

# The Breath of Psyche

Peter Stickland

In collaboration with

Clare Carolan

[www.77books.co.uk](http://www.77books.co.uk)

Copyright © 2012 Peter Stickland

The author has asserted his right under the Copyright, Designs and Patents Act, 1988 to be identified as the author of this work.

A catalogue record for this title is available from the British Library.

ISBN 978-0-9560121-7-3

# Contents

## THE VAGARIES OF FATE

Animated by enchanted forces	6
The threat of Psyche's beauty	9
Fighting invincible fate	11
Advice to the suppliant	14
Glimmers of reflected glory	15
An overindulged tyrant	16
A plea to Cupid	17
Cupid the trickster	19
Crimes against young virtue	20
A maiden ripe for picking	20
Waters of the sea explode	21
The Oracle of Apollo	22
A vile misfortune	24

## DECEIVED BY LOVE

Like a hawk on warm winds	26
Divine providence	27
Incorporeal voices	30
Wonders to obliterate grief	30
A contract with Cupid	31
The anticipation of love	32
Wild extravagance	34
Panester and Detainer	35
An eagerness to be deceived	36

## JEALOUS DESTRUCTION

The lack of human comfort	36
Psyche learns to plead	37
As patient as skilful anglers	39
Ugly piles of imagined pain	40
A world coming apart	41
A land of eternal spring	42
Under pressure from envy	43
A God for a husband	45
Vicious Noise	46
Cupid's counsel	48
Predictable treachery	49
Crouching jackasses	50
The God awaits your return	51
Cupid	52
Psyche	53
Married to a loathsome serpent	53
Pernicious counsel of sisters	56

## RUPTURED RESOLUTIONS

The return to the mountain	56
The harridans attack	57
Stirred by shocking furies	60
Cupid's beauty	61
Utterly forlorn	63
Breath containing life	64
The God of shepherds	65
Living in her bones	67
Carnal desire	68

## PRESSURE FROM ABOVE

Abominable treachery	70
The wrath of Venus	72
Juno and Ceres	75
Caring for the temple	76
Pleading for pardon	78
Life without advocates	79
Pleading for help	81
Hiding in the dark	82
The careful reason of the soul	83
With the aid of Mercury	84
Revenge of the Goddess	85

## A DIVERSIONARY TALE

Tears from a faithful heart	86
Meeting the ass	87
The golden ass Part one	87
Endings and such like	89
The golden ass Part two	90
A balm for an aching spirit	92
The prince of mortals	93

## SUPRISING DIVINITIES

Psyche's punishment begins	94
Cruelly tormented	95
Quick sons of the ground	97
A gentle and benign reed	99
The royal bird of great Jupiter	100
A visit to Proserpina	102
A harp of sorts	103

## THE IMPOSSIBLE CHALLENGE

What the wind knows	106
The breath of the wind	108
The tricky light ahead	110
The Styx and Cerberus	112
A box of beauty	115

## SYMPATHETIC CONNECTION

Past transient stars	116
Back in the breeze	117
A beautiful wife	119
The end of spite and envy	122
Generous conjunctions	124
A quality to melt hearts	126
The dance of reconciliation	128
How the world fills its heart	129

# The Breath of Psyche

## THE VAGARIES OF FATE

### Animated by enchanted forces

Imagine, dear reader, a young princess lying on her divan; the morning breeze no longer teases the linen drapes and a strange stillness wraps about her gentle heart like a frozen blanket.

The young woman, Psyche, lies motionless, holding her breath. She suspects the calm will usher in sinister deeds and prays that her fears will diminish. She suspects they will not.

In recent weeks, unwelcome hallucinations and alarming visions have dogged her and the strange, heavy stillness that fills the air is the condition that precedes these disturbances.

Rather than diminish with time, these intrusive apparitions began to impose on her with ever greater frequency and she can do nothing to direct or influence their crushing intensity.

They're not the stuff of dreams; they have a more ordered clarity about them with none of the trickery or shifting qualities of a dream. They come with a singular malicious purpose.

In earlier days, these visions carried no evil intent. Psyche imagined they might reveal a truth, but now she's doubtful. A reason for the ominous premonitions is beyond her knowing.

Psyche is celebrated for exceptional kindness. Her ability to respond with generous sympathy is her valued treasure, but the innocence of her actions is both her dowry and her downfall.

