

"My father is the chief god, king of the mountain, lord of the sky."

"My father is lord of the sun."

"My father is called the thunderer. When he is angry, the sky grows black and the sun hides. His spear is a lightning bolt, and that's what he kills people with. He hurls it a thousand miles and it never misses."

"Without my father there would be no day. It would always be night. Each morning he hitches up his horses and drives the golden chariot of the sun across the sky. And that is daytime. Then he dives into the ocean stream, and boards a golden ferryboat and sails back to his eastern palace. That time is called night."

"Sometimes I visit my father," said Epaphus, the other boy. "I sit on Olympus with him, and he teaches me things, and gives me presents. Know what he gave me last time? A little thunderbolt just like his — and he taught me how to throw it. I killed three vultures, scared a fishing boat, started a forest fire. Next time I go, I'll throw it at more things. Do you visit your father?"

Phaethon never had. But he could not bear to tell Epaphus. "Certainly," he said, "very often. I go to the eastern palace, and he teaches me things too."

"What kind of things? Has he taught you to drive the horses of the sun?"

"Oh, yes. He taught me to handle their reins, and how to make them go, and how to make them stop. And they're huge horses. Tall as this mountain. They breathe fire."

"I think you're making it all up," said Epaphus. "I can tell. I don't even believe there is a sun chariot. There's the sun, look at it. It's not a chariot."

"Oh, what you see is just one of the wheels," said Phaethon. "There's another wheel on the other side. The

body of the chariot is slung between them. That is where the driver stands and whips his horses. You cannot see it because your eyes are too small, and the glare is too bright."

"Well," said Epaphus. "Maybe it is a chariot, but I still don't believe your father lets you drive it. In fact, I don't believe you've been to the palace of the sun. I doubt that Apollo would know you if he saw you. Maybe he isn't even your father. People like to say they're descended from the gods, of course. But how many of us are there, really?"

"I'll prove it to you," cried Phaethon, stamping his foot. "I'll go to the palace of the sun right now and hold my father to his promise. I'll show you."

"What promise?"

"He said I was getting to be so good a charioteer that next time he would let me drive the sun chariot *alone*. All by myself. From dawn to night. Right across the sky. And this time is next time."

"Poof — words are cheap," said Epaphus. "How will I know it's you driving the sun? I won't be able to see you from down here."

"You'll know me," said Phaethon. "When I pass the village I will come down close and drive in circles around your roof. You'll see me all right. Farewell."

"Are you starting now?"

"Now. At once. Just watch the sky tomorrow, son of Zeus."

And he went off. He was so stung by the words of his friend, and the boasting and lying he had been forced to do, that he traveled night and day, not stopping for food or rest, guiding himself by the morning star and the evening star, heading always east. Nor did he know the