

EROS AND PSYCHE: PART II

CAST

EROS *Young God of Love*

PSYCHE *A Beautiful Mortal Princess*

APHRODITE *Goddess of Love and Beauty*

ZEPHYR *West Wind*

ZEUS *Lord of Olympus*

VOICE/REED *A Talking Reed*

ANT QUEEN *Leader of an Ant Colony*

CHARON *Aged Ferryman of the Underworld*

HADES *Lord of the Underworld*

PERSEPHONE *Queen of the Underworld*

NARRATOR: On the lonely mountaintop, the princess Psyche sat on a rock where a golden palace had once stood. It was here that an old friend, Zephyr the West Wind, found her.

ZEPHYR: *(clears throat)* My lady.

PSYCHE: *(sadly)* Hello, Zephyr. Once you brought me to this happy place, but I've ruined everything.

ZEPHYR: *(soothingly)* Don't cry, my girl. All is not lost.

PSYCHE: *(through sobs)* What will I do? Eros has left me! How could I ever win him back?

ZEPHYR: Didn't you ever wonder why he kept himself a secret from you?

PSYCHE: He is a god, and I am a mortal. It's obvious now.

ZEPHYR: That may be a part of it, but remember his goddess mother, Aphrodite. He was protecting you from *her*. She sent him to ruin you, you know. But because of his love, he could not.

PSYCHE: I didn't know.

ZEPHYR: You let me carry you before. Allow me to once again. Let me take you to her.

PSYCHE: *(surprised)* To Aphrodite?

ZEPHYR: Who else? Plead your case to her. Grovel at her feet. She's so vain. All you have to do is flatter her a bit.

PSYCHE: Will she let me see her son?

ZEPHYR: If we succeed, it'll be like none of this ever happened.

PSYCHE: *(cheerfully)* Oh, thank you, Zephyr.

ZEPHYR: *(shrugging)* Eh. It's nothing. I can't stand to see a beautiful maiden cry. Now, come.

PSYCHE: I'm a mess. I can't go before a goddess looking like this.

ZEPHYR: Trust me. The worse you look, the better.

NARRATOR: She clung tightly to Zephyr, and he carried her high into the clouds.

PSYCHE: Are mortals allowed at Mount Olympus?

ZEPHYR: Some. Just watch your step. The Olympians are a nasty bunch.

NARRATOR: Amid the clouds there appeared a mountain—colonnades and glittering buildings wrapped around it. Zephyr carried Psyche toward the palace at the mountain's peak and sat her down within a hanging garden.

ZEPHYR: Stay here. I will go before you and announce you.

NARRATOR: No sooner had Zephyr left than he flew back into sight, his face white with fear.

ZEPHYR: Good gracious! I've never seen such a fiery temper. She's infuriated that I've brought you here, but she said she'll see you. Good luck!

PSYCHE: Thank you!

NARRATOR: Psyche took a deep breath. The most fearsome mother-in-law heaven and earth had ever seen was waiting for her at the other end of the hallway.

APHRODITE: (*shouting*) Come in, mortal! Don't dilly-dally.

NARRATOR: Aphrodite's chamber was all softness and pinks. The goddess eyed Psyche coldly.

APHRODITE: So—have you come to grovel?

PSYCHE: Yes, your majesty.

NARRATOR: The goddess paused.

APHRODITE: I'm waiting.

NARRATOR: Psyche sank to the floor.

PSYCHE: O immortal creator of Love and Beauty! I come to beg your pardon—

APHRODITE: (*angrily*) I should think so, you little tramp. Taking advantage of my darling boy like that! Using your beauty to lure him in! I know your little game! I invented it!

PSYCHE: Forgive me, your majesty.

APHRODITE: Why should I? You nearly killed him with that nasty burn. Right now, he has taken to bed, sick from the wound *you* gave him. (*sniffing*) He may not survive.

PSYCHE: (*frightened*) What? I didn't mean to—

APHRODITE: Silence! And keep groveling until I tell you to stop.

