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Greek Myths Stories of Sun, Stone and Sea

Written by

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Illustrated by

Jane Ray

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For my father, who encouraged me to travel.
For my nephew, Fergus, may you go far – *S.P.C.*

For Rosemary Sandberg – *J.R.*



JANETTA OTTER-BARRY BOOKS

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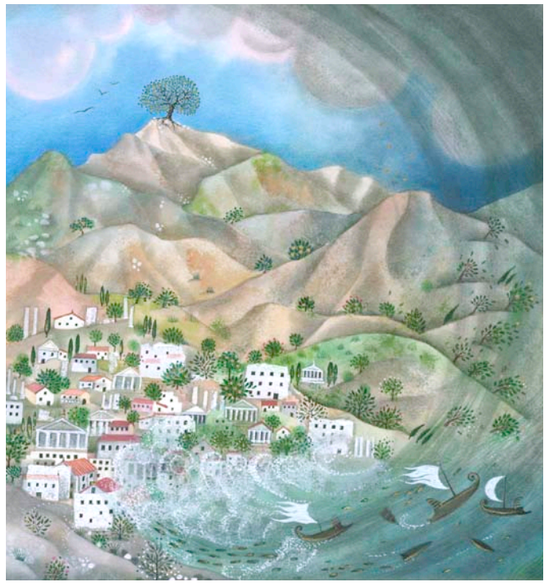
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GREEK MYTHS

STORIES OF SUN, STONE AND SEA



SALLY POMME CLAYTON
ILLUSTRATED BY JANE RAY

FRANCES LINCOLN
CHILDREN'S BOOKS

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MAP OF ANCIENT GREECE



THE WORLD OF GREEK MYTHOLOGY

It was hard work being an Ancient Greek! You had to grow, make or catch everything you needed. The Ancient Greeks depended on land, rivers and sea for their survival. They believed Gods were everywhere. And it was important to remember the God, so that the Gods would take care of you.

The Ancient Greek Empire was larger than Greece is today, reaching into Turkey, Italy, North Africa, and along the Black Sea. Different versions of the myths existed in different regions. Each area had their favourite gods and heroes, who were linked with their landscape. These places still exist. You can find them on our map, and even visit them yourself. Ruins of temples and palaces, rivers and mountains, can still be seen today. The world of Greek mythology is alive in the landscape.

Hidden in these real places is an invisible world. The mythical world of monsters, magic and impossible tasks. The world of Greek mythology describes another reality, where gods are everywhere and heroes struggle to discover who they are.

I spend a lot of time in Greece. I imagine how life would have been, and try to understand what the myths might mean. The Greek landscape is dominated by burning sun, dusty stone, and blue sea. The images of sun, stone and sea appear in the myths again and again. These are my versions of those eternal stories.

THE CREATION

GIANTS AND GODS

In the beginning, Father Sky hung closely over Mother Earth. Too closely. Grass grew and flowers bloomed. But there was not enough space for trees or mountains.

When Mother Earth gave birth to twelve children, there was no space for them to grow. Her six sons and six daughters crawled. But when they tried to stand up, they couldn't. Their heads pressed against Father Sky. The children grew bigger and bigger. They were turning into giants. Titans. Their heads and shoulders pushed at the sky.

"Stop growing!" boomed Father Sky. "Stop pushing! You're pushing me out of the way."

