

EROS AND PSYCHE: PART I

CAST

EROS/VOICE *Young God of Love*

PSYCHE *Beautiful Mortal Princess*

APHRODITE *Goddess of Love and Beauty*

KING *Psyche's Father*

SISTER ONE *Psyche's Conceited Sister*

SISTER TWO *Psyche's Other Conceited Sister*

ZEPHYR *The West Wind*

SERVANT *Invisible Servant*

NARRATOR: In a far, mountainous kingdom, a king had three daughters. While his eldest two daughters were as beautiful as any mortals could be, the youngest seemed to radiate with immortal light—a goddess among women. Her name was Psyche, and many said she was as beautiful as Aphrodite herself. And so began Psyche's troubles.

APHRODITE: (*angrily*) Eros! Eros!

NARRATOR: In the cloud-built halls of Olympus, the Goddess of Love was pacing the floor. She called for her young son Eros, whose magical bow and arrows could create love in any heart.

EROS: (*annoyed*) Mother! What's the matter?

NARRATOR: The god Eros floated into the room.

APHRODITE: (*distraught*) My son, I have horrible news. Those miserable mortals!

EROS: (*concerned*) What have they done, mother?

APHRODITE: They have committed the worst crime imaginable!

EROS: (*angry*) Tell me, and we will make them pay for it!

APHRODITE: I can barely utter the words. But they have declared that a mortal princess—

EROS: Yes?

APHRODITE: Is as beautiful as I am.

EROS: (*pause*) That's it? (*laugh*) I thought it was something terrible.

APHRODITE: (*angry*) Eros! You don't understand? I am the Goddess of *Beauty*. Goddess! Do you know what that means? No one's looks can rival my own! Especially *not* a mortal's!

EROS: Isn't Beauty in the eye of the beholder?

APHRODITE: How can I expect you to understand? You were not born with my *burden*. When I first sprang from the sea foam, they gathered around me upon the beach and worshipped me. "How glorious is Aphrodite!" they cried. Beauty has been my title—my right!

EROS: What has changed? You look the exact same as you did when you were born. Gods don't age.

APHRODITE: Yes. My skin is still as soft as it ever was. My hair has its old luster. But over time people grow tired of the same old thing. They look for something new, something *inferior*. Ever since the day I was born, I've been defending my title. But, my son, this is the deepest cut of all.

EROS: (*sigh*) What would you like me to do?

APHRODITE: I need you to ruin her, of course.

EROS: You want the usual? Make her fall in love with someone hideous and penniless, right?

APHRODITE: (*laughing*) That would be perfect. Somebody completely *disgusting* like a

shepherd or something. They don't bathe for months!

EROS: (*sigh*) Is this type of thing in my job description somewhere? I thought I was supposed to use my arrows to bring love, not pain.

APHRODITE: Ha! Love *is* Pain. You're bound to figure that out soon enough. Now, fly down to Earth. Psyche is her name. We'll make her regret ever crossing the Goddess of Love!

EROS: (*sadly*) And he's off. Eros, the god of gloom and doom.

APHRODITE: (*absentmindedly*) Be careful, Darling. Remember, Mother loves you. Kisses.

NARRATOR: Eros eased quickly down through the night sky. The stars winked out at him, socketed in the dark air, and he wondered when *he* would find love, real love—not the cheap stuff he doled out with his flimsy arrows. The stars did not reply, and he flew on.

In an earthbound palace, the princess Psyche sat in her chambers. She had spent a whole tiring day entertaining suitors from far-off lands. They all wanted her hand in marriage, but her father had turned them all away. He was waiting for a sign from the gods.

Psyche's two older sisters sat nearby, weaving.

SISTER ONE: (*snottily*) So, Psyche, another day of marriage proposals? You must be exhausted.

SISTER TWO: (*snottily*) We are so jealous. We wish we weren't such dogfaces, so fools could flock to us.

PSYCHE: (*tiredly*) I didn't ask them to come.

SISTER ONE: Of course, you didn't. That's the beauty of it all. They just showed up. Like flies to dung.

SISTER TWO: (*sarcastically*) No one will want *trolls* like us after seeing you.

