



THE GOLDEN AGE

Ovid's *Metamorphoses*

Retold for children by Heinz Janisch
Illustrated by Ana Sender

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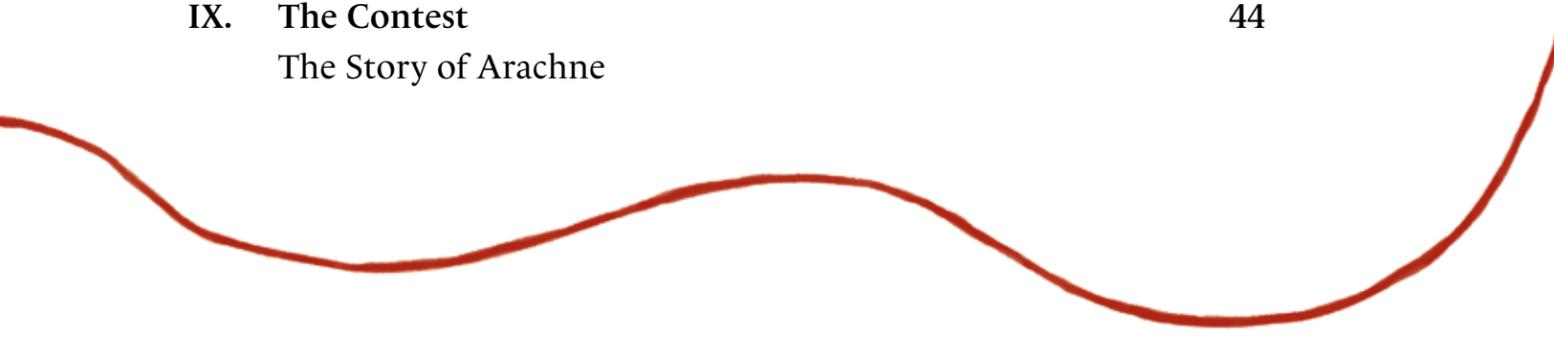


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I. THE BLUE BALL

The Story of the Origin of the World and of Humans

At the beginning of the beginning there was no sky, no earth, no up above and no down below.

What we now call earth, sea, and sky were nameless and all mixed together in one big mess. Hot and cold intermingled, hard and soft kept changing into each other. Nothing kept its form, everything was constantly changing, and one thing would touch another and twist and turn as it passed by in a great swirling cloud of chaos.

At the beginning of the beginning there was nothing but wild Nature, totally out of control. It was huge and powerful and stirred everything together into a mighty ball.

The god of the beginning wondered at all this confusion. Finally, he had had enough of the chaos. He separated the earth from the sky by pushing one downward and the other upward. He created enough room for the waters—the seas and lakes, the ponds and the rivers.

He shaped a firm ball out of the chaos and rounded it in such a way that it seemed exactly equal on all sides. Now a beautiful blue



globe went floating through the air. He allowed the rocks to spread, the mountains to soar into the sky, and narrow valleys to form between little hills.

The god of the beginning made the trees cover themselves with leaves, and he scattered flowers and blossoms over the fields. He let loose the winds, which at once rushed away in all directions like warring brothers. The east wind headed for the warm coasts, where the sun rises. The west wind went in the opposite direction. The north wind made its way to the snow and ice, far from the south wind, which set out for the other side of the earth.

Finally, the god of the beginning parted the mists. He pushed some clouds up to the top of the mountains, but in many places he let the bright sky shine through.

Then suddenly at night one could also see the stars, countless millions of twinkling buds that lit up the heavens.

“What is missing here is life and movement, up above and down below,” said the god of the beginning, and so he created birds for the sky, different animals for the earth, and fish for the seas.

And in order for there to be other kinds of living beings who could witness everything he had just created, the god of the beginning made humans.

He mixed seeds from the light of the sky with earth and rainwater, and out of them he formed women and men who looked similar to the gods. He gave them hands to hold with and feet to walk on. They were to walk upright over the ground, and their eyes were to look not only at the earth below but also at the heavens above. Unlike many animals they were given the ability to raise their vision all the way to the stars.



II. FLOWERS AND SWORDS

The Story of Four Ages

The newly created humans lived under the sky, their eyes looking up at the stars. They loved their Earth, which offered them so many good things. Fruit grew on the trees and in the fields, grass and grain of all kinds grew from the soil, and in the water there were fish that one could catch. There were animals too, whose flesh was delicious to eat.

The gods had made their home in the sky and looked down with pleasure at what was happening on Earth. This was the Golden Age, when humans knew nothing of guilt and revenge, of crime and punishment, of danger and fear. No boats had yet been built for them to sail to other lands and conquer them; there were no swords or spears, and peace still reigned among humans. It was a time without soldiers and without wars.

The humans busied themselves harvesting their crops from the fields, picking fruit from the trees and berries from the bushes. There was more than enough milk and honey, and the flowers enjoyed the spring, which seemed never to end.



But then, both in heaven and on Earth, there came a change. The uncontrollable and often bad-tempered Jupiter took command of the gods.

He shortened the endless spring to three months and divided the year into four seasons: the spring was followed by summer, autumn, and winter.

In summer the air glowed, and the heat played havoc with human senses.

In autumn the winds howled their hardest, and the trees lost their leaves.

In winter came the cold, and everyone looked for shelter. Freezing animals stayed for months in their caves, and freezing humans in their makeshift houses.

This was the Silver Age, not as shiny as the Gold but still brighter than dark Iron.

There followed the Bronze Age, which already knew about the darkness of Iron. Life lost its sparkle; the seeds of doubt and discord were sown; the air turned gray, as did the faces of the people, who now quarreled more and more and passed ever harsher judgments on their fellow humans.

The worst age of all was the fourth: the Iron Age.

Humans were driven by deceit, greed, and anger; and many were filled with envy at someone else's good fortune.

Weapons were forged out of hard metal, swords and spears rattled in the wind, and plans were drawn up for war.

Trees were carved into boats in which one could sail across the water to conquer other islands. Borders were set up all over the land.

No host was ever sure that he could trust his guests. Whatever was precious to him would be stolen. Soon not even the Earth's interior was sacred as people dug deeper and deeper into it with their sharp tools in the hunt for gold and iron.

Soon they were holding their forged iron in their hands to fight for gold, and the treasures that many people had at first regarded as a blessing quickly turned into a curse. . . .



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Of the glories of the Golden Age nothing remained. Where once there had been beautiful flowers blossoming in the meadows there were now the ruins of war.

Giants of enormous stature, not satisfied with the destruction they'd caused on Earth, also wanted to conquer the heavens. They piled mountains on top of one another in order to take the stars out of the sky, the silver and gold of the night.

At last the gods lost patience.

Jupiter, king of the gods, sent down a mighty thunderbolt to smash the piled-up mountains. The giants tumbled down from their homemade tower, and many were buried under the falling rocks. And so the heavens remained intact. But this was not enough to appease the angry gods.

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III. FISH IN TREES

The Story of the Great Flood

Jupiter was so angry at the selfish behavior and cruelty of humans that he decided to punish them with thunderbolts. These were meant to set everything on fire.

But after the first few thunderbolts, he hesitated. Would this terrible fire, which would cover the whole planet, also send heaven up in flames?

He recalled the thunderbolts. Then he gathered together dark and heavy rain clouds. The rain was to cleanse life on Earth forever, and so he planned to send down a great flood.

Jupiter let loose the south wind to spread the rain clouds, and then he ordered the river gods to show their power.