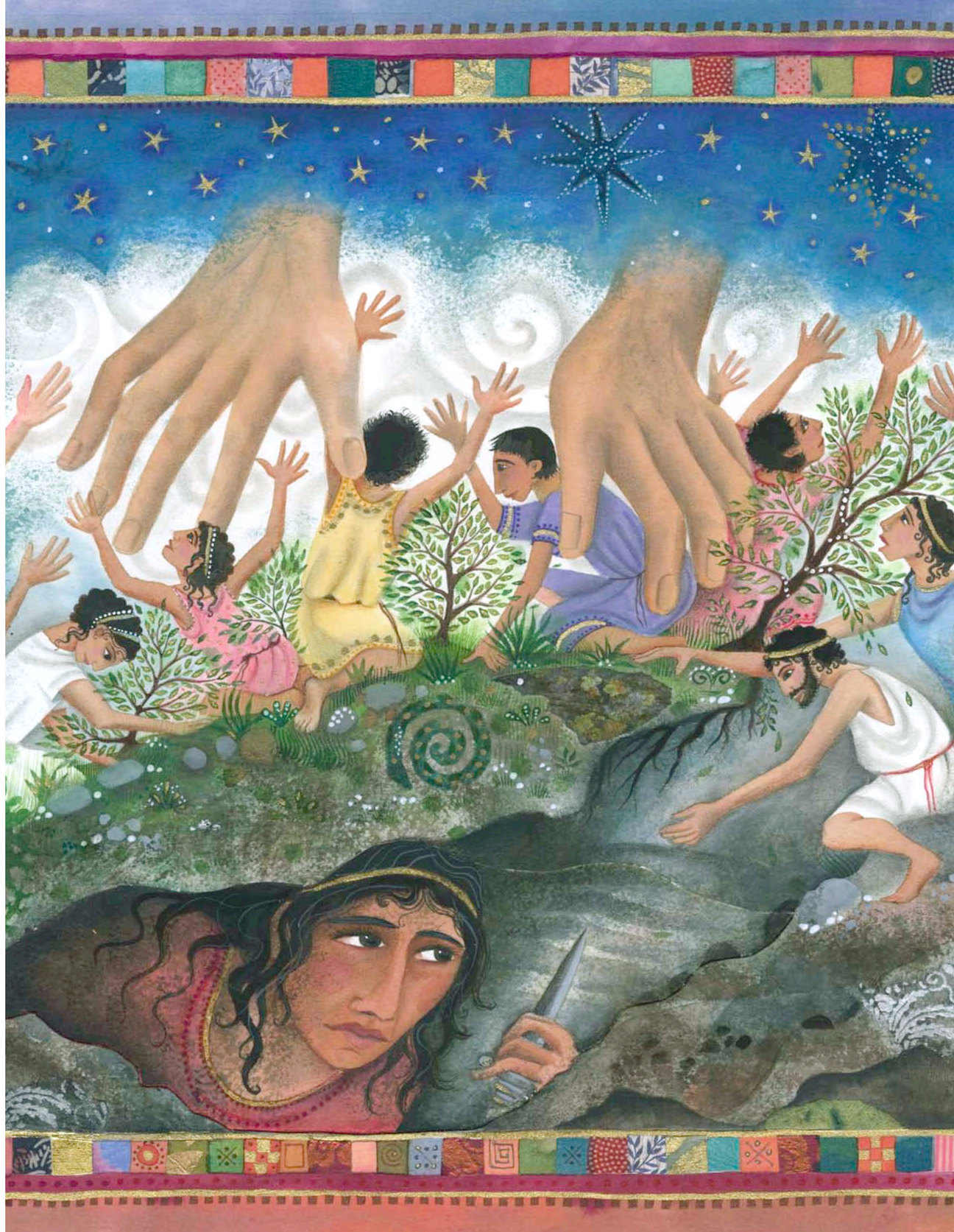
Sky pushed back. He pushed his children down. He pushed them underground, deep into Earth's body.

Mother Earth was furious. She formed a knife from sharp stone, and called, "Children, take this knife, and cut your way out of here."

Her eldest son, Kronos, grabbed the knife. He waited for night to fall. Then, in the darkness, he reached up and flashed the blade. Kronos slashed at Sky, slicing Sky away from Earth.

Father Sky began to float upwards. He shouted, "Your children will treat you as you have treated me!"

But Father Sky floated far away. And the sky has been a long, long way from earth ever since.



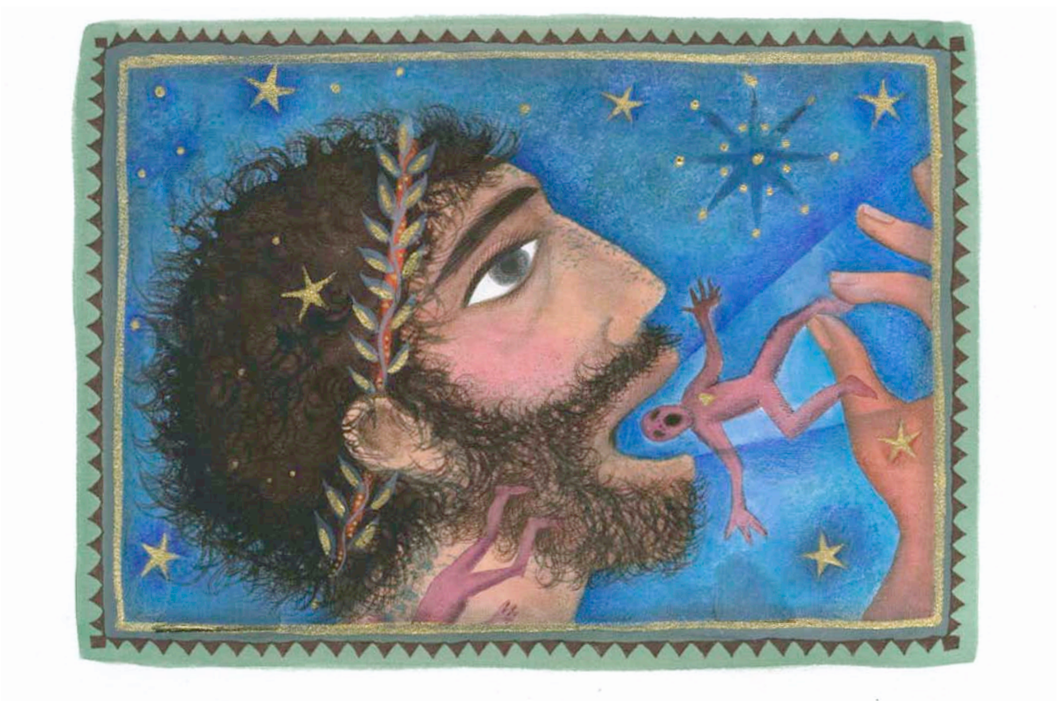
Kronos uncurled his crooked back, and held his head high. At last he could stand tall. "The time of the Giants has begun!" he cried.

