

**P**OSEIDON, lord of the sea, was a moody and violent god. His fierce blue eyes pierced the haze, and his sea-blue hair streamed out behind him. He was called the Earthshaker, for when he struck the ground with his trident, the earth trembled and split open. When he struck the sea, waves rose mountain high and the winds howled, wrecking ships and drowning those who lived on the shores. But when he was in a calm mood, he would stretch out his hand and still the sea and raise new lands out of the water.

In the days of Cronus and the Titans, the sea was ruled by Nereus, son of Mother Earth and Pontus, the seas. Nereus was an old sea god with a long gray beard and a fishtail and was the father of fifty sea nymphs, the lovely Nereids. When Poseidon, the Olympian, came to take over the kingdom of the sea, kind old Nereus gave him his daughter Amphitrite for his queen and retired to an underwater grotto. He gave the new king and queen his palace at the bottom of the sea. It was made of the palest gold and lay in a garden of corals and shimmering pearls. There Amphitrite lived contentedly surrounded by her forty-nine Nereid sisters. She had an only son, whose name was Triton. He had a fishtail instead of legs, like his grandfather Nereus, and rode about on the back of a sea monster, trumpeting on a conch shell.

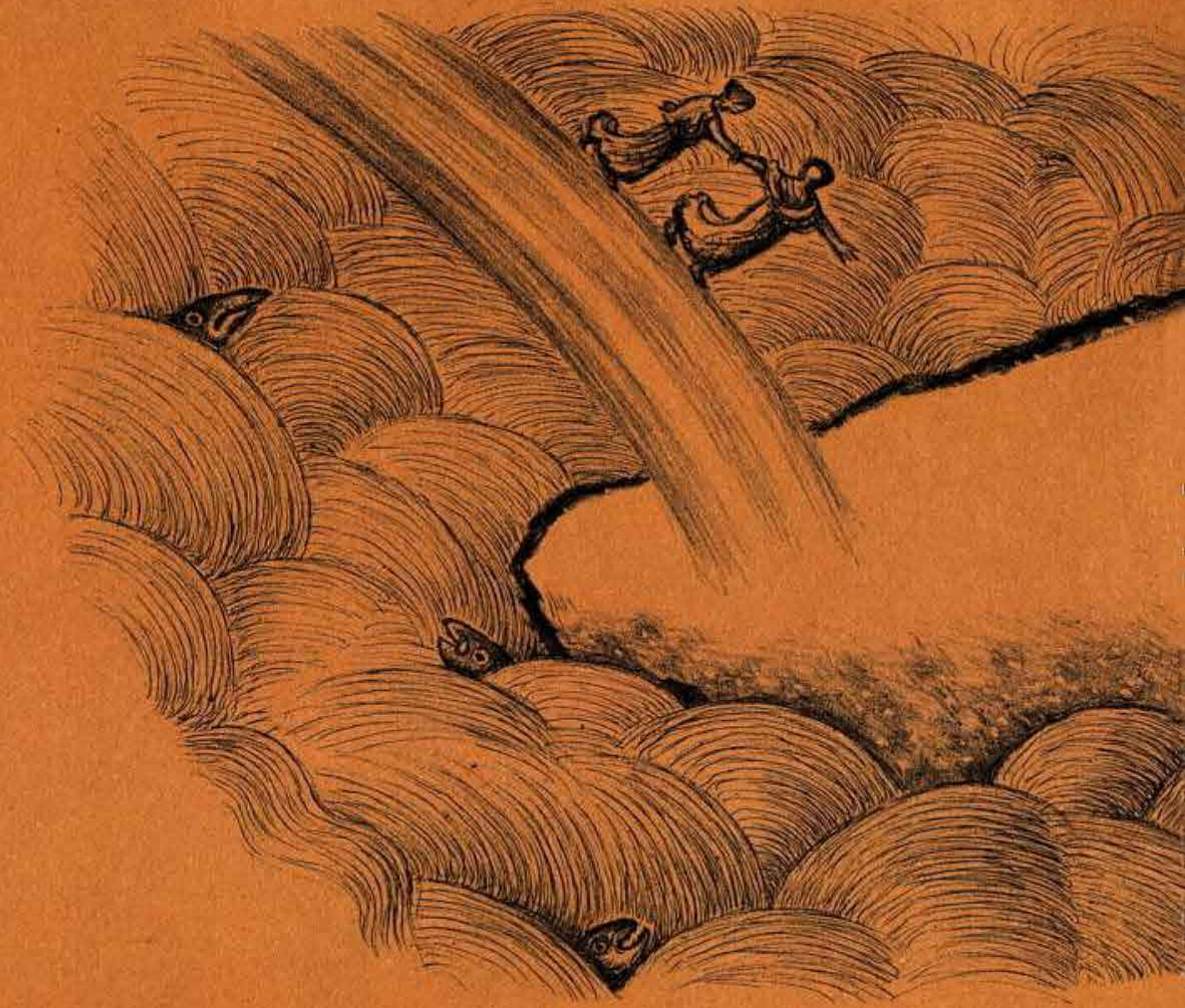
Poseidon was rarely at home. He was a restless god and loved to race the waves with his team of snow-white horses. It was said that he had created the horse in the shape of breaking waves. Like his brother Zeus, Poseidon had many wives and many children, but Amphitrite was not jealous like Hera.