PSYCHE: I will do any—

APHRODITE: (*snarling*) Did I say you could speak? (*quieter*) Now, I have devised three tasks. If you complete these three tasks, I will *consider* forgiving you. They are dangerous tasks, and ones of great importance. If you fail at any, you

will never see my son again. Do you accept these tasks? (*pause*) Why do you not answer?

PSYCHE: You told me not to.

APHRODITE: Don't be stupid. Of course, I want you to answer.

PSYCHE: I accept.

APHRODITE: (*happily*) Marvelous! Why not begin immediately? Rise! You have work to do.

NARRATOR: The Goddess of Love gleefully clapped her hands. There was a flash of light. The two—goddess and girl— were no longer on Mount Olympus, but on a barren plain.

APHRODITE: Here is your task.

NARRATOR: An enormous pile of seeds lay at Psyche's feet.

APHRODITE: Within this heap is every kind of seed: flax, wheat, poppy, millet. And—silly me—I mixed them all up. I will return at nightfall, and by the time I return, you must have sorted all these seeds into separate piles. Not even *one* may be misplaced.

PSYCHE: (*weakly*) But this is impossible.

APHRODITE: My, you are a smart one. Well, you better get started! Farewell! (*gleeful laugh*)

NARRATOR: Several hours later, Psyche had managed to separate a small pile of flax seeds from the mix. Her back ached, her eyes burned, and the tiny seeds continued to fall through her fingers. She could already hear Aphrodite laughing.

PSYCHE: Oh, Eros. Why did I doubt you?

NARRATOR: As Psyche continued to sort, she noticed a new color of seed in the pile below her—tiny black seeds she hadn't seen before.

PSYCHE: (*defeated*) Have these been here the whole time? (*pause*) Wait! They're moving! Moving seeds?

NARRATOR: And indeed, it seemed like a thousand specks had come to life within the pile. Perched upon the very top of the pile stood a single speck. It began to speak to her.

ANT QUEEN: (*tiny voice*) Handsome maiden! The West Wind has told us of your misfortune, and we ants have come to help.

NARRATOR: Sure enough—the specks *were* ants, an army of them—industriously carrying seed after seed from the mound.

PSYCHE: (*overjoyed*) Thank you! What did I do to deserve your help?

ANT QUEEN: You do this task out of love, and there is no greater cause.

PSYCHE: The Goddess will return at nightfall. Will you be done by then?

ANT QUEEN: Of course, my dear. We ants never take a break. We love to work. It's our function!

NARRATOR: Returning the Ant Queen to her hill of workers, Psyche watched in wonder as the pile slowly shrank into many smaller mounds. The sun was setting as the final loads were carried to their appropriate destination.

ANT QUEEN: Our day's work is done.

PSYCHE: I'll never forget this. Today you little ones accomplished something that a giant creature never could have.

ANT QUEEN: You've learned your lesson well then! Good luck, Princess Psyche.

NARRATOR: Once on the ground, the Queen led her victorious troops away—singing an ant song of victory. When Aphrodite returned, she was not pleased.

APHRODITE: (*angry*) Impossible! You couldn't have done this on your own!

PSYCHE: (*stubbornly*) I didn't claim to. The smallest creatures of the world have helped me. You never said I couldn't get help.

APHRODITE: So that's your game, is it? Well, Missy, the next two tasks will be so tough they'll make your head spin.

PSYCHE: I am ready. Bring them on.

APHRODITE: (*laugh*) Ha!

NARRATOR: A mist formed around the goddess and the girl, and its cold, gray fingers grasped Psyche. She felt herself being pulled away through the air. When the swirls subsided, she was standing on the edge of a swift stream. On the opposite hill, a herd of shiny sheep were grazing.

APHRODITE: My task is a simple one. See those sheep there? I desire some of their wool. Fetch some for me.

PSYCHE: (*surprised*) Is that it?

APHRODITE: Cross my heart.

PSYCHE: Very well.

NARRATOR: Psyche pulled up the hem of her tunic and forded the stream. The golden sheep continued to graze—unconcerned by her approach. Searching for some sign of a trap, Psyche continued forward. The nearest sheep paid no attention to her. She reached forward to grasp its wool.

