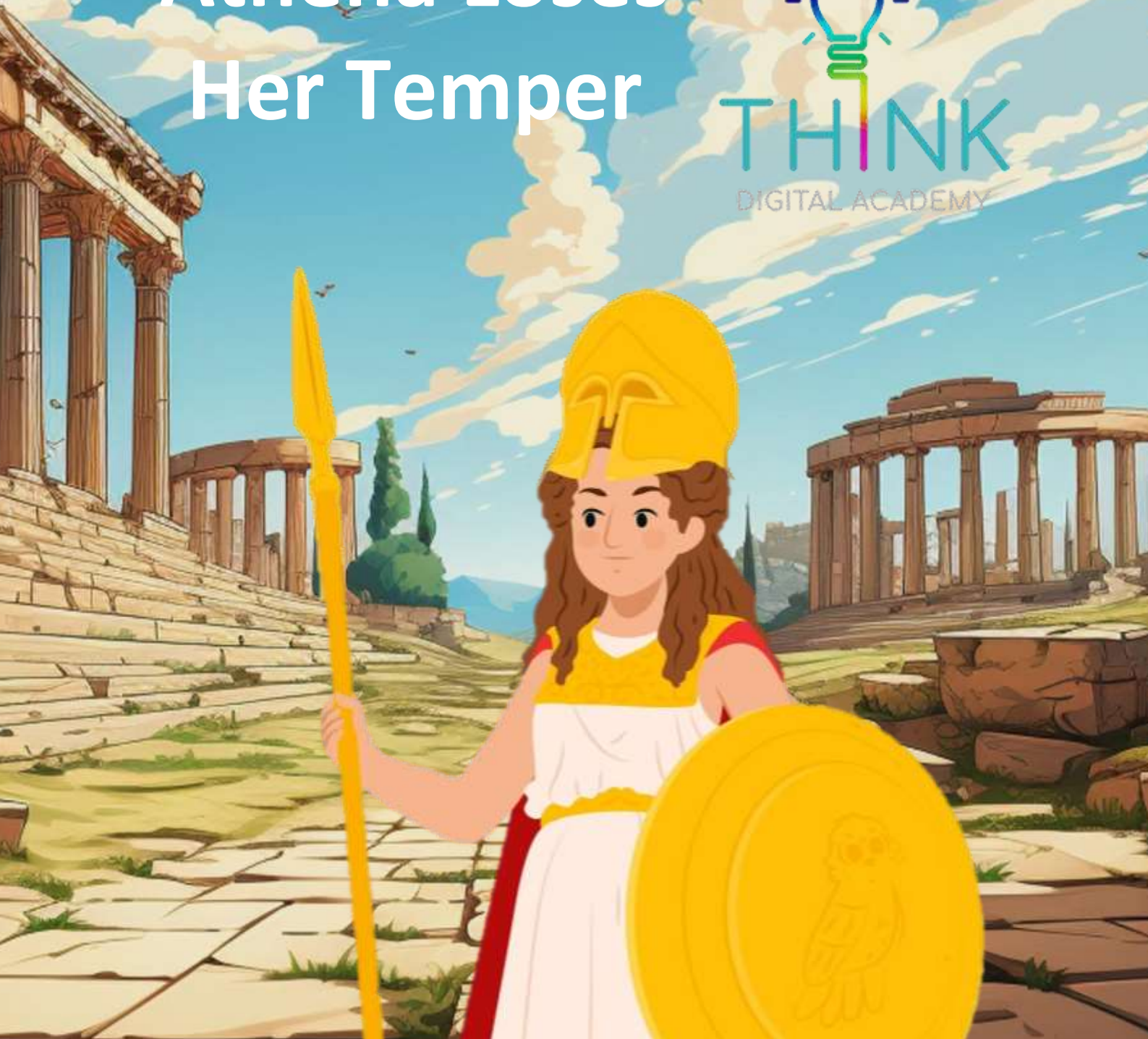




# Stories of the Ancient World

## Athena Loses Her Temper

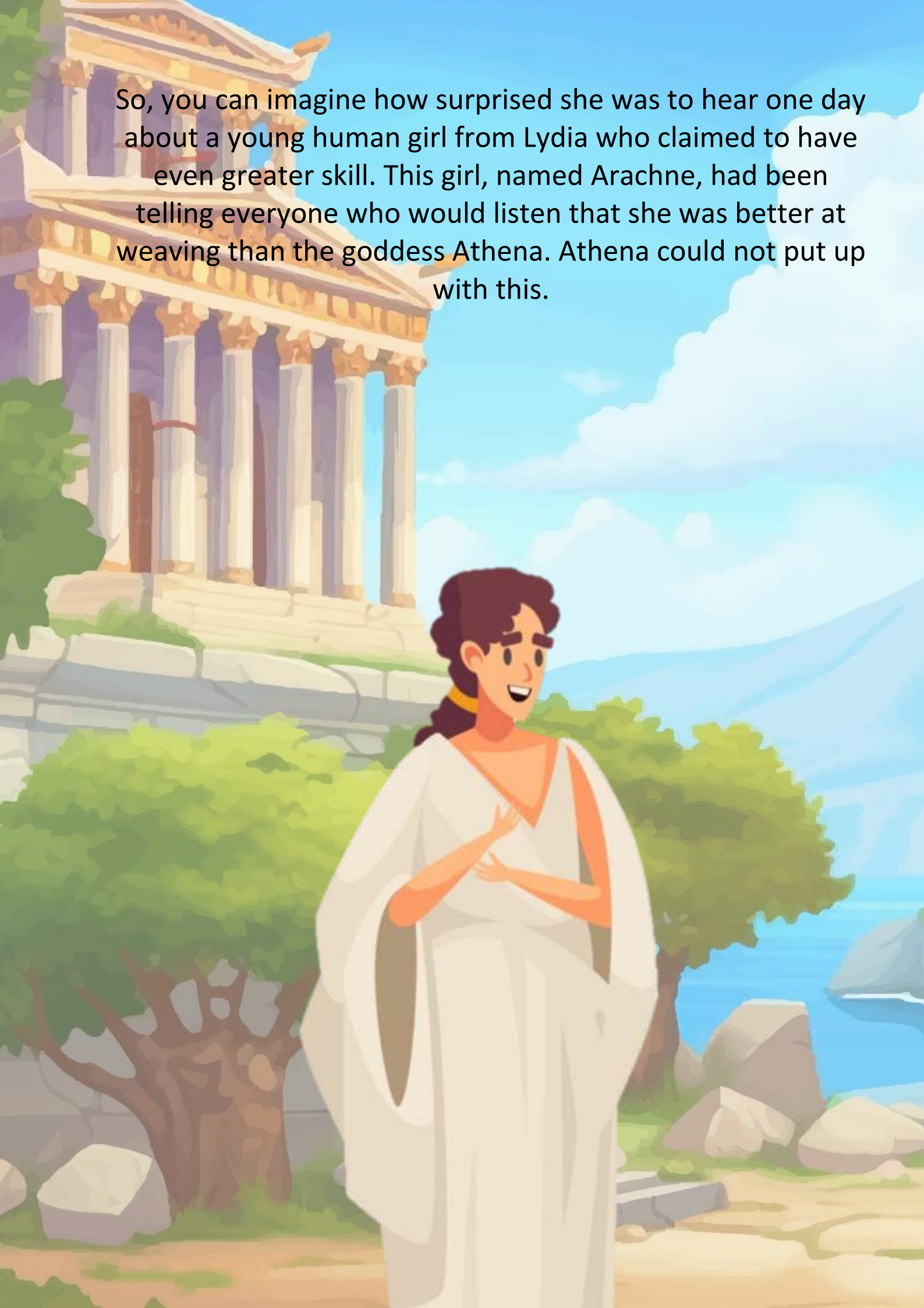


## Athena Loses Her Temper

The goddess, Athena was well known as the best weaver on Mount Olympus, where all of the gods and goddesses lived.



So, you can imagine how surprised she was to hear one day about a young human girl from Lydia who claimed to have even greater skill. This girl, named Arachne, had been telling everyone who would listen that she was better at weaving than the goddess Athena. Athena could not put up with this.