Soon water was flowing from all sides. From the sky came continuous rain, and the rivers overflowed their banks and flooded the land.

The humans saw that the gods were angry, and now they were really afraid.



They climbed onto the roofs of their houses and to the tops of the trees, and they boarded their boats to try and escape from the masses of water. But the water kept on rising, and the rain kept on pouring.

Soon the flood covered the fields and gushed through the valleys. The land turned into sea, and there was not a riverbank to be seen. Fish swam through the treetops, and boats got stuck on the roofs of high towers. Soon neither humans nor animals could find any refuge. There was no escaping the Great Flood.

Only one man and woman were to survive the flood. The man—one in a million, and a true worshipper of the gods—was called Deucalion.

His wife—one woman in a million, and also a loyal worshipper of the gods—was called Pyrrha. It was left to them to start a new life on Earth.



IV. THE GREAT MOTHER

The Story of Deucalion and Pyrrha

Jupiter had had enough of the Great Flood.
He was no longer angry.

He drove the rain clouds away and kept a tight rein on the quarrelsome winds. With one gentle breath he smoothed the waves of the mighty ocean that had spread all over the planet.

He blew into a huge shell, and the sound calmed the river gods. The rivers stopped flowing over their banks. Then he ordered the mountains to rise again.

And so the land grew as the flood slowly receded. Soon there were gray rocks and green hills rising out of the water, and here and there a treetop made its way upward. A new Earth emerged, with high mountains and narrow valleys, green hills and dense forests.

Deucalion and Pyrrha had already been together before the flood, and now they were even closer as they gazed in amazement at the new world that had opened up before them.



A deep silence lay over the earth.

With tears in their eyes, Deucalion and Pyrrha stood there holding hands.

“I can see some birds in the sky and some fish in the water,” said Deucalion. “Many animals have survived the Great Flood. But we are the only two humans left—a man and a woman who must start out on a new beginning.”

For a long time they stood there, uncertain. Everything was new, and they didn’t know where they should begin.

A goddess—the goddess of prophecy—took pity on them in their isolation. “Take off your clothes! And then throw the bones of the Great Mother behind your backs,” she whispered.

Pyrrha heard these mysterious instructions and thought about them for a long time. The darkness of the words made her feel uncomfortable. And at first Deucalion too had no idea what to do.

Only when they shared their thoughts did Pyrrha and Deucalion find an answer.

“The Great Mother! She must have meant the earth! The earth from which we both came! And her bones—they can only be the stones that are hidden in the ground.”

They took off their clothes and walked naked and defenseless over the soft ground.

With their hands they pulled stones out of the black soil and threw them behind their backs as they walked.

Out of the stones that Deucalion threw behind him grew men as naked and defenseless as himself. Out of the stones that Pyrrha threw behind her grew women who looked just like her.

Swiftly Deucalion and Pyrrha walked on and on, and behind their backs the number of women and men became greater and greater.

And so the human race was reborn, emerging from the body of the Great Mother Earth.



V. THE LAUREL TREE

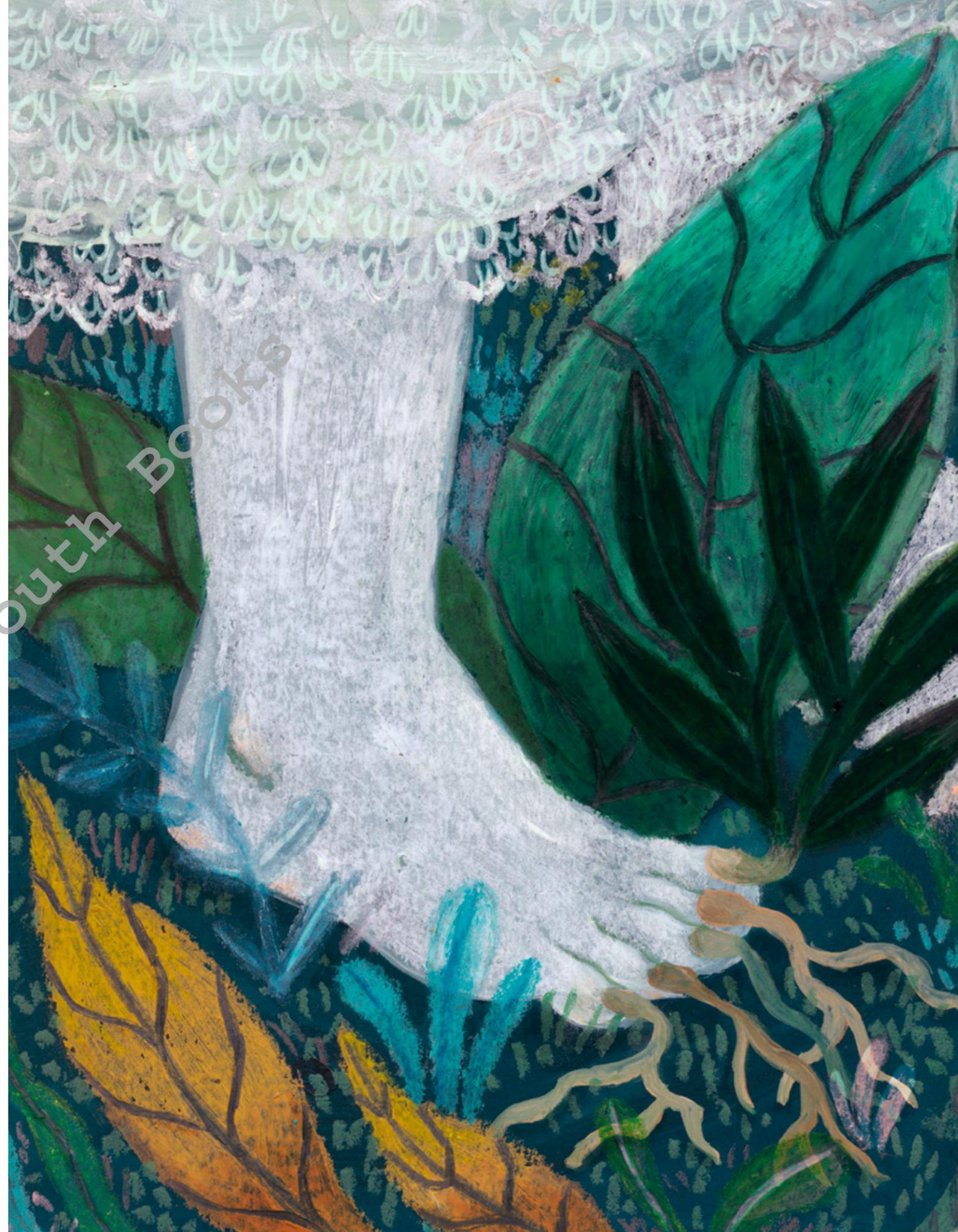
The Story of Daphne and Apollo

There were many gods in heaven, and again and again some of them would come down and mix with humans. Amor, the god of love, with his bow and arrows, was particularly fond of roaming through fields and forests in order to have fun with gods and humans.

One morning he had two arrows in his quiver: one gold, which would make someone fall passionately in love, and the other lead, which would make the person run away from love.

Amor aimed the golden arrow at the quarrelsome god Apollo, son of Jupiter, who enjoyed boasting about all the fights he'd won. And the arrow with the leaden tip struck the beautiful nymph Daphne.

When the love god's arrow hit him, Apollo at once fell madly in love with Daphne. All he wanted was to be beside her and to declare his love. But she was horrified and fled from him like a gentle breeze that can never be held in the hand.