(*hellish bleat*)

The sheep spun toward her and bared its razor-sharp teeth. She barely snatched her hand back in time to avoid its jaws.

PSYCHE: (*screams*) Ah!

NARRATOR: Once safely back across the stream, Psyche noticed the bones lying white among the tall grasses.

APHRODITE: Oh. Did I fail to mention that those are *man-eating* sheep? (*evil laugh*)

PSYCHE: (*angrily*) You—you...

APHRODITE: Try to not to die. It would be quite embarrassing to be killed by such *cuddly* creatures.

NARRATOR: Left to her task, Psyche tried to clear her mind. Keeping a careful eye on the sheep, she knelt by the stream and dipped a cool drink of water.

VOICE: (*anxiously*) Don't do it!

NARRATOR: Who had spoken? Surely not the sheep.

PSYCHE: Hello?

VOICE: Don't do it. You can still beat her! Whatever you do—don't drown yourself. It'll solve nothing.

PSYCHE: I wasn't going to. I was just going to get a drink.

VOICE: Well, that's a relief. I've seen plenty of fools try to get some of that golden wool. They either get their neck bit through—or give up and kill themselves right here in this stream out of shame. It's so dramatic.

PSYCHE: Where are you?

VOICE: I'm here. Right beside you.

NARRATOR: Near her face, a reed was swaying slightly in the breeze.

REED: No, you're not imagining it. A reed *is* talking to you.

PSYCHE: Well, you may not believe this, but it's not the strangest thing that's happened to me today.

REED: Since you're *not* going to kill yourself, let me give you some more advice. I don't usually do this, but I'll tell you how to get some of that golden wool. But, first, you have to promise not to tell anyone where you got it.

PSYCHE: No problem.

REED: The last thing I want is a thousand people traipsing around on my bank and drowning themselves in the shallows. One dead body can stink this place up for weeks.

That's some meeean mutton over there. They can skeletize a grown man in sixty seconds. What you do is you wait for the sheep to come down for their daily drink. You know sheep—they have one brain between the whole flock. When they come to the water, their fleece gets caught on those briars over there. Wait until they're gone, grab it, and you're good.

PSYCHE: I never would have thought of that! That's brilliant!

REED: I *am* the only talking reed for a reason.

NARRATOR: Psyche waited for the flock to drink, and after they had gone, a thousand tiny tufts were left in the riverside brambles. The girl collected these quickly.

PSYCHE: Thanks, Reed. I'll never forget this. (*loudly*) Aphrodite! Aphrodite! I have completed your task!

NARRATOR: The atmosphere crackled, and the goddess appeared. Psyche stretched out hands filled with golden clumps.

APHRODITE: (*coldly*) Fool! This is not about fleece—or seeds—or love. This is about *you* and *me*. I will destroy you if it's the last thing I do! You will *never* have my son!

NARRATOR: Aphrodite ripped the riverside reed up by its stalk, snapped it in half, and threw it to the ground.

REED: (*agonizing cry*)

APHRODITE: Ha! That reed has talked its last! Now—for your final task I'm sending you to a place where no one would dare help you. (*pause*) Follow this stream. It runs for many miles. When you reach the mountains, it flows into a cave. The cave leads down—into the Underworld.

PSYCHE: (*breathlessly*) Hades?

APHRODITE: If you truly love my son, you will go into the Underworld as I ask. You will go to my niece Persephone, Queen of Hades herself. Take this box to her.

NARRATOR: An ornately carved box appeared in Psyche's hands.

PSYCHE: What is this for?

APHRODITE: Command Persephone to take some of her beauty and place it into this box. Then return it to me.

PSYCHE: Then will you allow me to see your son?

APHRODITE: (*coldly*) I swear it by the Styx.

PSYCHE: How do I even get into Hades?

APHRODITE: There is only *one* surefire route into Hades, my dear: suicide. Don't rule it out—just yet.

NARRATOR: Psyche felt her feet start their weary plod. Time passed. Before her now was the black pool—a cave behind it lead into nothingness. Psyche lowered herself into the pool. Numbing cold.

