

Athena, Hercules, and Plato.

Schoolmates since the first grade, they had always been good friends, but recently they've become inseparable. It all began on the day that they discovered, in Athena's grandmother's house, a very old - practically ancient - trunk. Their decision to explore its contents proved a historical one! Under the worn, yellowing clothes, the children were amazed to find a false bottom, which had been hiding something very special for many years: a magic book! When they first opened it the pages were blank, but then, suddenly, it became filled with large script, written in gold ink, and its secret was revealed. There was a magic word and if one spoke the word and concentrated on a person from in the past, then that person appeared, but for only 33 minutes. Then he or she disappeared again, and returned to the past, without any memory of what he or she saw, learned or experienced.

The last page said that the magic word is revealed to whomsoever the book chooses. This person must keep the word a secret otherwise it will lose its power. When the children had finished reading, the gold letters began to fade, then disappeared completely.

After recovering from this first shock, Athena, Hercules and Plato carefully hid the book and swore to keep their secret safe. That way, they would be able to invite guests from the past for only the three of them to see and hear. They would live their own magical half hour.



AN AMAZING NEW

ACQUAINTANCE

Sunday is often a strange day. It was on such a Sunday in mid-June, that Athena, Hercules and Plato set off to visit the Acropolis, where, in ancient times, the Athenians had built the sanctuary of the goddess Athena, guardian of their city.

That day, the sky was as blue as the sea and the sun was hot enough to fry an egg. The cicadas had already begun their clamouring, and so had Plato.

"Phew! It's so hot! I'm exhausted," he whined.

He was panting, and his plump little face was bright red.

"Already?" Athena scolded. "You don't hear Hercules complaining, and he's lugging your stuff as well as his own."

"Plato's stuff?" asked Hercules, genuinely puzzled, since he had forgotten that he was carrying two backpacks instead of one.

"Okay, okay," said Plato sheepishly, realizing that it was best for him if this conversation ended as soon as possible. "Let's go..."

"Why don't you carry your backpack yourself?" Athena mocked. "You never know, it might help you do better in gym next term!"

Plato wondered if he should take offence. However, deep down he knew that his friend was right. Without a word, he took his backpack from Hercules and walked ahead at a brisk pace.

A while later, the three children were standing, dazzled, at the Propylaea the immense main gate of the Acropolis. All around them, hordes of suntanned tourists were going up and down the steps. A group of Japanese in multi-colored shirts clicked away incessantly on their cameras. Nearby, another group, hair as blond as hay, noses buried in guide books, stumbled up the steps polished by centuries of wear. Everywhere, guides practically screamed in order to be heard over the din, trying to bring history back to life, but Athena, Hercules and Plato had a better idea.

"Are you ready?" asked Athena.