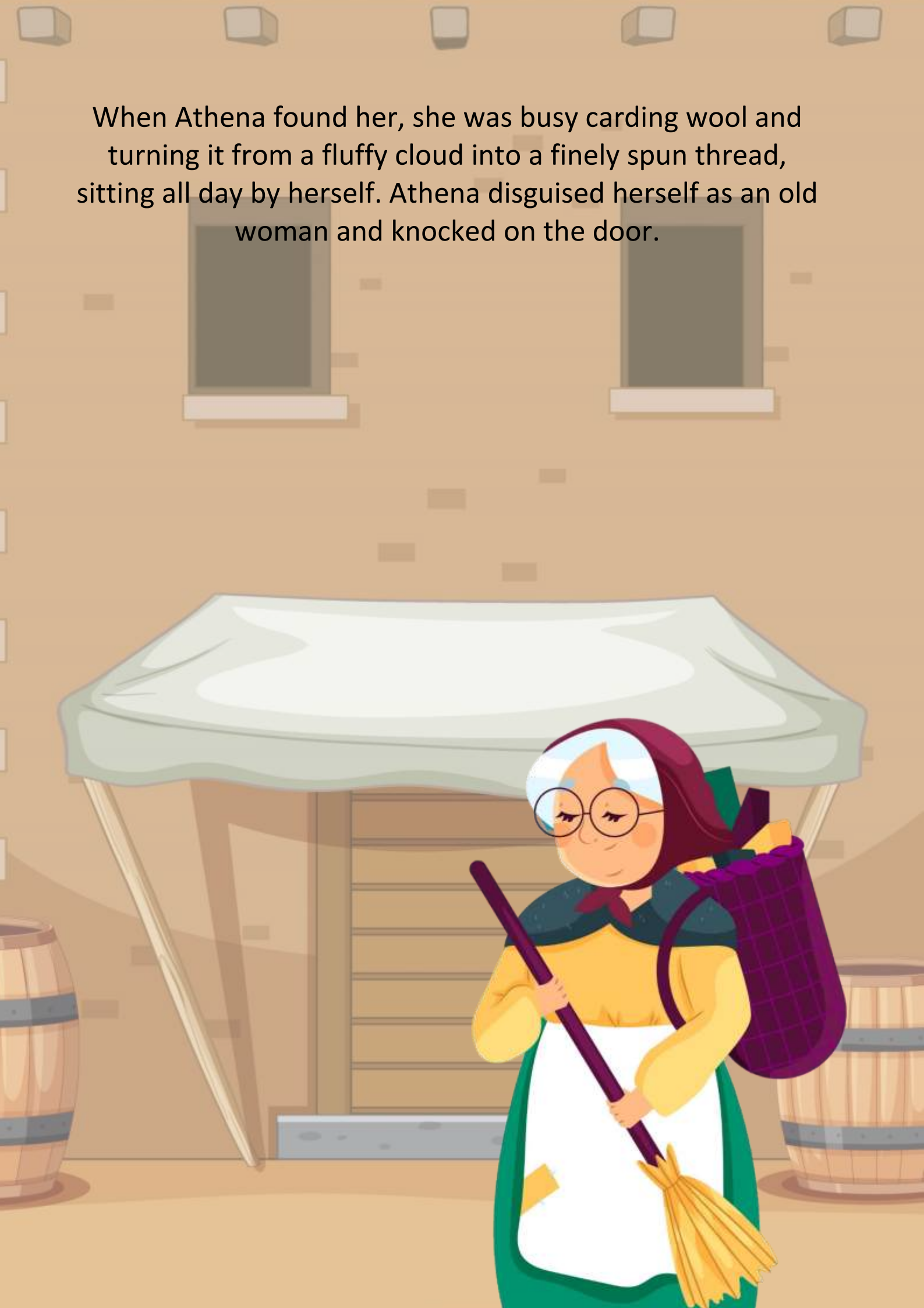
She went down into the human world immediately to find Arachne and remind the young girl that it was Athena who was the goddess of arts and crafts.