A stir of wind caught her hair and caused her to turn. Floating on the black water of the pool

was a cake. And baked into its tender crust, a small coin.

PSYCHE: Zephyr, you are my true friend.

NARRATOR: It cannot be told how terrifying and deep the Land of Hades runs. As the light of the world disappeared, a new light appeared—a sickly light—the light of the grave—and it drew Psyche ever downward on a doomed path.

(*dog barking and snarl*)

PSYCHE: (*whispering*) Cerberus.

NARRATOR: The three-headed guard dog of Hades lurked just ahead on the path. Prying loose the coin, Psyche took the cake into her hand.

PSYCHE: I hope this works.

NARRATOR: Psyche stepped forward. Three heads lifted, three pairs of glowing eyes, and gaping jaws. Before the beast could move to rip her apart, Psyche threw the cake. Cerberus darted after it, and Psyche dashed by.

(*hellish growl*)

A dark river came next—flat and motionless. Wraiths stood along the bank—waiting. Psyche took the coin and placed it beneath her tongue. The shallow craft of Charon was moored on the bank before her—and the boatman himself stood inside it—leaning on his pole.

CHARON: (*hissing*) Life has passed the Gates of Death. Tell me, foolish maiden. What do you seek below? And for what purpose?

PSYCHE: I seek Death and his queen—for love.

CHARON: Then I shall ferry you—provided you can pay the price.

NARRATOR: Her mouth opened. His sandy fingers found the toll there. As she climbed aboard, Charon poled the craft away from the shore. The boat did not dip nor bob. It floated on nothing. With a thud it hit the other side.

CHARON: I am the only way across this river. And you have given me your only coin. You are lost.

NARRATOR: Psyche turned her back on these words. Ahead a black palace had clawed its way out of the rock. A thousand cobweb whispers surrounded her and flew before her—announcing the mortal maiden to the king. Then she came at last to stand before Hades and Persephone, the Lord and Lady of Death.

HADES: (*unemotionally*) Mortal, what brings you into Tartarus?

PSYCHE: Love. Love has brought me here.

HADES: Love? Love has no place among the dead. Here Love is dried up.

PSYCHE: I have brought it here with me. I snuck it in—in my heart.

HADES: You are mistaken. Anything that passes the gates of death *is* dead. Love was alive when you came, but now it is dead. *You* were alive when you came, but now *you* are dead.

NARRATOR: Under the stony glance of Hades, Psyche felt her soul weakening. She turned frantically to face the stone-like Persephone.

PSYCHE: (*pleading*) Please, my Queen. Help me. Give me some of your beauty. Surely your heart hasn't been frozen completely by this place. Some love must still live there.

HADES: Do not trouble yourself with her. Her heart also is dead.

PSYCHE: (*frantically*) Please! You were once young! You were once in love! Remember it now! Remember the Spring! Forget this wintry place—only for a moment!

NARRATOR: The eyes of Persephone remained unchanged.

HADES: (*forcefully*) I am tired of your whining! She will give you none of her beauty.

NARRATOR: At that moment the hand of the Queen—a hand that seemed as if it had been carved into her lap—suddenly raised.

PERSEPHONE: Please, Husband. I believe she was speaking to *me* instead of *you*.

HADES: Wha—

PERSEPHONE: Girl, I will grant this request—but only for Love. Take this beauty. I hope it will bring you more happiness than me. Now—go, before death seizes you completely.

NARRATOR: The pale light of the Underworld faded—and Psyche felt her body warm. She was lying on the banks of the black pool once again.

PSYCHE: (*surprised laugh*) I can't believe it. Only the great heroes have visited the Underworld and lived to tell about it.

NARRATOR: Aphrodite's box lay near her.

PSYCHE: The beauty. I must make sure it's really there. If I give Aphrodite a box full of air, I'll never see Eros again.

NARRATOR: With trembling fingers, she began to inch the lid of her treasure open.

PSYCHE: Just a peek. That's all I need. Then I'll be sure.