“Run away more slowly so you won’t hurt yourself on the thorns in the forest!” shouted the infatuated Apollo in his concern for the beautiful Daphne.

Again and again love drove him to approach her until she no longer knew if she was coming or going.

Finally, exhausted by her efforts to escape from him, she stopped beside a river.

“River gods, please help me!” she cried in despair. “Take away this shape that is so pleasing to my pursuer. Transform me!”

Hardly had Daphne made her wish when she felt her whole body changing. Her hair turned into leaves, her arms into branches, and her feet into roots that sank into the soft earth on the riverbank. Tall and upright, Daphne stood there in her new form as a laurel tree, and the wind played among her leaves.

Apollo had watched the transformation of his beloved nymph, and now he stood sadly before the laurel tree. “You cannot be my wife,” he said, kneeling down. “But I want to show you in another way

how much I honor you. From now on your leaves will be the reward for great and noble deeds. As from today a laurel wreath will decorate those who have earned fame and glory as you have done.”

A gust of wind made the laurel tree tremble, and it looked as if its branches were nodding in approval.



VI. THE SINGING REED

The Story of Pan and Syrinx

As with Daphne and Apollo, love played its part in the meeting between Pan and Syrinx. But this time Amor, the god of love, was innocent—he had not taken any arrows out of his quiver.

Pan, the god of shepherds, had been wandering through rough mountain country when he saw the nymph Syrinx, and from that moment on his heart could never rest. He confessed his love to the beautiful nymph, but she rejected him with a few short, sharp words.

Just like Daphne, she fled to a river in order to ask the gods and goddesses for help. When Pan reached out to take hold of Syrinx, the only thing he found in his hand was a thin and fragile reed that rocked in the wind.

Syrinx had been transformed, and when the gentle breeze stroked the open reed, one could hear a soft and melancholy sound. . . .

The transformed nymph was singing a song of lamentation, and Pan, the god of shepherds, was deeply moved.



“I have seen your transformation,” he said, “and I shall find a way to answer you.”

He gathered up several reeds, stuck them together with wax, and made them into a flute that still bears his name today.

He carefully raised his newly made flute to his lips and answered the nymph’s song with gentle sounds of his own.

Pan stayed for a long time beside the river.

The conversation between Pan and Syrinx was still to be heard until late into the night. . . .



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VII. A BULL AS WHITE AS SNOW

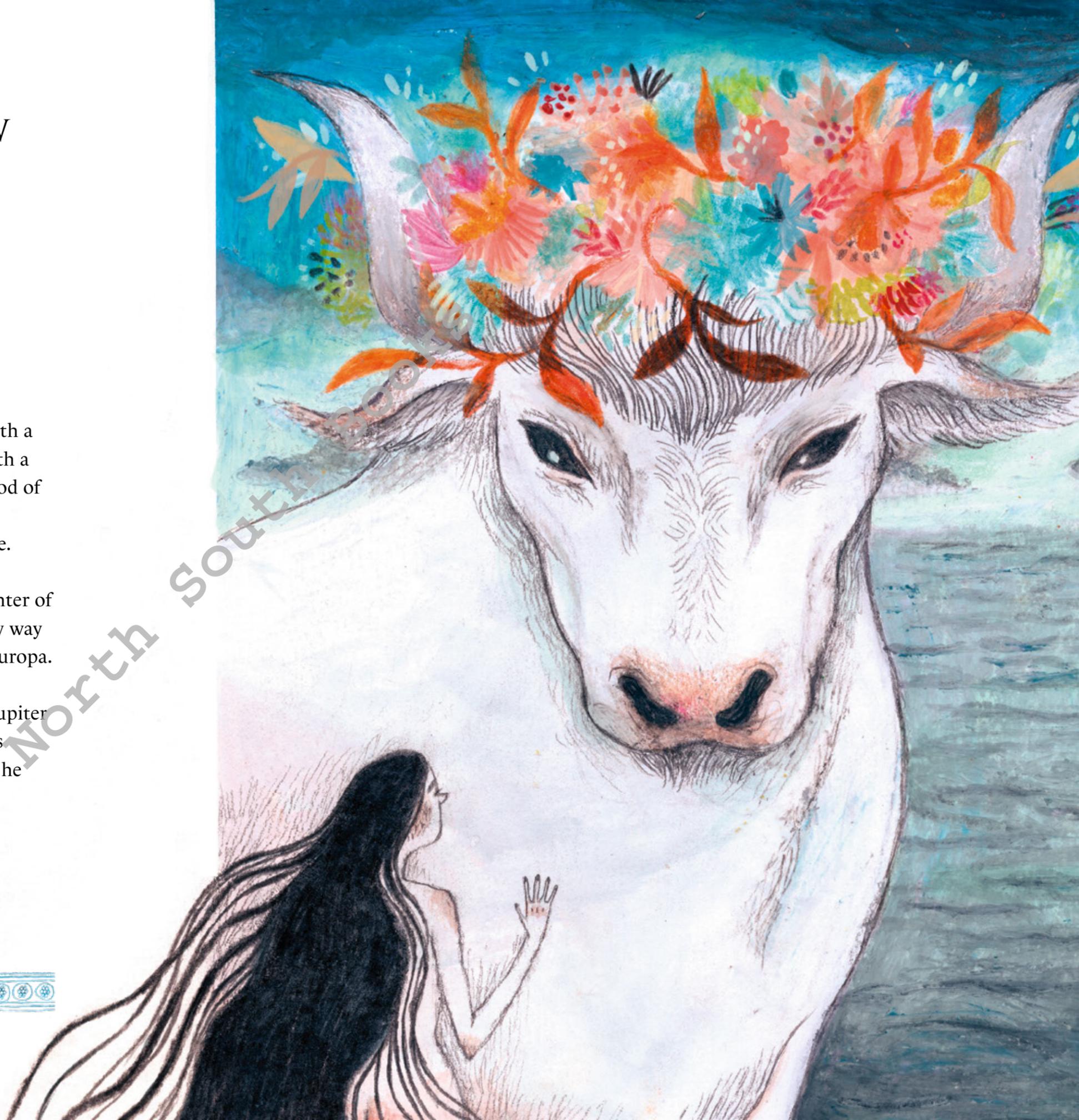
The Story of Jupiter and Europa

Jupiter, the god of gods, could set the winds in motion with a wave of his hand. He could make the rivers burst their banks with a single look, and he could even change the whole world with a nod of his head.

And yet Jupiter, the god of gods, was not greater than love. Against love he was powerless.

When he fell in love with young Europa, the proud daughter of a king, he didn't know what to do. He who was used to ruling by way of cunning and power now searched for a means of abducting Europa. Maybe he could win her love if she was far from home?

One day when Europa went for a walk along the beach, Jupiter appeared in the form of a bull. Strong and handsome, his skin as white as snow, with horns that shone like gems in the sunshine, he was suddenly standing there in front of her.



Europa was startled, and at first she shrank back from him; but gradually she began to feel at ease with this beautiful white animal. She held flowers up to his mouth and let him munch them. She stroked his shining skin.

Soon she was decorating his horns with garlands of flowers. And eventually she playfully jumped up onto the back of the friendly creature.

Now the white bull slowly moved away from the dry land and headed step by step toward the sea.

Europa still had no idea of the approaching danger. Until suddenly the huge and heavy beast started to run. And he ran faster and faster in great strides toward the surging sea.

Terrified, Europa clung to his horns, her dress fluttering in the wind like a flag.