Athena found Arachne in a place that was unlike anything she had expected. She had expected to find the daughter of a king or a queen, or perhaps even the child of some god or goddess who had given her special powers. But Arachne was a very ordinary sort of a person who lived in a small house with her father.



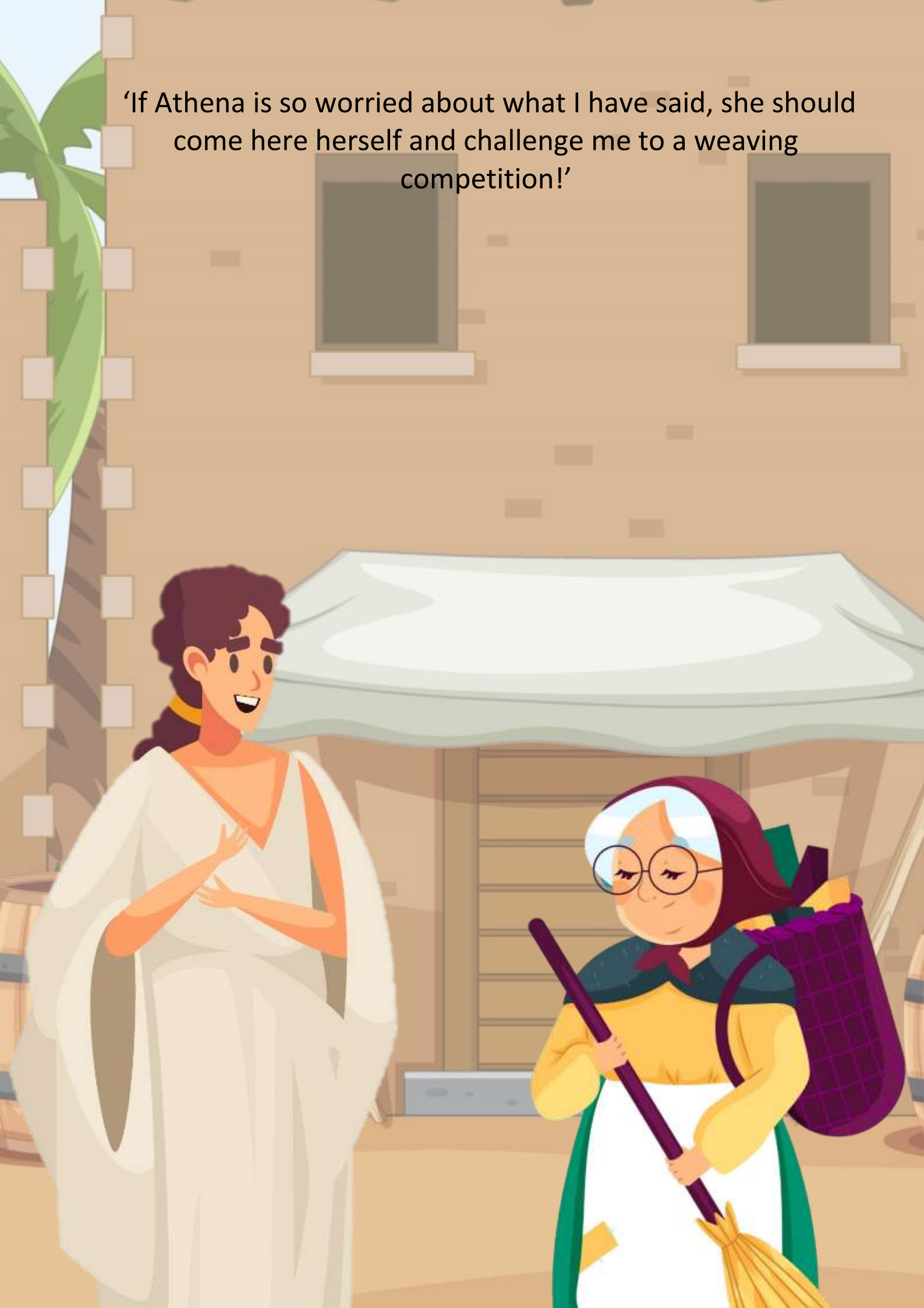
When Athena found her, she was busy carding wool and turning it from a fluffy cloud into a finely spun thread, sitting all day by herself. Athena disguised herself as an old woman and knocked on the door.