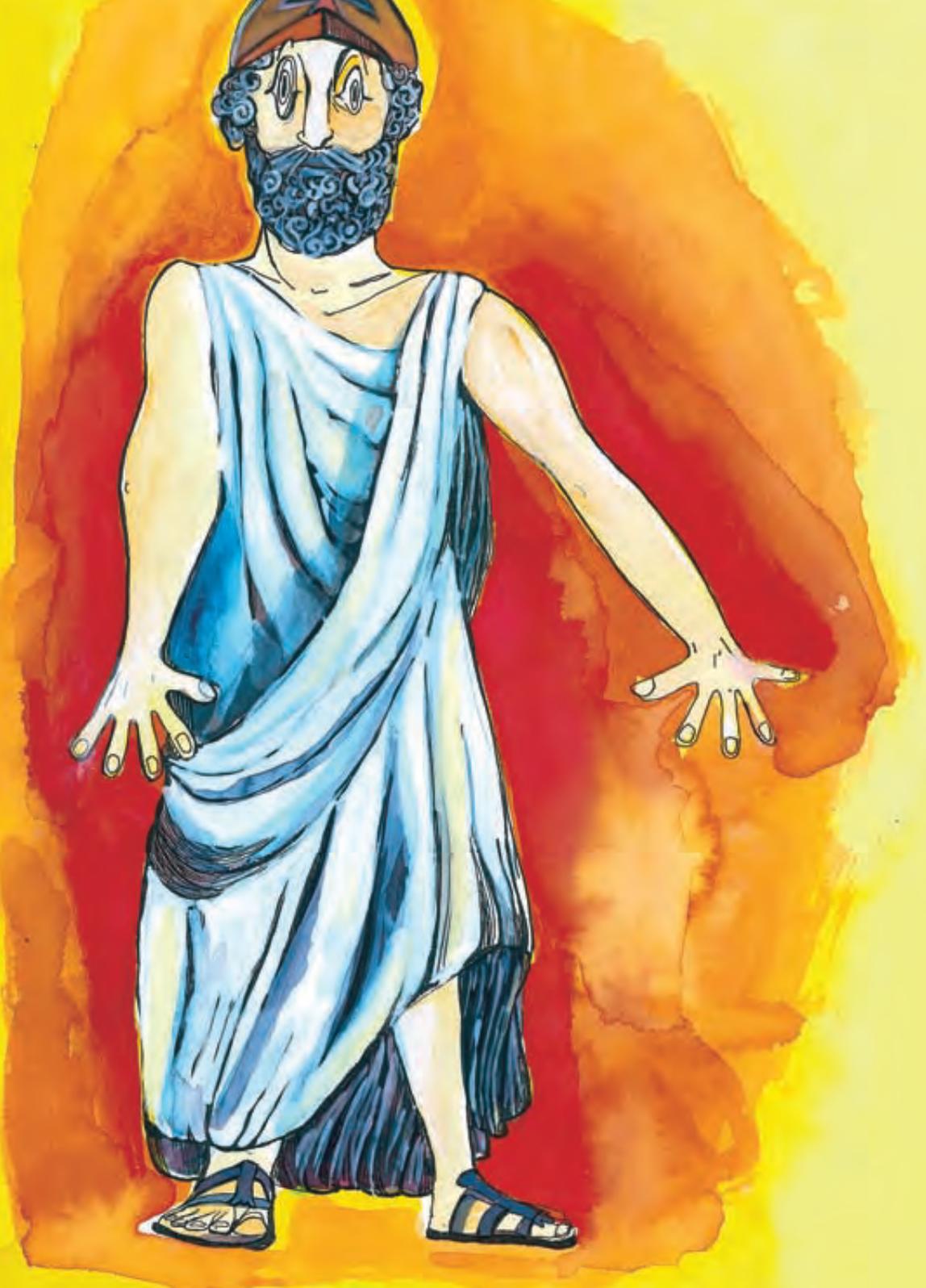
Hercules answered with another question.

"Who do you have in mind?"

"Who do you think?" said Plato. Shutting his eyes tightly he whispered the magic word. The other two followed suit, and at once, a fourth person joined them. The newcomer wore a white mantle, sandals, a shiny helmet on his head and a







dazed expression on his face. As he looked around his face turned a deep red and his eyes almost popped out of their sockets.

"By Zeus!" he cried. "What's happened to my precious marbles?"

"Hello," said Athena, excitedly. "I'm Athena..."

"Athena? The daughter of Zeus?" asked the newcomer in a shaky voice.

"Of course not!" replied Athena. "My dad's name is Dimitris!"

Feeling left out, her two friends hastened to introduce themselves...

"I'm Plato!" announced Plato.

"And I'm Hercules!" declared Hercules.

"How strange," mused the man in the helmet gazing at the children. "You have the name of the goddess, and you have the name of the great hero Hercules."

"It's not strange at all; lots of people are named after gods and heroes," Athena informed him.

"And not only gods and heroes," added Plato. "In fact one of our schoolmates is called Pericles, like you!"

It was actually him; the most famous ancient Athenian, in the flesh!

Pericles jumped as if he had been stung.

"You know who I am..." he cried in astonishment. "The only thing is... I don't know where I am."

"You're in Athens of the 21st century." Hercules told him. "Two and a half thousand years after your time."

"But how did I get here?"

"We brought you here because we wanted to learn





about the Acropolis firsthand." explained Plato proudly.

"But don't worry," added Hercules. "You'll only be here for a little while. Then you'll go back."

"I see..."

"So, what do you think of all this?" asked Athena.

"Incredible," replied Pericles, who had now regained his color. "But how could the Athenians have allowed the sanctuary for the goddess to come to this?"

"It's a long story. We'll tell you later," said Athena. "Right now we're anxious to listen to your story."

"My life story?" asked Pericles.

"No! The history of the Acropolis," answered Hercules.

"We know that what went on here was your doing," explained Athena.



"And we're dying to hear it from you!" begged Plato, opening his eyes wide the way he did when he wanted to sound serious. "We don't have much time."

"Agreed," said Pericles cheerfully. "In which case, let's go back to when it all started."

"Meaning?" asked Hercules.

"Meaning the glorious years when the Greeks were fighting the Persians."