NARRATOR: A shriek escaped the box—the beauty freed from its prison. Psyche slammed down the lid as quickly as she could, but she was too late. It had already gone. Psyche fell—defeated—to the ground.

EROS: (*faraway*) Psyche! Psyche!

NARRATOR: Psyche opened her eyes to a handsome face.

EROS: Psyche! Come back to me!

NARRATOR: It was Eros. He was actually cradling her in his arms.

PSYCHE: (*weakly*) I—I—tried so hard.

EROS: (*joyfully*) You succeeded! You did it. You showed how much you truly loved me. Oh, Psyche, I knew you did.

PSYCHE: But I failed! The beauty—I opened the box.

EROS: Forget that! You did something much greater.

PSYCHE: But—Aphrodite—your mother?

EROS: Forget her! I was foolish to hide you away, and *you've* had to pay the price. But I'm going to make it all up to you—starting now.

PSYCHE: How?

NARRATOR: The Love God lifted her—higher and higher through the clouds. Soon she saw that they were in the hearing hall of Olympus. High on his throne sat Zeus himself.

EROS: (*emotionally*) Zeus! I've come to ask your help. In my arms I hold the woman I love.

ZEUS: (*uninterested*) Hmmmm. I see that.

EROS: But, O Zeus, she is a mortal, and I am a god. My mother would never agree to our marriage.

ZEUS: Fooling around with a mortal is one thing—but marriage? It's most unusual.

NARRATOR: A pink poof appeared in the midst of the proceedings.

APHRODITE: (*raging*) Never! NEVER!
NEVER!

NARRATOR: Zeus angrily waved Aphrodite's fluorescent fumes away from his face.

ZEUS: I take it that you disapprove of this marriage, Sister?

APHRODITE: Of course, I do! This selfish boy has gone against his mother's wishes—and fallen in love with a mortal! Who has ever heard of something so disgusting?

ZEUS: (*annoyed*) Well, I have for one. Perhaps you have forgotten that I have had a few—affairs with Earth women.

APHRODITE: (*stumbling over herself*) Well—that's different. You're—Zeus.

ZEUS: And—let's see. (*thinking*) It's rumored that even *you*, Aphrodite, have been known to go "slumming" with the mortals.

APHRODITE: (*shocked*) I never...

ZEUS: (*slyly*) Really? What about a man named Anchises or a boy named Adonis? Do these names ring a bell?

APHRODITE: I was young and stupid! Who hasn't made a few mistakes?

ZEUS: My point exactly.

APHRODITE: (*fuming*) The fact remains: *a mortal cannot marry a god!*

ZEUS: Precisely right, Aphrodite. A mortal cannot marry a god.

APHRODITE: I knew you'd see it my way!

ZEUS: That is why I'll just have to make Psyche a goddess.

APHRODITE: (*complete shock*) WHAT?

NARRATOR: The two young lovers leaped at this pronouncement.

EROS: Thank you, Zeus! Oh thank you! I shall never forget this!

ZEUS: Aphrodite, standing before you, you have the bravest of earthly women. This child has faced task after task and even descended into the Underworld to receive your approval. If you cannot give her yours, I shall give her mine.

APHRODITE: But—But—

ZEUS: Hebe! Bring the nectar of the gods!

NARRATOR: Aphrodite watched numbly as Hebe revealed the cup of the gods.

ZEUS: Come, my child.

NARRATOR: Psyche stepped forward to receive the immortal draught. As the liquid warmed her throat, everlasting life rushed through her. A shimmer of silver began to cover the maiden's body. Zeus smiled triumphantly.

ZEUS: So, my two lovebirds. You have been equally matched. Eros, the greatest of hearts, and Psyche, the strongest of souls. Live together in happiness forever. And that's an order.

NARRATOR: While the newly-weds embraced, Zeus turned a sly glance on his sister.

ZEUS: Come now, Aphrodite. Be a good sport. You'll soften in time. Soon the place will be crawling with children. And—think—these youngsters will love no one more than their beloved old *Grandma!*

APHRODITE: (*horrified*) Grandma?

ALL: (*good-natured laughter*)