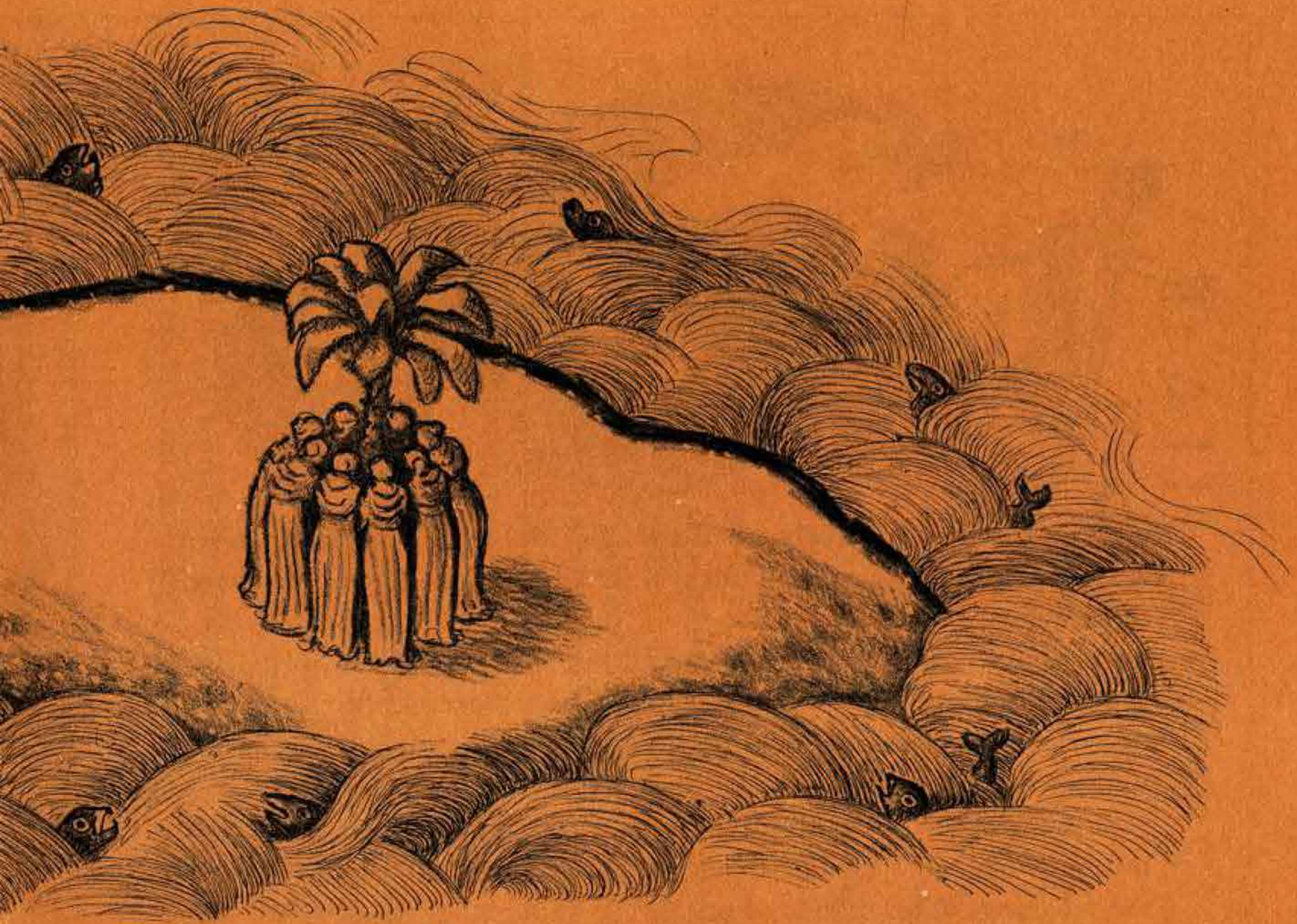


One of the islands that Poseidon raised out of the sea was Delos. It was so newly created that it was still floating about on the water. The little island was barren. Nothing grew on it yet except a single palm tree. In its shade, the two great gods Apollo and Artemis were to be born.

Zeus had married the goddess Leto, and when Hera found out that Leto was expecting twins, she flew into a jealous rage and ordered all the lands in the world to refuse Leto shelter. Chased away from every land, poor Leto wandered from place to place and could not rest to give birth to her twins.

At last she came to Delos and the little island welcomed her. Since it was still floating and not quite land, it was free from Hera's bidding. Exhausted, Leto sank down in the shade of the palm tree, but still she could not give birth to her twins, for Hera forbade Ilithyia, the goddess of childbirth, to go to her. Without her help no child could be born. All the other goddesses felt sorry for Leto and tried to sway Hera by offering her





a beautiful necklace. It was nine yards long, made of gold and amber, and Hera could not resist it. She let Ilithyia go, and Iris whisked her down the rainbow to Leto.

Leto's first child was Artemis, a girl as beautiful as the moon, with hair as dark as the night. She was to be the goddess of the hunt and all newborn creatures. Then Apollo came into the world. He was fair as the sun and he was to be the god of music, light, and reason.

Zeus was filled with joy at the sight of his beautiful twins and he gave them each a silver bow and a quiver full of arrows. The arrows of Artemis were soft as moonbeams and brought painless death, those of Apollo were hard and piercing as the rays of the sun.

Zeus blessed the little island and fastened it to the bottom of the sea. Grass and flowers burst forth from the barren ground, and Delos became the richest of all the Greek islands. Pilgrims flocked to it and loaded it with temples and treasures to honor Leto and her twins.