Say that you are a mere human and your skills are but an echo of those of the goddess. Ask Athena to forgive you, and I am sur that she will do so.’ But Arachne believed in her talent and did not appreciate the old woman’s advice. ‘Why have you come to my house to tell me what to do?’ she asked, with anger in her voice.

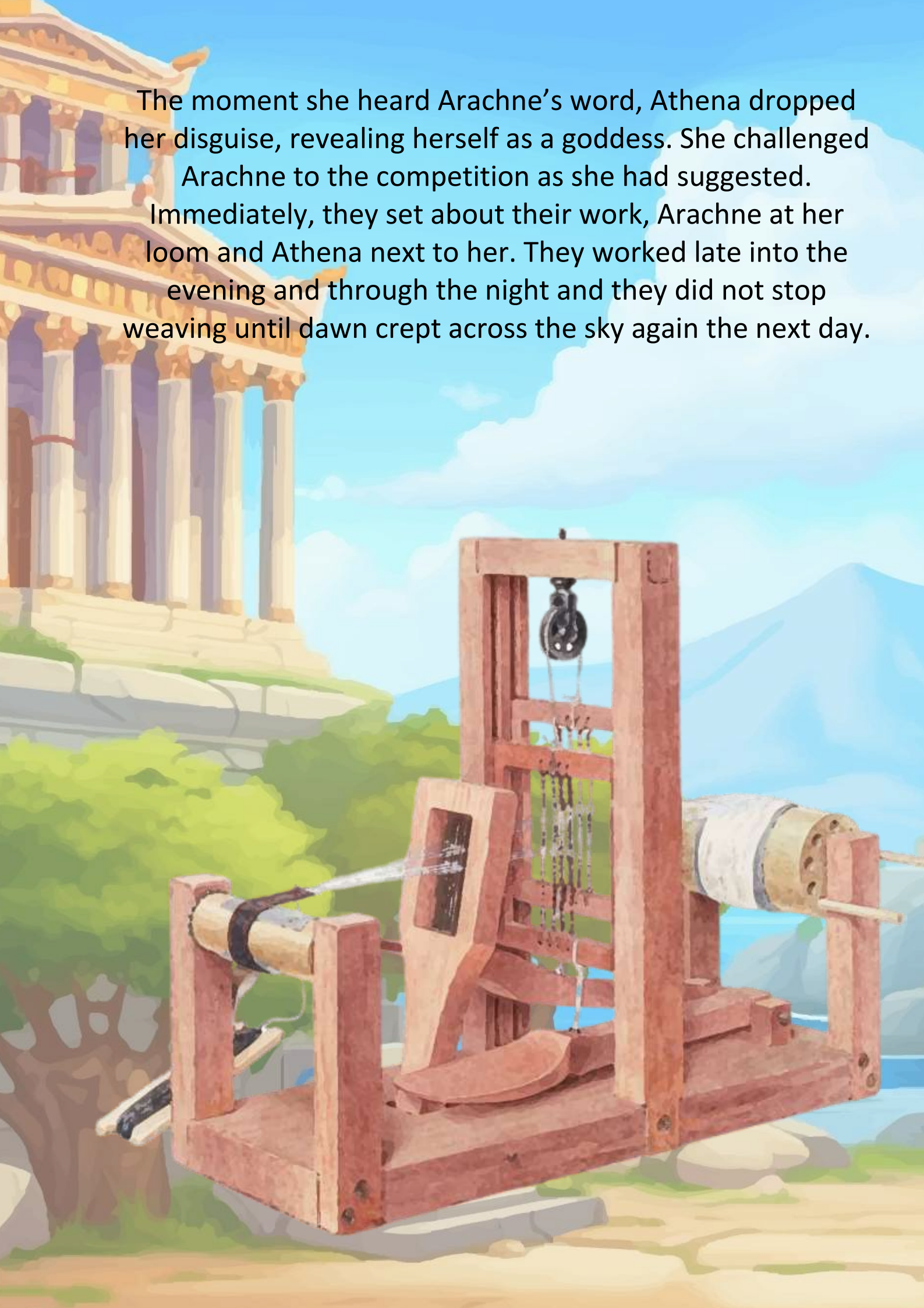


'If Athena is so worried about what I have said, she should come here herself and challenge me to a weaving competition!'