Without stopping, the white bull carried her across the waters of the ocean, far away from the shore.

Transformed into a bull, Jupiter had abducted the king's daughter.

He took her to a land that one day would be named after her.



VIII. THE BEAUTIFUL REFLECTION

The Story of Narcissus and Echo

The nymph Liriope was famous for her beauty.

Her skin was water-blue, as clear and as lovely as the waves of a gentle sea.

When one day she gave birth to a son, no one was surprised that he too was extraordinarily beautiful.

The boy, whose skin was light and whose hair was dark, grew up; and wherever he went, everyone would bow before the sheer handsomeness of his face and figure.

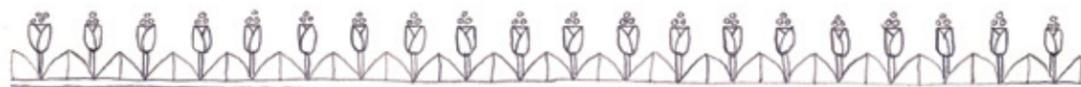
A nymph named Echo, who was good at imitating the voices of others, fell in love with the handsome youth.

She had a habit of always repeating the last words of whomever she was speaking to.

One day Narcissus went for a walk in the mountains with some friends, but he got lost. He called out, "Is anyone here?"

Echo repeated "Here!" in a loud voice, and in this way she lured the youth toward her.

Narcissus looked around, but he was in unknown surroundings and so he was hoping that he would soon see a familiar face.



“Come!” he shouted.

“Come!” the voice of Echo shouted back.

Narcissus made his way toward the attractive voice, and suddenly he found himself face-to-face with Echo.

The amorous nymph wanted to hug him, but Narcissus was shocked and pushed her arms away. Then angrily he left her—he wanted nothing to do with her.

He hurried off to look for his friends.

At this moment the rejected nymph lost all control. Her body transformed itself and seemed almost to vanish into thin air; it became light and transparent, and nothing remained except her voice.

From that day onward, no human ever saw the nymph again. But Echo’s voice is still to be heard in many places, and especially in the mountains.

Whenever you shout something to her, she answers with the last word you spoke.

Narcissus was honored and admired by many, but no one ever found favor in his own critical eyes. Then one day he saw a face in a lake and felt amazingly attracted by it. How beautiful the eyes were, and the mouth too—he could not take his own eyes off this face. At last Narcissus had fallen in love!

For hours he sat by the lake, talking to the beautiful face in the water.

Narcissus had fallen in love with his reflection! Without knowing it, he was worshipping his own beauty.

He tried in vain to kiss the lovely face in the water. He tried in vain to take hold of it. And he longed in vain to be embraced by this other being to whom he felt so magically attracted.

Love for himself blinded Narcissus to all others. Soon he could look at nothing except his own reflection.

And no one else was even allowed to see him.

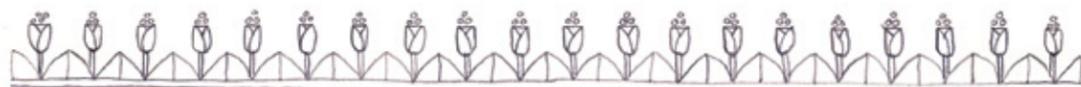
Depressed by the fact that he could never hold his true love, he forgot to drink and to eat. His body grew thinner, and he became weaker and weaker.

Again and again he would gaze at the beautiful face in the water, and it would gaze back longingly at him.

Time went by.

Narcissus could feel all his strength ebbing away.

He raised his head and looked around him. Then he looked into the lake again.



And at last he suddenly realized that all his love had been devoted to himself.

Sadly he looked again at the face in the lake, with tears running down its cheeks just like the tears on his own face.

“Alas!” he said softly to his reflection. “This must be the end. Farewell!”

“Farewell!” came the sound of Echo’s voice.

She was still in love with the unhappy youth and had stayed invisibly by his side.

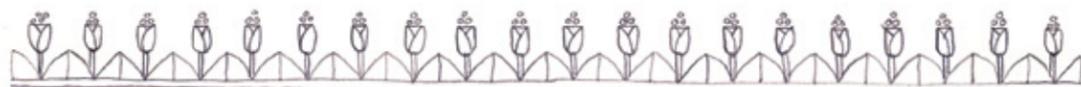
“Farewell!” came the echo from the mountains all around.

Narcissus lay down exhausted in the tall grass. He closed his eyes.

Then a wondrous change came over him. His body slowly disappeared into the greenness.

And from the spot where his weakened body had been lying, there now grew a flower of extraordinary beauty. Its center was a radiant yellow, and this was surrounded by white petals.

The flower was given the same name as the handsome youth, and even today it is still called Narcissus.





IX. THE CONTEST

The Story of Arachne

It is a wonderful thing to be so good at an art that one's fame spreads far and wide.

This was what happened to the young Arachne, who was famous for the inimitable way she could weave masterpieces out of dyed wool and silken threads.

Men and women came from all over the country to admire her art and to touch the fine beauty of the cloths she wove.

"Your work is so perfect it's as if it had been made by Minerva, the goddess of art," they said in sheer wonderment at her skill.

"What are you talking about?" snapped Arachne, who was so sure of her supremacy that she had become arrogant. "Let Minerva come here and show what she can do. I'll bet that I'd beat her in any art competition!"



When the goddess heard this, she came to Arachne disguised as an old woman.

“Listen to an old lady,” she said to the artist sitting at her loom. “Strive for fame and glory among humans, but leave the gods with their own splendors. Do not try to be equal with the gods—that can only lead to disaster. Ask the goddess to pardon you for your impertinence and she will forgive you.”

Arachne would not listen to her advice.

“Has the goddess sent an old woman to threaten me?” she sneered. “Why doesn’t she come herself and show her art? I’m not afraid of her!”

Then Minerva transformed herself into her true form.

“You shall have your contest,” she said to Arachne. “Let us set up two looms and work side by side. Each of us will weave a carpet, beautiful and costly, with golden threads and richly illustrated with the faces of gods and humans. Then let us see which of our woven pictures is more pleasing to the eye!”

And so the contest began.

Many people came to see it for themselves. They gathered round the two looms.

Arachne and Minerva were soon absorbed in their work, their hands constantly moving, pulling the colored threads, and the looms creaked and groaned, while outside the day turned into night.

At last, as the sun rose, they both finished working at their looms.

The goddess’s picture showed Neptune, god of the sea, with his trident. Other gods and goddesses were also to be seen in many forms. Some had been transformed into cranes or snow-white storks that flew through the shimmering air.

The goddess’s picture was beautiful, but Arachne’s was an even finer example of the weaver’s art.

There were silver fish jumping high out of the blue sea, and Jupiter ran over the water disguised as the white bull abducting Princess Europa. And there were many other well-known stories illustrated in her carpet.



Everyone could see at once that Arachne's picture far outshone Minerva's. The whole room seemed to be lit up by its beauty.

This infuriated Minerva.

"You are a champion weaver!" she shouted angrily. "And so you shall remain. But I warned you! Arrogant humans who consider themselves equal to the gods must be punished!"

She took a handful of herbs out of a bag and sprinkled them over the hair of the unhappy Arachne.

"You shall go on weaving as you have always done," said the goddess as she left. "But within the hour you shall take on a new form."

Then she swiftly walked out of the house.

Very soon Arachne felt her body beginning to change. Her head became smaller, her arms and legs shrank and became very thin, and only her stomach in the middle seemed to get bigger.

Arachne had been transformed into a spider.

