During the period when Cronus ruled the world, the Titans lived large, some on the land and some in the seas. The deepest oceans were the haunt of Oceanus, a Titan brimming with the need to spread his waters everywhere. His sister Tethys swam beside him, lithe, graceful, and white-haired. Not gray—she was not aged. Not silver—she was not a source of light. True white. Pure as mother’s milk. It was that white hair that had captured Oceanus. He took Tethys as his wife.

Together they created so many sons, all strong rivers, from the great Nile of Egypt, to the famous Skamander of Troy, to the many that emptied into the friendly Black Sea. They swirled in eddies, they rippled with gusto, they rushed over cliffs and fell in loud, energetic sheets to the rocks below.

Then Oceanus and Tethys created so many daughters, all water nymphs, some inhabiting pools in foothills, some splashing in springs, some slipping through swamps. Each nymph was unique: one rosy, one nimble, one soft-eyed, one knowing—all charming.

When Zeus, the youngest son of Cronus, deposed his father and took his place on the throne as king of the universe, his eye fell on one of these nymphs, and he was indeed charmed. Metis, known as the wise one, seemed to flow like water to Zeus, cool and soothing. Watching her was
like swimming in a clear, bubbling spring. He was smitten. And since he was king and felt he deserved anything he wanted, he simply took her as his wife. Metis soon had a child growing within her.

That's when Zeus' grandmother Gaia and grandfather Uranus gave him the ugly warning that, by now, he almost expected: Metis would bear him a daughter and then a son, and the son would be invincible. That splendid son, that wretched and hateful son, he would overcome his father. The curse felt never-ending: Uranus was overcome by his son Cronus, Cronus was overcome by his son Zeus, and now Zeus would be overcome by the son that Metis was fated to bear him.

Zeus would have none of it. His grandfather Uranus had tried to prevent his overthrow by imprisoning his children
inside their mother Gaia. A failed attempt. His father Cronus had tried to prevent his overthrow by imprisoning his children inside himself. Another failed attempt. Zeus was smarter than either of them. He opened his mouth wide and drank Metis—simply drank her, like a glass of the best sparkling water in the world. So long as she was trapped inside him, he could never make a son with her, so the prophecy was null and void.

Zeus went on to take other wives, a long series of them. And all the while within him Metis sloshed around the growing babe, rocking her lovingly. And the baby experienced the world from inside her mother inside her father. She sensed everything that either of them sensed. She grew wiser than both.

Time passed and Zeus felt queasy, as though his stomach would burst. Then the pressure moved to behind his eyes and nearly blinded him. His temples throbbed. His hair stood on end. And from his forehead sprang the goddess Athena, whole and solid and heavily armed.

The gray-eyed girl looked around, completely alert and completely wise. She took her place among the Olympian gods and watched, with those gray gray eyes, ever ready for the chance to advise the belligerent, to strategize with warriors, to lead soldiers into battle.