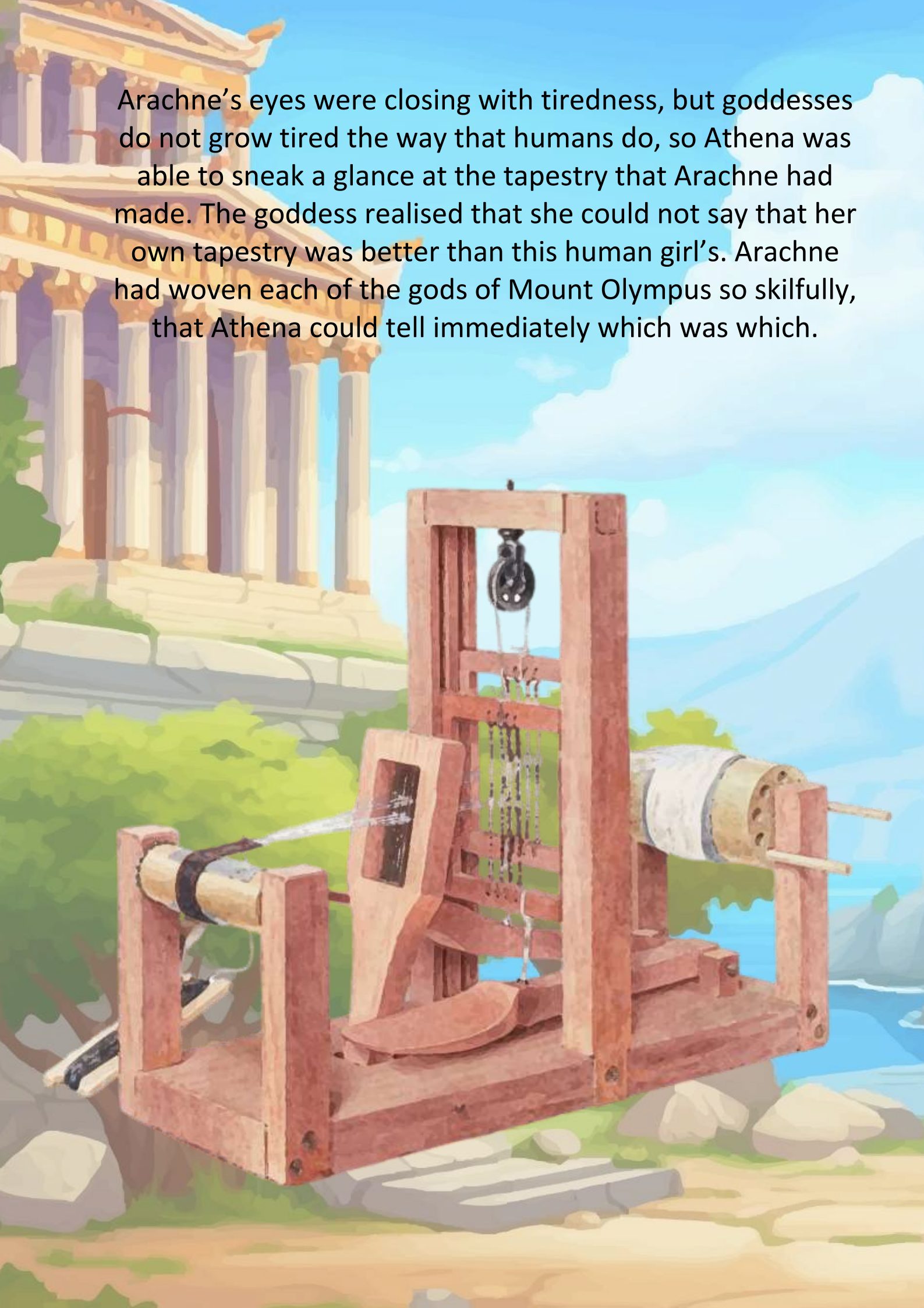




The moment she heard Arachne's word, Athena dropped her disguise, revealing herself as a goddess. She challenged Arachne to the competition as she had suggested. Immediately, they set about their work, Arachne at her loom and Athena next to her. They worked late into the evening and through the night and they did not stop weaving until dawn crept across the sky again the next day.