Promising chaos, bringing disaster, promoting blindness and stupidity, these vile disturbances play on her best virtues before initiating the viscous onslaught that saps her inner strength.

Suddenly, an immense power takes possession of her. Trance-like, she glimpses her future. Gossamer wings adorn her body and she loses all sense that she is bound by physical laws.

Transfixed, hypnotised, she can only imagine herself as an enchanted being, animated by another's will. Of the culprits, she knows nothing; to her they are simply outside forces.

Psyche, fascinated by her state, forgets that the visions will degenerate, that Despair will rear its ugly head, demand her fear and deny her the power to resist. Blackness fills the air.

Overwhelmed by an armoury of tricks, Psyche yields to the terrors engulfing her and cowers in dread as Despair hovers in the air; its fierce, piercing energies searing her delicate heart.

The mortifying torture is too much for mortals to bear, let alone one as fragile as Psyche, but attributes of physical potency are of no benefit here, only inner strength will allow survival.

Psyche collapses and separates from her body, leaving it to cope unsupported. She watches passively as her carcass throws itself into the deep, swirling waters conjured by her mind.

This attempt by muscle and bone to endure is a primal leap, orchestrated intuitively by the body in a desperate attempt to escape the all-consuming pain and the inevitability of death.

Psyche's voice calls out as the water chokes her throat, but at once it silences her cries and fills her lungs. Pulled by the undercurrents, she slips beneath the surface, sinking deeper.

Her hard-hearted torturers thwart each and every attempt she makes to gain control. Her tears dissolve in the water and she willingly embraces a stupor in which she is utterly lost.

Once oblivion has blotted out the terror, the threat departs and her body rises to the surface. Emerging, Psyche searches frantically to see if Despair waits to deliver further humiliation.

Above the water, she must immediately return to her body to coax it out of its stifling tension. Her fear must instantly and fully subside if she is to have any prospect of reaching the bank.

Psyche erases thoughts of other trials lying ahead. As her willpower returns, her drive to survive re-energizes her body. She realigns her concentration and regains her resolve to fight.

## The threat of Psyche's beauty

Psyche gulps down air and flies from her room to avoid further unpleasant visions. She knows of no-one who will share her fears, the most she can expect at this court is baffled frowns.

All are threatened by her shaky grip on reality, her unspeakable vulnerability, her thin cracked voice, the ravishing beauty she wastes in silent solitude and the desire she universally inspires.

Multitudes of suitors visit her father's Court, but none ask for her hand in marriage. Puzzled courtiers point to her sisters, asking why she cannot be married to men of status, as they are.

All say dreamers are impossible to control and insist she'll fester if she remains unwed. They cannot reason the delay; her sisters inspire poets, yet Psyche has more beauty than they do.

No man can be certain of winning Psyche and none are brave enough to swim in her alluring vortex. To be at the threshold of submission and lose her would be the end of joy for any man.

The modest glow of their smouldering flames could not survive the rays of her incomparable brightness. Who could bare the icy cold after the extreme heat that Psyche's love promises?

Psyche has no desire to dash hearts, but her lack of confidence fans flames. Any modest flush of embarrassment on her slender body sends shockwaves through every eligible man that's living.

She wilts under the gaze of others because she sees into their hearts and minds. She imagines that they too have a talent to read minds. She has met no man she could share her joy with.

As a girl, everyone labelled her the shy one. She asked her sisters, Panester and Detainer, if they too felt exposed; they told her that no one displays delicious vulnerability as she does.

The news of Psyche's breath-taking loveliness spread rapidly. Now it is talked about beyond her father's realm and her remarkable beauty and astounding grace are on everyone's lips.

Each day, thousands of her father's subjects travel on pilgrimages to pay homage to her. They come to gaze in blissful awe, to witness in person one of the great wonders of the age.

So vast is her fame that some declare she's the Goddess Venus herself. They imagine Venus has descended on earth, incarnate as a mortal, so they can gawp and boast of having seen her.

People come with adoration in their hearts to worship her as a divine being. Sacrifices are offered in her honour, flowers are scattered in her path and love is celebrated in tribute to her.

Banquets are held in her name and garlands offered, while the shrines and temples of the true Goddess remain dishevelled, her festivals neglected and her ceremonies abandoned.

## Fighting invincible fate

Venus, a lightening performer if her reputation is threatened, is distracted by events in Rome. While scheming to convert Julius into a god, she uncovers a treacherous plot to murder him.