The people who had watched the contest were horrified and fled from the house.

Arachne was to go on spinning, just as the goddess had prophesied. Even as a spider she could still weave her webs.

There were many places, both inside the house and outside between the twigs and branches of the trees, where from now on her works of art could be admired—beautiful webs spun with silver threads.



X. THE FORBIDDEN WATER

The Story of the Lycian Farmers

Just like the arrogant Arachne, the Lycian farmers were made to feel the wrath of the gods through a transformation of their bodies.

The farmers lived in the country of Lycia, a place with many lakes. The land was fertile, the water was good for their fields and meadows, the grain stood tall, and they had no problems earning their daily bread.

One day Latona, a young goddess, came to their country. She had just given birth to twins, and she brought them with her, wrapped in a cloth.

The sun blazed down on the dusty paths, and she was tired and thirsty.

When she came to a little lake, she carefully laid the two children on the shore and bent down over the clear water to quench her thirst.

Then suddenly she was pulled away roughly.



“Leave our water alone!” shouted some angry farmers who happened to be there cutting reeds for their baskets. “Strangers are forbidden to drink this water!”

“You want me, a mother with two children, to stay away from the water?” asked Latona incredulously. “You forbid a thirsty woman and her babies to drink the water that should belong to anyone who enters this land?”

“It’s our water!” replied the grumpy farmers. “You’re not allowed to drink here! Go away and take your children with you!”

They forced her to leave the water.

Then the young goddess raised her voice in anger.

“If this water is so valuable and so precious to you, then you shall live here forever. From now on you will stay on the shores of your lakes and ponds, and your voices will be heard from far away! As you are so fond of complaining, in future you will have wide mouths and harsh voices!”

No sooner had she spoken these words than the farmers began to feel their arms and legs and bodies changing.

They became smaller and smaller, and the color of their skin also began to change.

The farmers were horrified, but when they tried to complain to the young goddess, no words came out of their mouths. All that could be heard was a loud croaking.

Latona had turned the Lycian farmers into frogs.

From this moment on they lived beside the water they had forbidden others to drink.

They hopped frantically up and down, and with every complaint that left their mouths the croaking grew louder and louder.

Latona quenched her thirst with the clear water of the lake, and then she went her way with her two children.

For a long time she was still able to hear the angry voices of the frogs. Until late that night the wind carried the sound of their croaking all over the country.





XI. THE RED THREAD

The Story of Ariadne and Theseus

How can one hide a monster, half human, half bull, the very sight of which terrifies all eyes and hearts?

Minos, king of Crete, owned such a monster. It was called a Minotaur, and he wished to hide it from himself and from everyone else.

Daedalus, an inventor who was always full of good ideas, was given the task of building a prison that would not only keep the Minotaur out of sight but would also be strong enough to stop it from escaping.

Daedalus thought long and hard about it. He drew lines in the sand with a stick and spent hours walking up and down the shore, talking to himself all the time.

Mumbling and muttering, he laid stones here and there on the ground, and he would often walk around in circles.

At last he was able to tell King Minos his plan. A labyrinth was to be built, with high stone walls and countless blind alleys—a maze of confusing paths that would lead nowhere. Whoever was trapped in



there would forever go round in circles without finding any way out.

King Minos agreed and commissioned Daedalus to build the labyrinth.

Hundreds of men set to work under Daedalus's supervision. After many long hours of labor they had finally built a mighty stone prison from which no one should ever be able to escape.

When this hugely impressive construction was complete, Daedalus himself walked along the stone paths, and even he, the architect and builder of the labyrinth, had the utmost difficulty finding the way out.

Soon everyone was talking about the mysterious labyrinth on the island of Crete—and about the monster that was hidden inside it.

Warriors came from far and wide, wanting to prove themselves by fighting the monster and by mastering the maze.

But none of them succeeded. They were defeated by the Minotaur, or they got hopelessly lost in the labyrinth and never found their way out. And so their fate was sealed.

One day young Theseus, who later became king of Athens, came to the island. He wanted to see the labyrinth. And he wanted to fight and defeat the Minotaur.

Love is also a labyrinth and often takes people along strange paths. Ariadne, Minos's daughter, fell in love at first sight with young Theseus.

She heard about his plan to go alone into the labyrinth. How could she possibly help him?

After a sleepless night she had an idea that would save him.



Before he left, she secretly pressed a ball of red thread into his hand and told him to fix the end to the gateway through which he would enter the labyrinth.

Theseus took the gift and did as she had advised. Then he rolled the thread out behind him as he went deeper and deeper into the maze.

After a short, sharp fight he defeated the monster and then followed the red thread back again to the entrance. And so he succeeded in finding his way out of the labyrinth. Ariadne's thread had saved his life.

That same night Ariadne and Theseus left the island together out of love for each other—and also out of fear of what the angry King Minos might do to them.



XII. THE FLIGHT OF THE BIRDS

The Story of Daedalus and Icarus

King Minos was furious. His daughter, Ariadne, had left Crete with Theseus after helping him to escape from the labyrinth. All over the island people were talking about Ariadne's lifesaving thread, which had enabled Theseus to find his way out.

Minos was also furious with Daedalus. Had he and his son, Icarus, helped Ariadne? The three of them often had their heads together and spent many hours talking with one another. Had they joined forces against him?

Daedalus knew that it was dangerous to make the king angry and that he had to get away from Crete. For a long time he felt like a prisoner on the island. It was impossible for him to escape by boat because the king's soldiers guarded every shore.

For hours Daedalus and Icarus sat outside their house trying to think of a way they might leave the island.

One afternoon there were lots of birds in the sky. An endless flock flew high over their heads.



“Do you see the birds flying up there?” Daedalus asked his son. “We can’t sail across the water—the king and his men rule the seas. But he doesn’t rule the sky. As free as the birds, flapping our wings—that’s how we’ll leave this island!”

Daedalus and Icarus began to collect the feathers they found on the shore and in the fields and meadows. They laid them out on the ground in thick rows, beginning with the smallest. Then they added the larger ones. Daedalus stuck them together with wax and fetched some sticks and some string, and with them he made wings for himself and his son.

“Let’s see if they work,” he said to Icarus one morning. “We need to lift ourselves up in the air. Be careful not to go too close to the sea. The water would make your feathers heavy, and you’d fall into the waves. And don’t fly too close to the sun! The heat would melt the wax between your feathers, and then there’d be nothing to hold you up in the air.”

And so the two of them went to a cliff and fastened their wings. Then bravely they jumped, and so their flight began. The wind blew underneath the feathers of their wings and carried father and son far away from the hated island.

Like two large birds they flew across the sky, high above the shimmering sea. But flying was so easy that Icarus became overconfident. “I’m free! Free as a bird!” he shouted into the wind as he let it carry him upward.

Higher and higher he climbed to the horror of his father, who kept calling out to him at the top of his voice, trying to bring him to his senses.

But now Icarus had come too close to the sun. Its rays cut



through to the wax between the feathers like thin knives, and one by one the feathers floated away until the homemade wings fell apart in the sky.

Daedalus could only watch helplessly as his son fell like a stone from the heights of heaven down into the depths of the blue ocean. Nothing could save him. Overcome with grief, Daedalus landed on the shore of the ocean that since then has been known as the Icarian Sea.

“We’ve been given a terrible punishment because of my pride,” Daedalus said to himself. “I wanted to conquer the sky and be like the birds. Oh, what have I done?”

He plunged into deep mourning and stayed for many days and nights at the place where he had lost his son.

