

“Helios et Phaethon” video transcription

Constance, the storyteller, walks towards us in a room of the museum.

[Constance]

Ah, summer... What does it make you think of? It makes *me* think of morning freshness before sunrise, and of the dew that soaks your feet.

Actually, do you know how dew first appeared? Well, it was a long, long time ago! Back then gods and mortals lived on Earth together. There was one god... a magnificent, dazzling god, called Helios, the sun god. Oh, look, there he is, on his chariot, with four horses.

She approaches a display case which holds a large Greek vase. It’s a volute krater – a vessel that would have been used to mix wine and water – decorated with red figures on a black background. Around the neck we can see Helios on a chariot pulled by four horses. The god seems to be struggling to control the animals, which are rearing up on their hind legs.

[Constance]

Every day, he crossed the sky from east to west, lighting up the world.

One evening, he’d left his horses drinking in the ocean when he spotted Klymene, an ocean nymph. She was so beautiful that he fell madly in love. The two of them were so in love that they had a son, called Phaethon. Klymene raised him alone. Every morning, she said,

[Klymene]

“My son, never forget you’re the son of the sun god.”

[Constance]

Every evening, she’d say,

[Klymene]

“My son, never forget you’re the son of the sun god.”

[Constance]

Phaethon grew up very proud, and every day he said,

[Phaethon]

“I’m the son of the sun god!”

[Constance]

He was so vain that his friends got fed up. They told him,

[Phaethon’s friends]

“You say you’re the son of the sun god, so prove it!”

[Constance]

So Phaethon went to visit his father in his great palace of marble and gold. He bowed down before him and said,

[Phaethon]

“I’ve come because my mother says I’m your son. If it’s true, prove it to me!”

[Constance]

When Helios saw his son he was overjoyed, and held him tight. He said,

[Helios]

“Ask me for whatever you want, I’ll give it to you.”

[Constance]

Phaethon said,

[Phaethon]

“My dream has always been to go with you across the sky, on your chariot with its four horses.”

[Constance]

Helios grew sad. He knew his horses were hard to control. They always left his hands bleeding. He tried to make Phaethon change his mind, but he was stubborn. So Helios taught him to drive a chariot, and the fateful day arrived.

Phaethon climbed on his father’s chariot, beaming, and proud. He spurred the horses on, but you know what animals are like. They could tell that he wasn’t their master. They got nervous, and they bolted. They touched the earth, and burnt it. Then they climbed high in the sky, and the earth froze. It was a real natural disaster.

Zeus, the god of thunder on Mount Olympus, saw that and said,

[Zeus]

“What’s going on?”

[Constance]

He saw the chariot and didn’t hesitate for a second. He threw a thunderbolt at it. It caught fire, and fell in the ocean, and Phaethon drowned.

Helios, every morning, still crossed from east to west, lighting up the world. But every morning, when he mounted his chariot, he remembered his son Phaethon and began to cry. What we now call morning dew is actually the tears of Helios, still crying for his son.