Arachne's eyes were closing with tiredness, but goddesses do not grow tired the way that humans do, so Athena was able to sneak a glance at the tapestry that Arachne had made. The goddess realised that she could not say that her own tapestry was better than this human girl's. Arachne had woven each of the gods of Mount Olympus so skilfully, that Athena could tell immediately which was which.



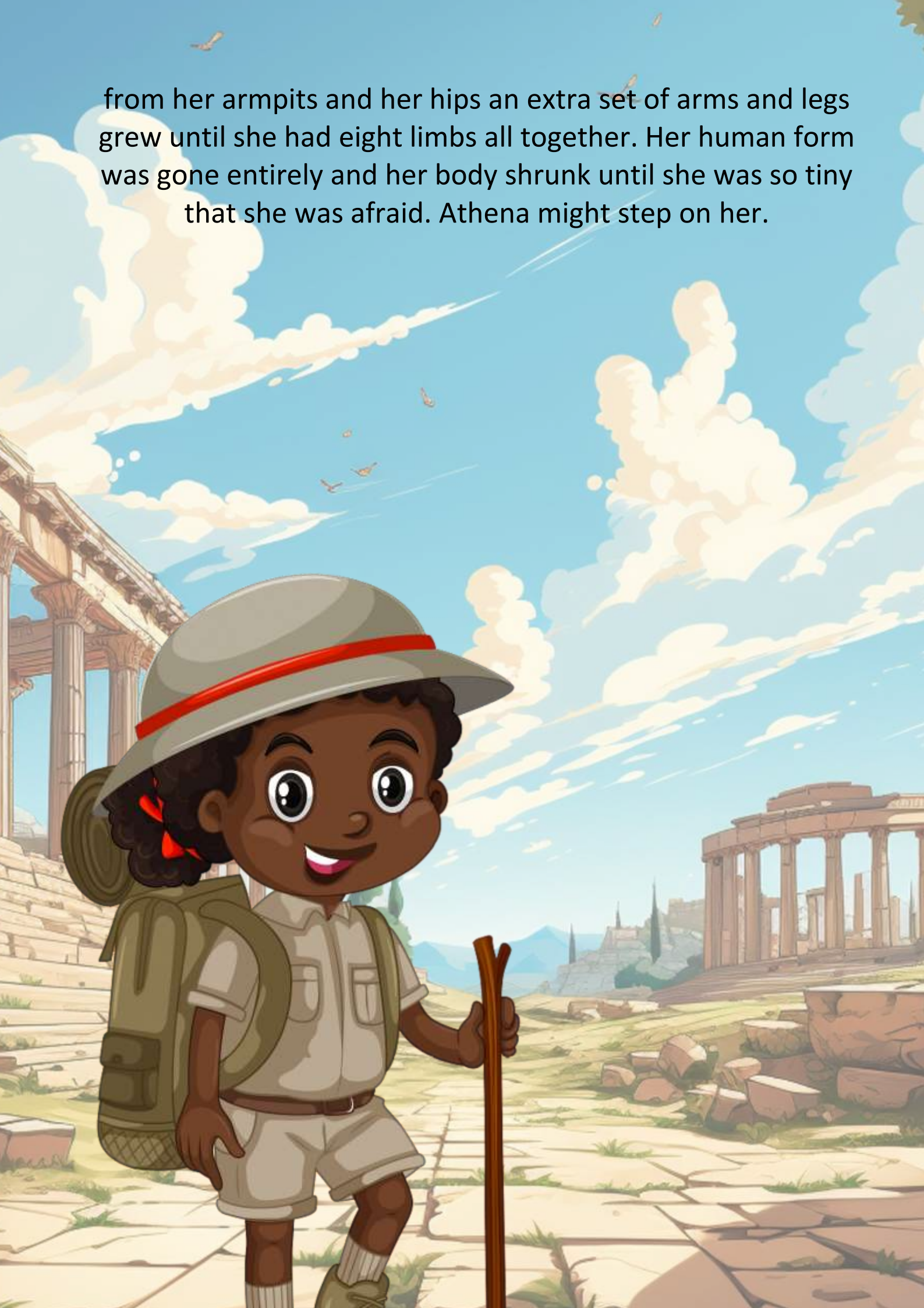
There was no other way to put it: Arachne was a better weaver than the goddess Athena herself and that, Athena could not stand.



