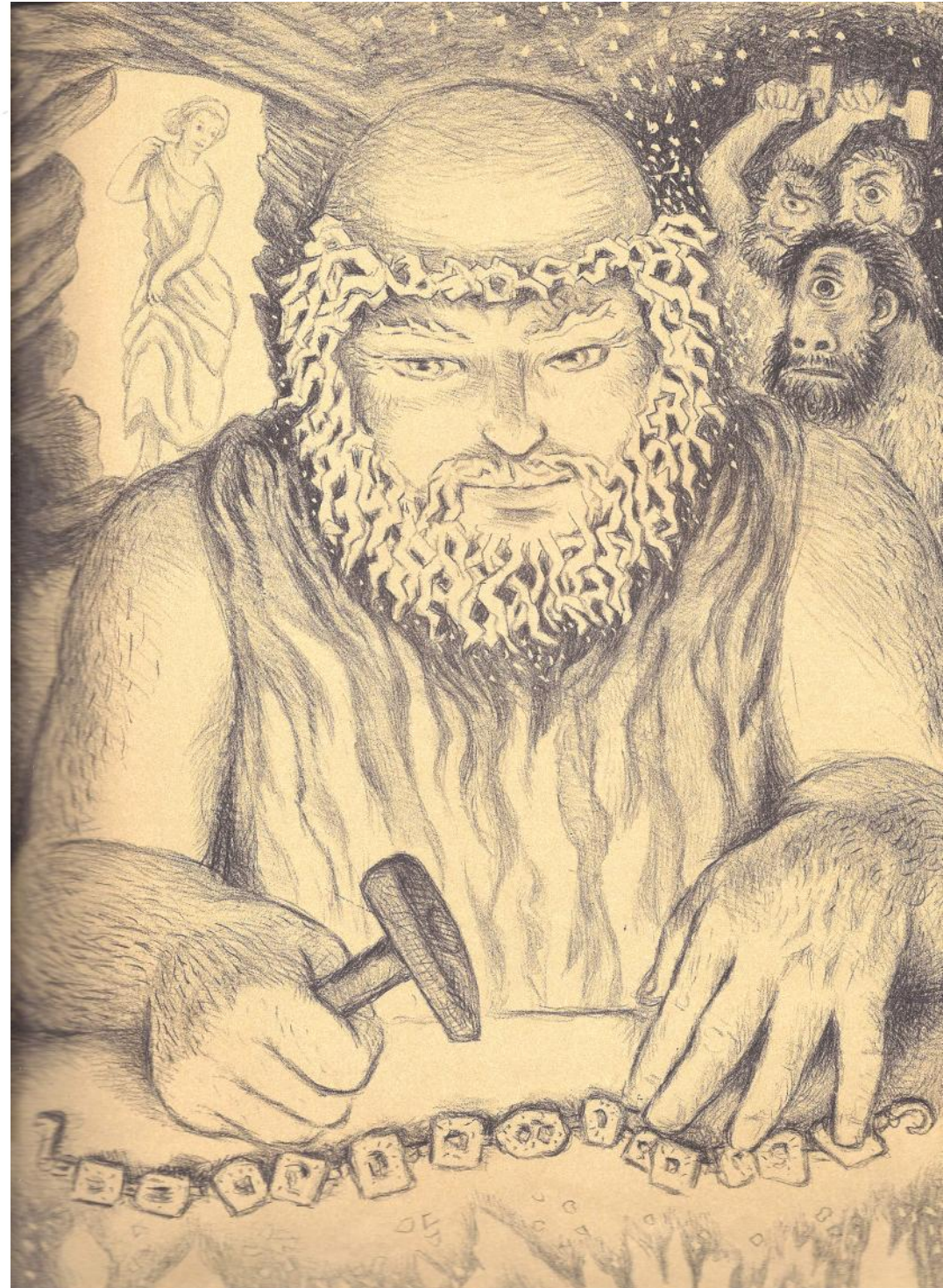


**H**EPHAESTUS, the god of smiths and fire, was the son of Zeus and Hera. He was a hard-working, peace-loving god and was very fond of his mother. Often he tried to soothe her temper with gentle words. Once he had even dared to step between his quarreling parents. He sided with Hera, and that made Zeus so angry that he seized his son by the legs and flung him out of Olympus. For a whole day, Hephaestus hurtled through the air. In the evening he fell on the island of Lemnos, with a thump so hard that the island shook. Thetis, a gentle sea goddess, found him all broken and bruised. She bound his wounds and nursed him back to health.