The Titans ruled the world. Kronos became king and his youngest sister, Rhea, was queen. In the gap between sky and earth, life came into being.

Kronos and Rhea had a baby daughter, called Demeter.

When Kronos took the little girl in his arms, he heard a voice echoing in his head. It was his father, saying, "Your children will treat you as you have treated me!"

Kronos stared at the baby. He did not want to be pushed out of the way. So he lifted the girl to his giant mouth, and swallowed her whole. Rhea gave birth to four more children. Two girls – Hestia and Hera. And two boys – Hades and Poseidon. But Kronos swallowed them all!



When Rhea had a sixth child, a boy, she was terrified she would lose him too. She named the baby Zeus. She placed him on the ground, whispering, "Mother Earth, help me! Kronos is behaving like his father. He is afraid of his own children, and is devouring them. Mother Earth, save your grandson."

The ground rumbled. A crack appeared in the earth, and baby Zeus sank underground.

Rhea picked up a large stone. She wrapped the stone in a blanket and put it in a cradle. The stone looked like a new-born baby.

When Kronos saw the bundle, he said, "Not another one!"

He grabbed the stone, and swallowed it whole!

Mother Earth carried baby Zeus to an island far away, the island of Crete. She hid Zeus in a mountain cave. And the nymphs, the spirits of the mountain, brought the baby up.

The nymphs hung a golden cradle inside the cave. They rocked Zeus and sang to him. They fed him fresh goat's milk and sweet honey. They taught him spells to charm the weather – how to bring out the sun, or capture a streak of lightning. They taught him the magic of plants – how some flowers could heal, and some roots could poison.

When Zeus became a young man, he gathered some poisonous roots. Under the cover of darkness, he sailed across the sea, to Rhea. Zeus gave the root to his mother, and she pounded it into a powder. Then she secretly slipped it into Kronos's wine.

Kronos greedily drank the wine. He immediately felt sick. His stomach churned. Kronos opened his mouth, and threw up his children, one by one. They were all unharmed, because Kronos had

swallowed them whole. Demeter, Hestia, Hera, Hades and Poseidon were still alive! Then, last of all, Kronos spewed up the stone!

Thunder boomed and Zeus appeared, clutching a bolt of lightning.

"Mother Earth," he shouted. "Swallow your son and save the world!"

The ground rumbled, earth opened up, and Kronos was pulled underground, down to a fiery prison, where he still remains.

Then Zeus cried, "The time of the Giants is over. Let the time of the Gods begin!"

Now Gods ruled the world.

Zeus became God of the Sky. King of Heaven. Shining ruler of all.
Hades became God of the Underworld. Lord of the Dead.
Poseidon became God of the Sea, making waters wild and calm.
The three brothers, guardians of sun, stone and sea, were joined by their sisters.
Demeter became Goddess of Grain, making crops grow.
Hestia became Goddess of the Home.
Hera became Zeus's wife, Queen of Heaven.

The Gods built a palace on the snowy peaks of Mount Olympus, the highest mountain in Greece. More Gods were born.

Athena, Goddess of War and Wisdom.
Hephaestus, Blacksmith God of Fire.
Apollo, God of Music and Light.
Hermes, the Messenger God.
Aphrodite, Goddess of Love.
Pan, God of Nature.

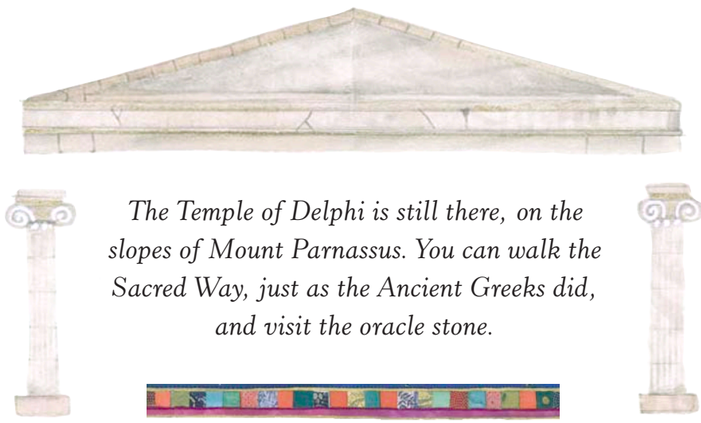


Zeus picked up the stone and hurled it into the air. The stone landed in the centre of the earth, on Mount Parnassus.

"The belly button of the world!" said Zeus. "Build a temple round the stone, so the stone can speak."

The Temple of Delphi was built. And people visited the magic stone, asked it questions, and listened to its reply.

The twelve Olympian Gods lived on the mountain-top, in a palace of marble and gold. The mountain-top was always shrouded in mist, so that humans could not see the Gods. But sometimes the Gods parted the clouds, looked down on earth, and interfered.



The Temple of Delphi is still there, on the slopes of Mount Parnassus. You can walk the Sacred Way, just as the Ancient Greeks did, and visit the oracle stone.