**A**POLLO grew rapidly, as all gods did, and when he was full grown, Zeus sent him off in a chariot drawn by white swans to win for himself the oracle of Delphi.

No place in Greece was as sacred as Delphi, on the steep slopes of Mount Parnassus. Sulphurous fumes rose from a deep cleft in the mountainside. A sibyl, the priestess of Delphi, sat on a tripod over the cleft and the vapors put her into a magic sleep. In her dreams the sibyl heard the voice of Mother Earth coming up from the depths, and repeated the mystic words she heard. Priests stood around the sibyl and explained the meanings of her muttered prophecies to the pilgrims who had come to the oracle of Delphi to learn about their future.

The oracle was guarded by the darksome dragon Python, who lay coiled around the sacred place. Old age had made him mean and so ill-tempered that the nymphs fled from the sacred spring nearby and the birds no longer dared to sing in the trees.

The oracle had warned Python that Leto's son would one day destroy him. He had tried to devour Leto when she wandered about looking for a place to give birth to her children, but she had escaped. When the old black dragon saw radiant Apollo flying toward him in his golden chariot, he knew that his last hour had come. But he sold his life dearly. He unleashed his fury, spitting fire and venom, and his black scaly body did not stop its writhing and coiling until Apollo had shot him with a thousand of his silver shafts. In torrents did the dragon's venom flow down the mountainside, and the oracle of Delphi was Apollo's.

Now there was light and joy on the once-somber slopes of Mount Parnassus. The air was filled with sweet tunes as the birds in the sky and the nymphs of the sacred spring returned to sing Apollo's praise. The voice of the young god rose above all the others, for he was also the god of music.