Zeus forgave him and Hephaestus returned to Olympus, but ever after, he walked like a flickering flame. His body was big and strong and his hands were wonderfully skilled, but his weak legs could not support him for long. He built for himself two robots of gold and silver to help him about. They had mechanical brains and could think for themselves. They even could speak with their tongues of silver. They also served him as helpers in his workshop on Olympus. It was there that Hephaestus made the twelve golden thrones of the gods and their marvelous weapons, chariots, and jewels.

He also had forges inside volcanoes on earth. His helpers there were the one-eyed Cyclopes. They worked his bellows and swung his heavy hammers. When Hephaestus was at work, the din of the hammers could be heard for miles and sparks flew out of the tops of the mountains.

All the Olympian gods were fond of Hephaestus and often went to his forge to admire his work. When Aphrodite, his lovely wife, came to his workshop to look at the matchless jewels he was fashioning for her, she daintily lifted her trailing garments out of the soot.





**A**PHRODITE, the beautiful goddess of love, was the only Olympian who had neither mother nor father. Nobody knew from where she had come. The West Wind had first seen her in the pearly light of dawn as she rose out of the sea on a cushion of foam. She floated lightly over the gentle waves and was so lovely to behold that the wind almost lost his breath. With soft puffs, he blew her to the flowering island of Cythera, where the three Graces welcomed her ashore. The three Graces, goddesses of beauty, became her attendants. They dressed her in shimmering garments, beaded her with sparkling jewels, and placed her in a golden chariot drawn by white doves. Then they led her to Olympus, where all the gods rejoiced in her beauty, seated her on a golden throne, and made her one of them.

Zeus was afraid that the gods would fight over the hand of Aphrodite, and, to prevent it, he quickly chose a husband for her. He gave her to Hephaestus, the steadiest of the gods, and he, who could hardly believe in his good luck, used all his skill to make the most lavish jewels for her. He made her a girdle of finely wrought gold and wove magic into the filigree work. That was not very wise of him, for when she wore her magic girdle no one could resist her, and she was all too irresistible already.

Aphrodite had a mischievous little son whose name was Eros. He darted about with a bow and a quiver full of arrows. They were arrows of love and he delighted in shooting them into the hearts of unwary victims. Whoever was hit by one of his arrows fell head over heels in love with the first person he saw, while Eros laughed mockingly.

Once a year Aphrodite returned to Cythera and dived into the sea from which she had come. Sparkling and young, she rose from the water, as dewy fresh as on the day when she had first been seen. She loved gaiety and glamour and was not at all pleased at being the wife of sooty, hard-working Hephaestus. She would rather have had his brother Ares for her husband.





**A**RES, god of war, was tall and handsome but vain, and as cruel as his brother Hephaestus was kind. Eris, the spirit of strife, was his constant companion. Eris was sinister and mean, and her greatest joy was to make trouble. She had a golden apple that was so bright and shiny everybody wanted to have it. When she threw it among friends, their friendship came to a rapid end. When she threw it among enemies, war broke out, for the golden apple of Eris was an apple of discord.

When Ares heard the clashing of arms, he grinned with glee, put on his gleaming helmet, and leapt into his war chariot. Brandishing his sword like a torch, he rushed into the thick of battle, not caring who won or lost as long as much blood was shed. A vicious crowd followed at his heels, carrying with them Pain, Panic, Famine, and Oblivion.

Once in a while, Ares himself was wounded. He was immortal but he could not bear to suffer pain and screamed so loudly that he could be heard for miles. Then he would run home to Olympus, where Zeus in disgust called him the worst of his children and told him to stop his howling. His wounds, treated with the ointment of the gods, quickly healed, and Ares returned as good as ever and seated himself on his throne, tall, handsome, and boastful, the plume on his golden helmet nodding proudly.

Aphrodite admired him for his splendid looks, but none of the other gods were fond of him, least of all his half sister Athena. She loathed his vain strutting and senseless bloodshed.

