

HOMER: While we wait for Calliope to return with the next portion of her story, I have come to regale you with a shorter story for your amusement. You can call me Homer, humble traveler. I will be laying out another love story for you, this time one beginning in betrayal and heartbreak. This story, traveler, is the story of Athena and Arachne. You know where this story begins, but what happens after Arachne takes on her spiderous form is what we are here to discuss today. We shall begin in a tree not far from Athena's home, with a spider weaving away and cursing under her breath.

ARACHNE: Over a year. Over a *year* like this and she couldn't even... I didn't do anything *wrong* if she had just admitted that she could be anything other than the best—

HOMER: A spark of light blinded Arachne for a moment. When she opened her eyes again she realized there were fewer now— back to the two she was used to once upon a time. She looked down and saw her form was human again, two legs and two arms and smooth skin. Looking around, Arachne tried to find what could've caused this, but the only thing she could see was a man standing at the base of the tree.

ATHENA: Here, I brought you clothes.

ARACHNE: (warily) What's the catch?

ATHENA: Why would there be a catch?

ARACHNE: There's *always* a catch with things like this. People don't give anything for free, especially if *you* were the one who undid whatever spell that bitch Athena put on me. So, what's your price? Because I'm not sure I'm willing to pay it.

ATHENA: Well that's a little rude don't you think? I've come to apologize.

ARACHNE: ...Athena?

ATHENA: In the flesh.

ARACHNE: You... Look different.

ATHENA: I guess we both went through some changes. (pause) I'm sorry, that was. That was in bad taste—

ARACHNE: Yeah, it seems like this was something you chose willingly. I don't recall asking to be turned into a bug.

ATHENA: Listen, I *am* sorry about that. That's why I'm here. To say I'm sorry and to turn you back into... into *you*. I let my jealousy and insecurity get the better of me and you paid the cost for that. You shouldn't have had to pay that cost, and I'm sorry. Really, truly sorry.

HOMER: Arachne stared at Athena for a moment, not trusting the god of knowledge in the slightest. Eventually she did take the clothing being offered by the god.

ARACHNE: I'm taking these so I don't go back to town naked, not because I trust that you or anything you've done here. I know you're searching for something from me, but whatever it is I'm not giving it to you. You want my forgiveness? You won't get it. I can assure you of that.

ATHENA: I didn't do this to get your forgiveness. I know I don't deserve that—

ARACHNE: You don't.

ATHENA: And I'm not asking for that. I just... This was the right thing to do. Your house is still yours, everything is where you left it.

ARACHNE: What's the catch? And don't try to tell me there isn't one, I know there is. There is *always* a catch with the gods and especially with *you*.

ATHENA: All I ask—

ARACHNE: I fucking knew it.

ATHENA: (more forcefully) All I ask is that you consider coming to talk to me.

ARACHNE: That's it? Just a consideration?

ATHENA: I'm not here to force you to do anything you don't want to, Arachne. I've done enough of that already. If you decide you want to talk to me, you know where to find me. And if you don't, you know where to avoid.

HOMER: Athena left after that, leaving Arachne standing shellshocked in his wake.

ARACHNE: I don't know what he thinks he's doing, but I'm not falling for it. He doesn't get to change me back and then think I won't— I'm onto him. And once I figure out what he's doing, I'm going to- to- I don't know yet but I will do something.

HOMER: Seeing no other option, Arachne got dressed and headed back to the place she used to call home. The streets she used to walk down felt so alien in their familiarity now— too small compared to when she was a spider and too big compared to her human form. And yet her feet carried her just as they always had: knowing exactly where to go despite having been away for so long. The house was beautiful, even more beautiful than when she last saw it. Opening the door, Arachne stepped back into the world that she thought was lost to her forever.

ARACHNE: It looks the same. Exactly the same. Not a speck of dust, not an item out of place. Someone must've been caring for it and... Gods, doesn't he realize I don't want anything to do with him? He cursed me! Who cares if he took care of my home, he was the reason I wasn't here to take care of it myself!

HESTIA: If it helps at all, he wasn't actually the one taking care of this place.

ARACHNE: Ah! What are you— Hestia?

HESTIA: In the flesh.

ARACHNE: You... Took care of my house?

HESTIA: I am the goddess of the hearth, the center of the home. When Athena asked, of course I said yes.

ARACHNE: (frustrated) Ah, yes, because he's *such* a good guy. That's why it took him *an entire year* to undo what he had done to me.

HESTIA: He didn't know how.

ARACHNE: What?

HESTIA: He's spent that year trying to figure out how to change you back. Spells done in anger... They get muddled. He didn't know what he broke so he didn't know how to fix it. But he spent that year trying to get you back to yourself, Arachne. I can promise you that.

ARACHNE: Does that really matter? That he was trying to change me back all this time?

HESTIA: Does it? You're the only one who can decide that, Arachne. If it matters to you, then it matters.

ARACHNE: (hesitantly) Should it matter to me? (pause) I know, I know, I'm the only one who can decide that, I just... A year stuck like that. And I'm just supposed to forgive and forget?

HESTIA: You don't have to do anything you don't want to, Arachne. Forgive Athena, don't, that's your choice. You're not better or worse for what you choose. You were hurt, that doesn't go away so easily. (pause) But I should be going, let you get settled back in. If you need anything, Arachne, you know where to find me.

ARACHNE: Thank you for looking after the house, Hestia. I do appreciate that.

HESTIA: Don't worry about it, dearie. And don't worry about Athena, either. It will work out how it works out.

HOMER: Hestia left Arachne standing alone in her home, the familiar unfamiliarity of it sinking into her bones once more. She wasn't sure what to do, so she made a sandwich and sat down at her kitchen table, trying to remember how it felt to be calm. The past year of her life had been a fight to survive, how does she adjust to the calm after that? Arachne didn't know. She ate and cleaned methodically, letting her feet carry her to her bed. She wasn't sure she'd remember how, and yet her eyes drifted closed and her brain carried her off to dreams.

It will be some time until we speak again, fair travelers. But when we do, we shall explore more of this life that Arachne has found herself in. Until next time, and as always, thank you for listening.