In a sudden rage, Athena tore Arachne's weaving in two, straight down the middle. Arachne was terrified of the goddess' anger, but Athena was only just getting started. Once she had torn Arachne's tapestry to pieces, she turned on the human girl herself. 'So, you want to be a better weaver even than a goddess? Then weave your web for as long as you live.' And with that, she tapped Arachne on the forehead with the shuttle from her loom. Arachne's hair fell out of her head onto the floor and next to her.



from her armpits and her hips an extra set of arms and legs grew until she had eight limbs all together. Her human form was gone entirely and her body shrunk until she was so tiny that she was afraid. Athena might step on her.



Arachne had become a spider. Now, instead of weaving beautiful tapestries, she would spend the rest of her life weaving the web she would call home. Although none of the other humans in Lydia thought that Athena's treatment of the girl was fair, they never again boasted that they were better than a god or a goddess at anything at all.



## Vengeful Gods and Evil Spirits

Gods and goddesses in the ancient world were not always kind and good. They could also be frightening! Ancient people had to try and stay on the right side of them.



Before science could explain things like diseases, people thought that feeling unwell or just plain bad luck meant they had angered the gods. Many ancient people carried objects that they used to ward off evil spirits or gave offerings to the gods and goddesses to protect themselves from their anger.





## **Egyptian Protector God**

Many ancient Egyptians worshipped the god Bes, who they hoped would protect them from evil spirits that caused people to become ill and die. He particularly watched over children and babies, and liked to make them laugh. Bes was worshipped in other parts of ancient Africa like Somalia and Nubia too.



## Keep an Eye Out

Gifts are a good way to keep temperamental gods happy. In ancient Syria, there was a temple in a city called Tell Brak. When modern-day archaeologists started to dig around the temple, they found thousands of mysterious figurines with huge eyes. It is still unclear exactly what all of these little statues were used for, but archaeologists think that they might have been left as offerings to appease angry gods



## Music and Magic

Ancient Egyptians carried a type of rattle called a sistrum. Their instruments made a soothing noise to calm the anger of gods or goddesses towards the humans who crossed their path. The ancient Romans used similar rattles in their religious ceremonies, but theirs were not for soothing. The sistrum made a jingling noise that the Romans believed would scare away evil spirits.



This sistrum is decorated with the head of the goddess Hathor. According to myth, she was a grumpy goddess and the other goddesses danced to sistrum music to try and cure her bad moods.



## Warlike Goddess

The gods and goddesses asked for help were often as threatening towards their own followers as they were towards their enemies. This goddess is fierce – it would be better to be her friend than her enemy! Her hair is bristling with weapons like axes and spears. Images of ferocious goddesses like this were made in the ancient city of Pataliputra in India.



## Fierce Protector

Humbaba was an enormous demon in the ancient Mesopotamian religion. He could breathe fire, cause floods by roaring and was put on Earth by the god Enlil to terrify the humans and to stop them from entering the cedar forest and stealing valuable timber.



Plaques like this one, showing the head of Humbaba, were often fixed to doorways and gates. People hoped Humbaba would protect their homes the way he protected the forest and would stop anyone with evil intentions from entering the building.



Humbaba was killed by Gilgamesh and Enkidu, who took timber from the cedar forest back with them to the city of Uruk. The story is told in an ancient poem called The Epic of Gilgamesh, which is sometimes called the first ever work of literature.







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