

## Ovid's *Metamorphoses*, Book 6: Arachne and Minerva

Minerva, the Roman embodiment of Athena the Greek goddess of war and wisdom, was the inventor and patron deity of weaving and embroidery, skills which women in classical antiquity learned and practiced in the home. As a goddess, she expected the usual adoration and devotion from those who worshiped her, especially those gifted in her own spinner's art.

Arachne, a poor country girl, was known far and wide as a wondrous weaver. However, she was also boastful, claiming even that she was superior to Minerva. Offended, the goddess dressed up as an old hag and went to Arachne to warn her against her *hubris* (immoderate pride). Nothing fazed this girl who only slightly blushed when Minerva revealed herself.

Far from giving credit to the goddess as the source of her skill, and unmindful of the danger posed by the presence of an angry deity so close by, the foolish girl challenged Minerva to a yarn duel, a looming Olympics.

In Ovid's tale, when both are finished with their furious fabricating, Arachne has indeed won the contest — *non illud Pallas, non illud carpere Livor / possit opus* ("Not Pallas, not Envy could pluck out a flaw in that work"), says Ovid — having flawlessly detailed the gods and their improprieties with mortal women, a thinly-veiled ironic affront. Minerva, on the other hand, had spun pictures of puny mortals turned into various creatures after defying the gods' warning, an admonition literally woven into every corner.

As Ovid heads into the following passage, the question that lingers in the reader's mind is what web of retribution has the arrogant Arachne spun for herself.

### Text and Translation

doluit successu flava virago  
the golden-haired goddess felt pain at the outcome

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130. **doluit:** *doleo, -ere, dolui, dolitum*: feel pain  
**successu:** *successus, -ūs, m.*: outcome; ablative of cause ("at the outcome," i.e. of the weaving contest)  
**flava:** *flavus, -a, -um*: blonde, golden-haired  
**virago:** *virago, -inis, f.*: heroic woman; here, goddess

et rupit pictas, caelestia crimina, vestes,  
and she broke down the embroidered cloth, (depicting) divine crimes,

utque Cytoriaco radium de monte tenebat,  
and as she held the shuttle from the Cytorian mountain,

ter quarter Idmoniae frontem percussit Arachnēs.  
twelve times Minerva struck the forehead of Idmonian Arachne.

non tulit infelix, laqueoque animosa ligavit  
The unlucky (girl) did not suffer (the insult) and with a noose she bound

131. **rupit:** *rumpo, -ere, rupi, ruptum*: break down  
**pictas:** *pictus, -a, -um*: painted, embroidered  
**caelestia:** *caelestius, -a, -um*: divine  
**crimina:** *crimen, -inis, n.*: crime  
**vestes:** *vestis, -is, f.*: cloth
132. **ut:** (conj.) as  
**Cytoriaco...de monte:** “from the Cytorian mountain,” referring to boxwood, a type of tree which grows in Greece. The shuttle of Athena’s loom is made of boxwood.  
**radium:** *radius, -ii, m.*: pointed rod; here, shuttle
133. **ter** (adv.): three times  
**quarter** (adv.): four times; with *ter*, “twelve times”  
**Idmoniae:** Idmonian, from the family of Idmon; with *Arachnēs*  
**frontem:** *frons, frontis, f.*: forehead  
**percussit:** *percutio, -ere, -cussi, -cussum*: strike  
**Arachnēs:** *Arachnē, -ēs, f.*: Greek genitive: Arachne, daughter of Idmon
134. **tulit:** *fero, ferre, tuli, latus*: suffer  
**infelix:** *infelix, -icis*: unlucky  
**laqueo:** *laqueus, -i, m.*: noose  
**animosa:** *animosus, -a, -um*: proud  
**ligavit:** *ligo, -are, -avi, -atum*: tie

**guttura:** pendentem Pallas miserata levavit  
(her) proud throat: feeling pity, Minerva lifted (her) up, hanging,

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atque ita ‘Vive quidem, pende tamen, improba,’ dixit  
and said thus: “Live, then! Yet hang, presumptuous (girl)!”

