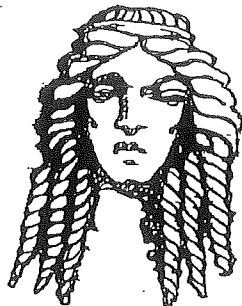
When the arrow missed, the bear was glad. Since she was a wild animal herself, she wanted all creatures to escape from hunters. But then Arcus turned and saw the bear watching him, and his muscles became taut with fear. Slowly he raised his bow and aimed his arrow directly at the bear. Unable to move, the bear only stared at her son with mute grief.

But just at that moment, Jupiter happened to look down upon the earth from Mount Olympus, and he saw what was about to

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happen. He moved quickly to save the bear, for he had once loved her very much when she'd been a young maiden. As fast as a lightning bolt, he swept down from his mountain, snatched Callisto, and hurled her into the night sky. Then Jupiter grabbed Arcus and hurled him also into the heavens where he became a small bear beside his mother.

Then *both* bears turned into stars. And thereafter, they lived together in the sky and were known as the Great Bear and the Little Bear constellations. When jealous Juno discovered them, however, she commanded Neptune, god of the sea, to forbid the two bears to descend into the ocean like the other stars. For this reason, the Great Bear and Little Bear are the only two constellations that never set below the horizon.





THE WEAVING CONTEST

The Story of Arachne and Minerva



RACHNE, a proud peasant girl, was a wonderful spinner and weaver of wool. The water nymphs journeyed from their rivers and the wood nymphs from their forests just to watch Arachne steep her wool in crimson dyes, then take the long threads in her skillful fingers and weave exquisite tapestries.

“Ah! Minerva must have given you your gift!” declared a wood nymph one day. Minerva was the goddess of weaving and handicrafts.

Arachne threw back her head. “Ha! Minerva has taught me nothing! I’ve taught myself everything I know!” And with that, she decided to challenge Minerva to a contest. “Let’s see which of us should be called ‘goddess of the loom!’” she said.

The nymphs covered their mouths, frightened to hear such scorn heaped upon a powerful goddess of Mount Olympus.

Their fears were justified — for Minerva herself was furious when word got back to her about Arachne’s conceit. The goddess immediately donned the disguise of an old woman with gray hair and hobbled with a cane to Arachne’s cottage.

When Arachne opened her door, Minerva shook her gnarled

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finger. "If I were you," said the old woman, "I would not compare myself so favorably to the great goddess Minerva. I would feel humble toward her and ask her to pardon my prideful arrogance."

"You silly fool!" said Arachne. "What do you mean by coming to my door and telling me what to do? If that goddess is half so great as the world thinks, let her come here and show me!"

"She is here!" boomed a powerful voice, and before Arachne's eyes, the old woman instantly changed into the goddess Minerva.

Arachne's face flushed with shame. Nevertheless she remained defiant and plunged headlong toward her doom. "Hello, Minerva," she said. "Do you dare to finally weave against me?"

Minerva only glared at the girl, as the nymphs, peeking from behind the trees, cringed to watch such insolence.

"Come in if you like," Arachne said, stepping back from her doorway and bidding the goddess to enter.

Without speaking, Minerva went into the cottage. Servants quickly dashed about, setting up two looms. Then Arachne and Minerva tucked up their long dresses and set to work. Their busy fingers flew back and forth as they each wove rainbows of colors: dark purples, pinks, golds, and crimsons.

Minerva wove a tapestry showing the twelve greatest gods and goddesses of Mount Olympus. But Arachne wove a tapestry showing not only the gods and goddesses, but their adventures also. Then she bordered her magnificent work with flowers and ivy.

The river nymphs and wood nymphs stared in awe at Arachne's tapestry. Her work was clearly better than Minerva's. Even the goddess Envy who haughtily inspected it, said, "There is no flaw."

When she heard Envy's words, Minerva lost her temper. The goddess tore Arachne's tapestry and hit her mercilessly — until

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disgraced and humiliated, Arachne crawled away and tried to hang herself.

At last, moved to a little pity, Minerva, said, "You may live, Arachne, but you will hang forever — and do your weaving in the air!"

Then the vengeful goddess sprinkled Arachne with hellbane; and the girl's hair fell off, and her nose and ears fell off. Her head shrank to a tiny size until she was mostly a giant belly. But her fingers could still weave; and within minutes, Arachne, the first spider on earth, wove the first magnificent web.