XIII. THE RUSTLING OF LEAVES

The Story of Philemon and Baucis

On a hill in a distant land stand two special trees: an oak a thousand years old and right next to it a lime. The two trees have merged, with their branches intertwined, so that they are bound inseparably together.

A low stone wall encloses them to show that here are two beings that belong to each other, and you are entering a very special place.

The two were once a husband and wife, Philemon and Baucis—a couple who were united in love all their lives.

And they are still together for all time—two gnarled old trees standing on a hill. All their leaves rustling in the wind. . . .

One day Jupiter, the greatest of all the gods, and his son Mercury were on their way to visit humans. They wanted to see how humans behaved among their friends but also toward strangers—how willing they would be to open their doors to others and to invite them to sit at their table.



Disguised as humans, they knocked on countless doors, but wherever they went they were rudely turned away.

They were told that the jug was empty, there was scarcely enough food in the cupboard to feed the family, there was absolutely no question of a bed for the night! The two of them could sleep outside under the open sky and look up at the stars. . . .

Tired and angry at the unfriendliness of the humans, Jupiter and Mercury finally found themselves standing outside an old and crooked little hut.

They had to bend down in order to go through the low doorway into the dark house. Inside were an old man and an old woman who got up from their chairs, surprised by the arrival of the two strangers. But they gave them a friendly welcome and invited them to warm themselves by the fire and to rest after their journey.

The old woman fetched some wood and kindling and made a nice bright fire while the old man went out into the little garden to get something to eat.

They also put on the table a juicy piece of meat that they'd been saving for a special occasion, and the guests really tucked into it.

Soon there were also olives and cheese on the table and a jugful of wine. Everything the old couple had in the house—sweet-smelling apples, dried figs—was laid out before the strangers. Even before the meal was over, the old woman began to prepare a bed for the two guests. It was made of wicker, and she covered it as best she could with old carpets and cloths.

The two gods Jupiter and Mercury were amazed and delighted at the wonderful hospitality of the old couple. They asked them about their lives and about the things they wished for, and everyone enjoyed this lovely peaceful evening beside the flickering fire.

Philemon saw that although he was continuously filling his guests' glasses with wine, the jug was never empty, and only then did he realize what kind of guests had come to his crooked little house.

"Forgive us for our poor hospitality," he said to Jupiter. "We have shared all that we have with you. But we still have a goose, and we could roast that for you."

He hurried outside in order to take the one and only goose out of its coop, but it escaped from him and ran into the house, flapping its wings.

The old couple tried to catch the frightened bird, but it rushed away here, there, and everywhere until finally it hid behind the guests.



“Leave it,” said Jupiter. “Your hospitality puts us to shame. You have very little and yet you have given us so much. You should know that you are the only people who have not turned us away. And so we are going to punish humans for their hard-heartedness. You must leave your house with us. A flood is coming this very day, and it will cover the land all around. The people and their houses will not be spared, but you shall be saved.”

When they had finished eating, the old man and the old woman went with Jupiter and Mercury to climb the highest hill.

They were amazed to see water suddenly pouring across the meadows from all sides, turning the land into one huge lake.

Only their house remained standing, but all at once the crooked little hut was transformed into a magnificent temple.

“We thank you for your hospitality,” said Jupiter. “Do you have any wishes that I can grant for you?”

The couple had a brief conversation.

“Let us live here as guardians of the temple,” they said. “And let both of us die at the same moment when our time comes. Neither of us should have to see the other’s grave.”

Jupiter assured them that both wishes would be fulfilled.

For many years Philemon and Baucis guarded the Temple of the Gods. And when their time came, each of them was transformed at the same moment into a tree. Philemon became an oak and Baucis a lime.

Just as they had lived side by side as humans, so they remained now as trees.

They are still to be seen, the old couple, in that distant land: two trees enclosed within a low stone wall—two lovers high on a hill, with their leaves rustling in the wind.



XIV. THE DIVINE VOICE

The Story of Orpheus and Eurydice

The tale of Orpheus and Eurydice is also a love story. It is a love story in which a difficult test had to be passed.

Orpheus was a singer whose voice was able to work miracles.

When he sang, leaping animals would pause in midair to listen to the sound. Trees and plants would bow before him, and he could even reach through to stones and rocks with his songs. It was as if his voice was a gift from the gods, it was so fine and clear, so strong and so beautiful. Humans and animals, gods and other beings of all kinds came just to listen to him singing.

He could calm the waves of the ocean with his voice.

But even his divine voice was no defense against the darker side of life.

Eurydice, his beloved wife, was bitten by a poisonous snake and died. It seemed that he had lost her forever.

“I shall go and bring her out of Hades, the world of the dead,” swore Orpheus, and so he made his way down into the Underworld.



He succeeded in enchanting everyone with his singing—even the many-headed dog, Cerberus, guardian of the Underworld. And so he was able to enter the Kingdom of the Dead.

“Let love be greater than death,” Orpheus said to the guards who watched over the realm of shadows, and he begged permission to take Eurydice back into the world of the living. And so Eurydice was brought to him.

“Walk ahead of her since you know the way,” said a voice out of the darkness. “Your wife will follow you. But keep in mind that if you should turn around just once to look at her, even if you only move your head, then she must remain with us forever.”

Orpheus gratefully agreed to this test and set out on his way. With pounding heart he heard the footsteps of his wife behind him.

But then there was a strange silence.

Was she no longer following him? He went on hesitantly. Was she still behind him or not?

Just very slightly, as if an imperceptible gust of wind had made him move his head, he turned sideways. He only wanted a glimpse of his beloved wife.

But at once the dreaded voice came out of the darkness.

“Orpheus, you have failed the test! And now your wife is lost to you forever. Leave this place. You are still one of the humans!”

As if through a mist Orpheus once more saw the face of his beloved Eurydice and then she disappeared.

In a daze, Orpheus stumbled along the passageways of the Underworld, past Cerberus, and finally out into the bright sunshine. He was back in the Land of the Living.

For many days and nights he grieved for Eurydice, and no sound came from his lips. His singing had been silenced.

It was not until many years later that Orpheus, the singer with the divine voice, saw his beloved Eurydice again. Only after he had died were the two lovers reunited at last.

From then on they were never separated again.

They lived together, side by side, as shadows in the realm of shadows.





XV. THE GOLDEN HAND

The Story of Midas

King Midas was favored by Fortune.

He had welcomed an old friend of Bacchus, the god of festivals and merriment, and had looked after him well. As a reward, the generous god had allowed him to make one wish.

King Midas didn't need long to decide what he wanted.

"For everything I touch to turn to gold!" he said.

Bacchus looked at him with a strange, sad expression on his face, but then he nodded.

"So it shall be," he said, turning away.

Midas ran out of his palace and touched the branches of the nearest tree that stood in the meadow before him.

A brief shudder went through the tree, and then it seemed to Midas that a golden film slowly spread over all the leaves and branches.

He held a leaf in his hand. It was pure gold.



Midas picked an apple from another tree. It was dazzling gold in the sunshine.

Midas picked up a stone out of the dust and lifted it. The stone too turned to gold.

With a cry of joy, Midas went back into the palace. Bacchus had granted his wish. Everything he touched turned to gold.

Like a child at play he wandered through all the rooms of his palace changing everything he saw to gold: keys and chains, swords and shields, even tables and chairs.

Thanks to his obsessive greed for gold there was soon not a single object in the rooms of his palace that he had not transformed into gold.

Out of sheer excitement, King Midas had not had anything to eat or drink for hours.