She can't allow Julius, the heir of Aeneas, her Trojan son, to die at the hands of traitors, so she indulges in a tirade against all the gods and fails to see the adoration surrounding Psyche.

*Look at the massive power of the treachery marshalled against me; look at the dangerous plot which threatens a life that I cherish, the only surviving descendant of Trojan Iulus.*

*Can I be the only god who feels wracked by justified anguish? One day I receive a wound from the spear of the Greek Diomedes; next I grieve for the walls of poorly defended Troy.*

*Then I must watch my son go through endless wanderings – hounded, tossed on oceans, forced to enter the eerie kingdom, forced to fight wars with Turnus or endure Queen Juno's hate.*

*See how deftly the traitors sharpen daggers! Stop them I beg you. Avert this iniquitous skirmish. Vesta's fires can never be quenched by the brutal death of my esteemed high priest.*

The gods, though moved by the complaints of Venus, could never defy the iron decrees of the Fates, so they offset their lack of action by displaying clear signs of the looming disaster.

The crime is foreshadowed by clashing arms in black clouds and by trumpets awesomely blaring in heaven. The sun's face is gloomy, steeping the uneasy earth in a ghostly pallor.

Shooting stars streak across the sky and drops of blood are discharged from the rainclouds. Dirty rust-hued blood spatters the chariot bearing the moon and all hide in fear.

The face of the morning star is dimmed and speckled with spots, the Stygian owl hoots its sinister omens and ivory statues weep, their voices chanting dirges of misery and doom.

Every sacrificed victim is a signpost to imminent treachery. When the lobe of a liver is cut off the priest finds it in the entrails, an unmistakable sign of the impending upheavals.

Out in the forum, around men's houses and close to the temples, the night is disturbed by the howling of dogs and the furore can be heard in the sacred groves and holy precincts.

Though the streets are haunted by all the many ghosts of the dead and the city is shaken by tremors, these heavenly warnings cannot halt the plot or forestall what fate has decreed.

The conspirators enter the hall of the Senate, naked swords in their hands. No other building in Rome but that sacred place could serve for their crime, for the infamous murder of Julius.

Venus beats her breasts and attempts to hide Aeneas' progeny in cloud, as once she had stolen Paris from his foe Menelaus and helped Aeneas himself to escape Diomedes' sword.

Jupiter cries to her. *Daughter, you are the only Goddess to fight invincible fate. Go to the hall of the Sisters Three and visit the Records of Fortune, see the tablets inscribed in brass.*

*These tablets fear no clashing of clouds, nor the thunderbolt's wrath or Rome's destruction, they are safe and abiding. Heed the truth; you cannot continue to act in the dark any longer.*

*There you'll find your family's fate cast in enduring adamant. I myself have noted their contents and the man for whom you labour, my dear Venus, has truly come to the end of his time.*

*The years he has owed to the earth are duly completed, but if he rises up to the sky as a God he can yet be worshipped in temples. Rescue his treasured soul from his cut-ridden body.*

*Swiftly Venus, you must transform the deified Julius into a comet so that his image may always gaze on my Capitol Hill from the notable height of his shrine in our propitious Forum.*

Before Jupiter has finished, the awesome and life-giving Venus has settled herself down, unseen in the heart of the Senate, and caught the soul of Caesar as it passes from his wounded body.

She prevents its component atoms from being dispersed into the air and carries it gently towards the heavens. Halfway, she feels the soul glimmering hot and watches as it catches fire.

Venus lets it escape from her bosom and fly upwards. Past the moon it soars, a sweeping trail of flame in its wake. Finally, it comes to rest in the far heavens in the form of a gleaming star.

## Advice to the supplicant

Dear reader, you might marshal fighting words against the likes of Caesar, but success is never certain. Many with the power to protect rise up suddenly. You must consider ambition wisely.

Study the way Venus behaves. Being driven to control all and sundry in heaven and earth, and having little or no patience to wait or watch, she mirrors those who now place you in debt.

They, like she, consider it foolish to allow the heart to inform decision. A true breath rarely directs their actions, wisdom's growth or a spirit of open generosity is simply of no relevance.

Similarly, they over romanticise family, take all that is contrary as a personal threat, bully everyone into agreeing that their presumptions are visionary and insist all else lacks majesty.