SISTER ONE: (*sarcastically*) Our only consolation is that when the gods take you to Olympus and make you a goddess, we'll be able to visit. What excitement!

SISTER TWO: Our little sister! The *new* Goddess of Beauty! (*cruel laughing*)

PSYCHE: (*angrily*) You two are just jealous.

SISTER ONE: (*angrily*) Jealous of what? You being auctioned off like a piece of meat?

SISTER TWO: At least *we* will be able to marry for *love*.

NARRATOR: Once in bed, away from the presence of her sisters, Psyche allowed her tears to fall.

PSYCHE: My beauty is a curse!

NARRATOR: It was there that Eros found the sobbing girl. He floated above her—invisible to human eyes.

EROS: (*to himself*) Why does she weep and hide her face? Come, girl. Show me your charms.

NARRATOR: As if in reply, Psyche raised her head from the cushion. A foreign feeling came into the god's stomach—a feeling half of delight, half of pain. His mission was forgotten. He only knew that this glorious creature before him was sad, and all he wanted was to make her supremely happy. He moved to materialize, to make himself known, and then he remembered...

EROS: (*despairingly*) I am a god. She is a mortal. We could never be together.

NARRATOR: To his surprise Eros felt his own heart breaking. How many times had he cruelly caused this pain in others? He knew one thing:

he could do nothing to cause his maiden more sadness. Eros dissolved into the night, his task abandoned.

EROS: Mother will be furious. But I don't care. Today I have learned how love truly feels.

NARRATOR: The following day, Psyche's kingly father received a message from the Oracle of Delphi. The Oracle's words were grave. The gods were angered by Psyche's beauty. The king must sacrifice her or face the wrath of Olympus.

KING: (*in pain*) Woe and grief! Send for my daughters at once!

SISTER ONE: (*shocked*) Father! What has happened?

KING: (*through tears*) Oh, gods! The Oracle has spoken. I must send Psyche to the mountaintop.

PSYCHE: What have I done?

KING: The gods are jealous, my sweet. On the mountain, a beast will come to you—a winged serpent—and you shall be his bride.

NARRATOR: Psyche felt fear rising up in her throat.

KING: I am too old and too weak to resist the will of the gods. They will destroy us if we disobey.

NARRATOR: Psyche saw her sisters staring at her in amazement. They were not as thrilled as she had expected them to be.

PSYCHE: (*numbly*) Then I guess I have no choice. I must go—to be the bride of the beast.

NARRATOR: When the next dawn broke, wailing was heard in the streets of the kingdom. Black cloths of mourning were draped from every balcony. A solemn procession led the princess up the mountain. The King tore his

beard as he marched, wailing for mercy. But no mercy came.

For all their weeping and gnashing of teeth, no one was brave enough to go against the will of the gods. They left Psyche there—alone on the mountain to await her monster groom.

A thin rain began to fall. Psyche wrapped her wet robes around her and closed her eyes. A faraway sound reached her ears—wind, growing louder and louder, until it was almost upon her.

ZEPHYR: Come.

NARRATOR: The strange voice behind her caused no surprise. Then an unseen force lifted her from the rock and into the air. Bright light through her eyelids caused her to open them. Ahead the clouds had parted. Perched atop a spindly peak was a palace—shining like the noonday sun.

PSYCHE: (*gasp*) This is the home of a serpent?

NARRATOR: She dared to look over her shoulder. To her shock, it was no winged beast that carried her, but a bearded little man.

PSYCHE: You aren't a snake!

ZEPHYR: (*insulted*) Of course, I'm not, you silly girl. I'm Zephyr, the West Wind.

PSYCHE: They told me a giant serpent was coming to take me away.

ZEPHYR: Sorry to disappoint you.

PSYCHE: *You* are to be my husband?

ZEPHYR: Good gods, no. The last thing *I* need is a wife. I'm free! Free as—well, the wind. Your husband is the master of that golden hall there. He's a friend of mine, and I owe him a favor or two.

PSYCHE: *Is he* a winged serpent?

ZEPHYR: I've heard him called plenty of things, but not *that*. I'm to take you to his house, and then he'll be along shortly. You'll find the spirits of the house ready to accommodate your every need. You do know what a *spirit* is, don't you?