At last he sank down exhausted onto a golden chair and called for his servants.

They brought him water and bread and dishes of all kinds. Soon the table was covered with fine foods.

But when Midas reached out to pick up a loaf of bread, a shining gold skin covered the bread and it turned into solid gold.

With a cry of horror, Midas reached out for other dishes. But as soon as he touched them, they all turned into gold.

Midas leaped to his feet. He was overcome with a fear such as he had never known before. He got one of his servants to hold up a jug of water. The servant lifted the jug to the king's mouth, but scarcely had the water touched the king's lips then it turned into liquid gold.

Midas angrily swept the jug away from him, and even as it flew through the air it turned to gold.

"Am I going to die of hunger and thirst?" cried Midas in despair. "What use is all this wealth to me if even bread turns into gold? And if I can't even drink one drop of water? What have I done? How could I have been so stupid, so blinded by gold?"

Only now did he see that the fingers of his right hand were also gold. Had he touched them with his left hand? His golden hand seemed cold and alien to him, as if it was no longer his.

Desperately he raised both his hands high in the air and pleaded with the gods to take pity on him.

"Forgive a king who had lost his senses!" he begged. "Please don't let my heart turn into solid gold!"

The god Bacchus was touched by the king's realization of his folly.

He appeared by his side and spoke soothingly to him:

“Follow the great river across your country until you find its source. Wash yourself in it from head to toe. Then you will be cleansed of your terrible wish and your greed for gold.”

Midas thanked the god and at once set out on his journey.

He walked upriver until at last he found the source. He took off all his clothes and washed himself from head to toe in the cool water.

Again and again he splashed the water over his body and his golden hand.

It seemed as if gold was coming out of all the pores in his skin. It mingled with the clear water and gave it a new color.

A shining gold river now left the source, shimmering in the evening sun.

Midas knelt on its bank and thanked the gods.

For a long time he stayed there cooling his hands in the water, and then he made his way back home.



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XVI. THE WOODPECKER

The Story of Picus

In a land not far from here, the king was a young man named Picus, who was very handsome. He was often to be seen in his crimson cloak riding through the country on wild horses that he had tamed himself.

King Picus was deeply in love with the nymph Canens, whose singing possessed magic powers. Just the sound of her voice could calm wild animals, and the loud rustling of trees in the wind would quiet down when she was singing. She could even stop the tumbling waters of the mountain stream. And birds that flew screaming and screeching through the air would come and sit in silence on her shoulder as she sang.

One day Circe, the daughter of the sun god, came to the forest where King Picus was hunting for wild boar. With his javelin in his hand, he galloped past the goddess without even looking at her.

“Do you dare to ride past me as if I were thin air?” Circe shouted after him, angry that he had not deemed her worthy of even a glance. “You shan’t get away from me so quickly, my young and



handsome king!” She quickly drew the shadow of a mighty boar in the air and ordered this unreal, magical beast to make itself visible to the king.

Picus saw the shadow of the boar disappear behind a bush and at once set off in pursuit. The boar led him to a clearing where Circe was waiting for him.

With a single movement of her left hand she dissolved the shadow of the boar and looked provocatively at Picus. “Now do you see my beauty, young king?” she asked, standing directly in front of him. “Before, you only had eyes for the animals in your forest. Now can you see that a goddess is interested in joining you?”

She asked him to get down from his horse and then she took hold of his hand. In the gentlest of voices she tried to win his heart. “My father, the sun god, would be proud to have a son-in-law like you! Come with me, young king, and you will never want for anything!”

Picus bowed his head to her and then carefully withdrew his hand. “Forgive me, beautiful goddess,” he said politely, “but my heart already belongs to someone else. I cannot go with you.”

Circe heard these words with astonishment at first, but then her surprise turned to anger. “Are you rejecting me? You spurn the favors of a goddess? You will pay for this, young king!” she raged. “You will keep your beauty, but your body will be changed!”

She touched him lightly on the forehead, then turned her face toward the sun and murmured a magic spell.

Picus was suddenly overcome with fear and began to run. He wanted to escape, and he found himself running faster and faster, but it was as if his body had lost all its weight. Then he felt himself getting smaller and smaller, with shiny feathers covering his body, and all at



once the wind lifted him up in the air. Circe had transformed Picus into a beautiful woodpecker.

The crimson of his cloak now decorated his covering of feathers, which were tinged with the gold of his belt. Picus had lost his human form, and all that remained of him was his name.

The followers of the much-loved king arrived at the clearing. During the hunt they had lost sight of him, and now they were searching for him. When they saw the king’s horse and the woodpecker that now had sat down on the empty saddle, they bombarded Circe with questions.

“What do you want me to do? There’s your king,” she said, pointing to the brightly colored bird. And as she was still angry at the stubbornness of humans, she also transformed the king’s followers into all kinds of animals. None of them kept their human form.

XVII. THE OPEN HOUSE

The Story of Fama

The goddess Fama lived in a house right in the center of the world on a mountain between sky, earth, and sea.

The house had many open doors on all sides.

This enabled Fama to see everything—above and below, big and little, near and far.

And she heard everything that went on in the world.

Conversations and sounds came to her ears from all directions.

Her house was a house of voices, of stories both fact and fiction, of truth and lies; and she heard all the rumors that were being spread at all times.

Dark and light voices lived in her house, and all the open rooms were filled with constant murmurings. Right and wrong, joy and fear were her guests, continuously adding to the sounds and bringing new tones to all the stories.



Fama had built the walls of her house out of bronze, and every word was repeated by an echo. No sooner had it been spoken than it would bounce back from the walls so that the endless mumblings and mutterings continued on all sides.

The tireless Fama never slept.

Day and night she sat in her house listening to the hubbub of voices.

She saw and heard everything.

Not even the quietest whisper escaped her ears. Not even the whisperings of silence.

Again and again a new voice would join in, and she would listen with extra attention.

The story was never-ending.

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“NONE OF THEM KEPT THEIR HUMAN FORM.”

About this book:

The *Metamorphoses* by the Roman poet Ovid is a wonderful landmark in world literature.

Publius Ovidius Naso lived from 43 BC until 17 AD. He himself believed that his work would still be read long after his death. He was proved right. Today it is known all over the world.

In a collection of fifteen books, Ovid's *Metamorphoses* tell more than two hundred and fifty stories, in nearly all of which there is a transformation. These are tales about gods, goddesses, and humans, nymphs and other beings; and they are always full of surprises. In one we learn that “none of them kept their human form.” A young man turns into a flower, a nymph becomes a reed, and an old couple are transformed into two trees whose branches intertwine.

Some of these names and stories are well known to us from everyday conversation and adaptations, music, theater, and books.

We meet Narcissus, the young man who falls in love with his own reflection.

The nymph Echo has made a habit of repeating the last word anyone says.

Arachne, the supreme master of the art of weaving, competes with and defeats a goddess and is turned into a spider.

The story of King Midas is famous. Everything he touches turns to gold, but he soon learns that gold can't be eaten.

We also meet Orpheus, the singer with a beautiful voice who wants to bring his wife out of the Underworld. His story has been told in opera houses all over the world.

Well-known paintings in museums and art galleries show us Icarus, who flew too close to the sun on wings of bird feathers and wax made by his father.

All these examples show the extent to which Ovid's *Metamorphoses* have become a part of world literature. The tales are famous in countless languages and cultures.

For this book I have selected seventeen stories, some well known and others less familiar, and I have retold them. I hope they will arouse interest in this wonderful, wide-ranging collection and will make you want to read some of the stories that I have not included here. The adventures of the mighty Hercules are enough to fill a whole book in themselves.