‘lexque eadem poenae, ne sis secura futuri,  
and let the same condition of penalty, lest you be carefree about the future,

dicta tuo generi serisque nepotibus esto!’  
be set for your offspring and distant descendants!”

post ea discedens sucis Hecateidos herbae  
After these things, (as she was) departing, she suddenly sprinkled (her)

135. **guttura:** *guttur, -uris, n.:* throat; here, plural for singular  
**pendentem:** *pendeo, pendere, pependi:* hang  
**Pallas:** Pallas Athene: (Greek nominative), equated with the Roman goddess Minerva  
**miserata:** “feeling pity”  
**levavit:** *levo, -are, -avi, -atum:* lift
136. **ita:** (adv.) thus  
**quidem:** (conj.) then  
**tamen:** (conj.) yet  
**improba:** *improbus, -a, -um:* shameless, presumptuous; here, used as a substantive
137. **lex:** *lex, legis, f.:* law; here, condition  
**ne sis:** “lest you be”; *sis* is the present subjunctive second singular of *sum*  
**secura:** *securus, -a, -um:* secure, carefree
138. **dicta:** with *esto*, said; here, set (+ dative)  
**generi:** here, offspring, family  
**seris:** *serus, -a, -um:* late(r); here, distant  
**nepotibus:** *nepos, -otis, m.:* grandson, descendant  
**esto:** let...be! (imperative second person singular of *sum*)
139. **discedens:** *discedo, -ere, -cessi, -cessum:* depart  
**sucis:** *sucus, -i, m.:* juice, sap  
**Hecateidos:** an adjective based on the Greek name *Hecatē, -ēs, f. .*, the moon-goddess and mistress of witch-craft; agrees with *herbae*. Also referred to as Hell-bane, this poison usually causes death but in Arachne’s case turns her into a spider.  
**herbae:** *herba, -ae, f.:* herb, plant

sparsit et extemplo tristi medicamine. Tactae  
with the juices of an infernal herb and a poisonous drug. Touched,

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defluxere comae, cum quis et naris et aures,  
(Arachne's) hair flowed away and with them both (her) nose and ears,

fitque caput minimum, toto quoque corpore parva est:  
and (her) head becomes very small, she is also small in her whole body;

in latere exiles digiti pro cruribus haerent,  
slender fingers cling on (her) side in place of legs,

cetera venter habet: de quo tamen illa remittit  
(her) belly occupies the rest: from which, nevertheless, that (girl) lets out

140. **sparsit:** *spargo, -ere, sparsi, sparsum*: sprinkle  
**extemplo:** (adv.) immediately  
**tristi:** *tristis, -e*: sad; here, "poisonous"  
**medicamine:** *medicamen, -inis, n.*: drug, medicine
141. **defluxere:** = *defluerunt; defluo, -ere, fluxi*: flow away  
**comae:** *coma, -ae, f.*: hair  
**cum quis:** = *quibuscum (defluxere)*  
**naris:** *naris, -is, f.* nose  
**aures:** *auris, -is, f.*: ear
142. **fit:** "becomes"; from *fio, fieri, factus sum*: be made, become  
**caput:** *caput, capitis, n.*: head  
**toto...corpore:** lit. "in (respect to her) whole body"; ablative of specification  
**quoque:** (adv.) also, too; usually placed after the word it emphasizes
143. **latere:** *latus, -eris, n.*: side  
**exiles:** *exilis, -e*: slender  
**digiti:** *digitus, -i, m.*: finger  
**pro:** (prep.) in place of ; + ablative  
**cruribus:** *crus, cruris, n.*: leg  
**haerent:** *haereo, -ere, haesi, haesum*: cling
144. **ceteri, -ae, -a:** the rest  
**venter:** *venter, ventris, m.*: belly  
**remittit:** *remitto, -ere, remisit, remissum*: let out

stamen, et antiquas exercet aranea telas.  
a thread, and the spider works (her) ancient looms.

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145. **stamen:** *stamen, -inis, n.:* warp (of a loom); i.e. the thread hanging from a distaff  
**exercet:** *exerceo, -ere, -ui, -itum:* work  
**aranea:** *aranea, -ae, f.:* spider  
**telas:** *tela, -ae, f.:* web; loom