PSYCHE: (*defensively*) Yes.

NARRATOR: They were very near the golden courtyard, and the West Wind swooped down low and set Psyche neatly upon the front step.

ZEPHYR: All ashore. Now, if you'll excuse me, it's hurricane season.

NARRATOR: Before she could utter a thank you, the little man dissolved into a breeze and blew away. The palace doors before her opened, and behind them there stretched a long, hushed hall.

SERVANT: Welcome, Mistress.

NARRATOR: Psyche saw no one within the hall.

SERVANT: We are here—though you cannot see us. We are the spirits of the house. We serve the master—your husband.

PSYCHE: (*confused*) Nice to meet you.

SERVANT: The Master has commanded us to give to you whatever you want.

PSYCHE: I see. Tell me, what kind of being is he?

SERVANT: He is the kindest of masters.

PSYCHE: Can you tell me what he looks like?

SERVANT: As we are invisible to you, he is invisible to us. His goodness is all that we see.

PSYCHE: Oh.

SERVANT: The Master will arrive tonight—in darkness.

NARRATOR: Psyche acclimated herself to her otherworldly surroundings. The voices spoke calmly to her, and objects were lifted by invisible hands.

As night fell, the voices called her to the sleeping chambers. There she lay down to await her mysterious husband. Sleep—as if another spell of the house—overcame her.

She awoke much later. The room was pitch black, and she felt that someone or *something* was very near.

PSYCHE: (*frightened*) Who is there?

VOICE: (*lovingly*) Your husband.

NARRATOR: Psyche felt his touch upon her arm.

VOICE: Do not be afraid.

PSYCHE: Show yourself!

VOICE: (*sadly*) I cannot.

PSYCHE: I don't understand. You tell *me* not to be afraid, but *you* are the one who hides. I have left my home and my family to come to this place. And yet I am forbidden to see my husband's face?

VOICE: You can never gaze upon me, Psyche. Your love is all I desire, and you would never truly love me if you were to see my true nature.

PSYCHE: How can you know that? *Blindness* is worse than any appearance could possibly be.

VOICE: I shall keep you here, and we shall spend each night as husband and wife. But

when the day comes, I must be gone from your sight.

PSYCHE: (*angrily*) That's unfair! If you make me a prisoner here, you must at least give me some right...

VOICE: This is the way that it must be. You must learn to live with this curse as I have. Trust me, Psyche.

NARRATOR: So Psyche's life began its mysterious routine. She would spend her days idly, attended by the spirits of the house. In the black midnight her husband would return to her and caress her in that hour but then be gone by the dawn.

By some other enchantment, even as they touched, she could never tell his true form. It shifted beneath her fingers—refusing to be identified.

He loved her true enough. His attentions showed it, and over time, the absence of his appearance no longer concerned her.

Whatever her husband truly was, giant serpent or bodiless spirit, Psyche grew to love him in return.

PSYCHE: Spirits, can I ask you a question?

SERVANT: Certainly, my lady.

PSYCHE: I know I cannot leave, but may I receive visitors?

SERVANT: Of course. Tell us whom you wish to see.

PSYCHE: My family. I miss them so.

SERVANT: Zephyr will deliver them tomorrow. But know that they can only stay for the course of a day. Before the sun sets, they must be gone.

NARRATOR: The next day there was a knock at the palace doors. When Psyche opened them, her father and her two sisters stood on the front step—rubbing their eyes in wonder.

KING: (*hesitantly*) Psyche? What is this place? Is this really happening?

PSYCHE: (*overjoyed*) Of course, Father! This is where I have lived these many months!

NARRATOR: Psyche explained the mysterious palace and her mysterious husband. When they had first arrived, Psyche's sisters beamed with happiness, but slowly—as they saw the treasures of her new home—they began to scowl once again.

SISTER ONE: So this husband of yours—he isn't really a beast?

PSYCHE: No. I mean—I don't know—for sure.

SISTER TWO: It's an easy question. Either he's a beast or he's not.

PSYCHE: I've never seen him.

SISTER ONE: Never seen him!

SISTER TWO: You mean, he's invisible like these servants you keep babbling about.

PSYCHE: No! No! He only comes at midnight! I am not allowed to look at his face.