The pictures of transformation in these stories are the work of the brilliant artist Ana Sender. The book itself has been transformed by her illustrations and so we have not only a collection of stories, but also a collection of fascinating artworks.

The range of my selection extends from the beginning of the beginning—the creation of the world—to the house of Fama, goddess of rumor and stories whose doors are always open. Through them she

can hear many voices coming from all directions. Stories come to her from everywhere.

The same applies to this book.

A door is opened to give access to the multifaceted world of “metamorphoses.” As we read we can hear lots of voices: those of Pan and Europa, of Apollo and Daphne, of Narcissus and Echo, and many more. We read, we listen, and the air is filled with whisperings, conversations, and songs.

The story is never-ending.

Heinz Janisch

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LIST OF NAMES

AMOR, also known as Cupid, god of love

APOLLO, god of light, the arts, music, and poetry

ARACHNE, a young woman and master weaver

ARIADNE, daughter of King Minos and his wife, Pasiphae, a daughter of the sun god, Helios

ARTEMIS, goddess of hunting and the forest

BACCHUS, god of wine, also known as Dionysus

BAUCIS, wife of Philemon

CERBERUS, a many-headed dog that guarded the entrance to the Underworld

CIRCE, daughter of the sun god, Helios

DAEDALUS, inventor, architect, artist, father of Icarus

DAPHNE, nymph, daughter of a river god, her name is Greek for “laurel”

DEUCALION, son of the Titan Prometheus, husband of Pyrrha

ECHO, a mountain nymph

EUROPA, daughter of King Agenor and his wife, Telephassa

EURYDICE, a tree nymph, wife of Orpheus

FAMA, goddess of fame and rumor

ICARUS, son of Daedalus ©

JUPITER, king of the gods in Roman religion, the equivalent of the Greek Zeus

LATONA, mother of Apollo and Artemis

LIRIOPE, nymph and mother of Narcissus

MERCURY, god of merchants and thieves, often traveling as a messenger for the gods, the equivalent of the Greek god Hermes

MIDAS, king of Phrygia, a region in modern Turkey

MINERVA, goddess of wisdom, arts, and crafts, patron goddess of poets and teachers, equivalent of the Greek goddess Pallas Athene

MINOS, son of Jupiter and Europa, king of Crete

MINOTAUR, a creature with a human body and a bull’s head

NARCISSUS, son of Liriope and the river god Cephissus

ORPHEUS, singer, son of the Muse Calliope and the king and river god, Oeagrus

PHILEMON, husband of Baucis

PICUS, king of Latium

PYRRHA, daughter of Epimethius and Pandora, wife of Deucalion

SYRINX, a tree nymph

THESEUS, king of Athens

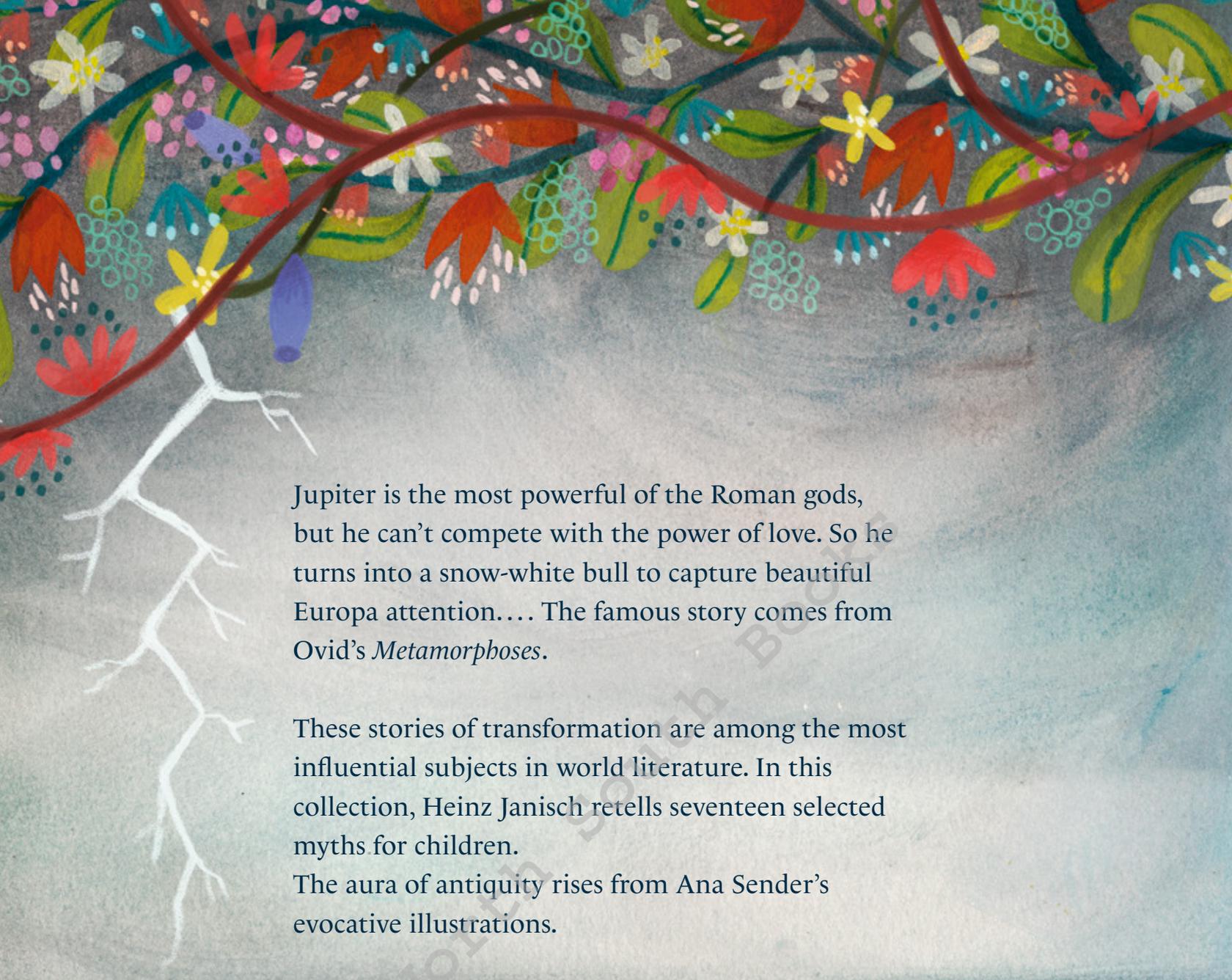
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First published in Switzerland under the title *Das goldene Zeitalter – Die Metamorphosen des Ovid*.
English translation copyright © 2022 by NorthSouth Books Inc, New York.
Translated by David Henry Wilson

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First published in the United States, Great Britain, Canada, Australia, and New Zealand in 2022 by NorthSouth Books, Inc., an imprint of NordSüd Verlag AG, CH-8050 Zürich, Switzerland.
Distributed in the United States by NorthSouth Books, Inc., New York 10016.
Library of Congress Cataloging-in-Publication Data is available.
ISBN: 978-0-7358-4471-1
Printed in Latvia, by Livonia Print, Riga
1 3 5 7 9 • 10 8 6 4 2

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Jupiter is the most powerful of the Roman gods, but he can't compete with the power of love. So he turns into a snow-white bull to capture beautiful Europa attention.... The famous story comes from Ovid's *Metamorphoses*.

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ISBN 978-0-7358-4471-1



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