SISTER ONE: And you *love* this thing?

PSYCHE: Well—yes.

SISTER TWO: Oh, Psyche. He obviously does not love you in return. Who would keep the woman they love prisoner?

SISTER ONE: If he had a pretty face, why would he hide it? He's obviously some kind of monster or evil spirit.

PSYCHE: I don't think—

SISTER TWO: Thank the gods we came here to talk some sense into you.

SISTER ONE: You're our darling sister, Psyche! We don't want to see you become a demon's prostitute!

PSYCHE: But I don't know for sure that—

SISTER TWO: That's true. That's true. You don't know for sure.

PSYCHE: He told me I am never to look at his face.

SISTER ONE: You mentioned that. But the question is: why? Why does he hide his face?

SISTER TWO: Listen to us, Psyche. Tonight, while he visits, you must light a lamp and look upon him.

SISTER ONE: If he is a man, you have nothing to worry about.

SISTER TWO: But if he's not—

NARRATOR: Her sister pulled a gleaming knife from the folds of her cloak.

SISTER ONE: You must end his life—before he ends yours.

PSYCHE: But—I—

KING: Listen to your sisters, Psyche. It may be your only chance of survival.

SISTER TWO: Don't you want to come back and live with us?

SISTER ONE: We miss you so, dear sister.

NARRATOR: Psyche nodded, and the knife was passed into her cold hand. After kissing her family goodbye, Psyche perched on the edge of

her bed—staring solemnly at the little lamp that sat on the nearby table. The lamp had never been lit. Her knuckles grew white around the knife handle. Tonight would be the night.

Soon the sun finished its journey across the sky, and darkness engulfed her.

VOICE: Psyche, my love.

NARRATOR: He was there—her phantom mate. Tonight she remained silent—cold and ungiving.

When she finally felt that he had succumbed to sleep, she stood and took the lamp in her trembling hands. She lit its flame and— holding her blade ready to strike— turned its light upon the form of her lover.

What she saw there caused her to gasp. Gracefully asleep in the half-empty bed was the most glorious boy she had ever seen. Golden curls built around the handsome features of a god.

PSYCHE: (*almost crying*) Oh, forgive me, my darling.

NARRATOR: It was then, as she moved to snuff her lamp, that a tiny bit of oil fell from it and landed upon his perfect shoulder. His eyes flew open, quickly moving from the knife, to the lamp, to Psyche.

EROS: (*shocked*) What are you doing?

NARRATOR: Her weapon fell from her hand.

EROS: (*hurt*) Is this all I mean to you? I told you never to look! Why did you not trust me? You betrayed me.

PSYCHE: I—I—I thought you were a beast.

EROS: (*growing angry*) What if I had been a beast? Would you have driven the knife through my heart?

PSYCHE: No! It's not like that!

EROS: (*enraged*) Silence! You have broken our agreement! The spell is undone! This palace will fade away, and you will be alone once again! But I suppose that is what you wanted, wasn't it?

PSYCHE: No!

EROS: Foolish girl. Love cannot live where there is no trust. You have ruined the one thing in life that has brought me true happiness. Go. Go back to your people. I can stand the sight of you no longer.

PSYCHE: I can undo it.

NARRATOR: He turned away.

EROS: There is nothing you can do now. Go back to your mortal world, and forget that you once loved Eros, the immortal son of Aphrodite.

NARRATOR: With final his words the lamp was snuffed. The world was blotted out.

It was hours before the shining chariot of the sun again rose above the peaks. On the barren mountaintop no golden walls reflected its radiance. The palace was gone—evaporated. And where it had been, a broken girl was hunched upon a rock—her face hot with tears.

DISCUSS

What do you predict will happen in the second half of the story?

Are Psyche's sisters typical siblings? Why or why not?

Why is Psyche's father a coward?

What is Psyche's weakness?

Why does Eros desire to love for himself? Does he deserve to be heartbroken?

How is Aphrodite's characterization ironic?

What has this story had to say about love so far?

Does the beginning of this story resemble a fairy tale?

How have Eros and Psyche represented their counterparts, the heart and mind?

Is Psyche's beauty a blessing or a curse?