They have weak hearts, a fundamental flaw in leaders. For them progress only occurs if the hierarchies and formulas are fully adhered to, but by this method no progress ever occurs.

Venus, the wicked harridan, is about to learn that Psyche is receiving tributes meant for her. See how swiftly she redirects attention towards the grave threat that Psyche's beauty poses?

She regards the astonishing transfer of divine honours to a mere mortal as utterly horrifying. Each day she storms about her palace, ranting loudly about imposters for heaven to hear.

Don't repeat her viscous words, dwell on her cruelty or be diverted by her need for sadistic reprisal, she likes to give angry passion free reign. Listen, but reject her spiteful appetite.

## Glimmers of reflected glory

*I am Venus, Goddess of Beauty. I was born in the sea, fed on the froth of waves, nourished by their energy to increase my magnificence. I alone am the divine power of beauty on earth.*

*Jupiter, you promised my loveliness would shine above all rivals; now take my cause, attend to this upstart. I am the Universal Mother, the very source of all the five elements.*

*Can I be expected to share sovereignty with a mere mortal who imitates me? Must I do nothing while my bright name, registered in the heavens, is dragged in the mud of mortals?*

*Juno, great Queen, do you assume that I am content to share in the sacrifices offered to this wretched flirt? Do I reign with tiny glimmers of reflected glory alone to nurture my beauty?*

*This cannot be! Help me make this enticing tease pay for her impudence. She cannot usurp my holy name, good looks and place of honour; I must take reprisals and have vengeance.*

*She's offended by giving pleasure and can't plead innocence; both are punishable offences. I will make this loathsome nonentity wish she was the plainest mortal that ever lived.*

## An overindulged tyrant

All allow Venus her monopoly of beauty and victimise Psyche who has had beauty thrust upon her. She never claimed to be such and sadly for her, her sweet loveliness is a grave wound.

If Psyche were grotesque nobody would notice her, but being highly praised Venus must make her life a painful, hopeless ordeal. So often, those with beauty are made to suffer for it.

Here is the strategy of Venus. First, make the enemy believe they are a nuisance and then insist they are not worth the significant effort you make on their behalf. Guilt is her game.

Venus uses conceit as the foundation of her fighting speech. She plays with arrogance, vanity and superiority to monopolise issues and that is how it becomes her just cause for vengeance.

The Goddess is renowned for screaming too frequently, so the Gods ignore her, refusing to act on her behalf. If they remained silent and waited for Venus to become exhausted, she'd win.

The justifying cry of overindulged tyrants can always beat the world into submission, causing it to retreat into silence, while none support Psyche's beauty or admit to Venus' jealousy.

## A plea to Cupid

For her finale, Venus angrily rises to her full height and utters a most powerful and piercing scream of fury, swearing terribly that only the girl's utter destruction will console her now.

Cupid, her son, can't pretend he didn't hear the cry of anguish. The embodiment of youthful beauty, the God of Love flies straight to his mother's palace to offer his filial consolation.

Cupid lovingly embraces his mother and she in turn swiftly demands that he become her saviour, insisting that only he has the craft to invent a reprisal that could possibly calm her anger.

*A girl called Psyche has emptied my temples. She has silenced my worshippers and denied my supremacy. I want you to exact a terrible revenge on this vile and detestable impostor.*

*There is not one who offers divine adorations to me anymore; they celebrate love through this slip of nothing. They look upon her to offer sacrifices and scatter flowers in her path.*

*These are the tributes due to the Goddess of Love, not some despicable spoilt brat who has received too much attention. She must be punished and I require you to carry out the act.*

The cheeky boy, raised in the company of his mother's raging tirades, marvels at her wild anger and finds her appalling temper a thing that only increases her stormy magnificence.

His attention sharpens when he realises it's a young woman of incomparable beauty who has caused his mother's ire, for he suspects there may be something in this for him to appreciate.

He can't believe he never learned of a woman whose grace and charm is so remarkable that people travel continents to catch a glimpse of her and now he can hardly wait to set eyes upon her.

He keeps his mother's anger fuelled, stops her from becoming aware of his ambition and overcompensates for his secret interest with displays of nonchalance and frowns of doubt.

The boy gestures with his shoulders to indicate his uncertainty, but Venus, too incensed to see that his actions might be ruled solely by desire, assumes it is reluctance and encourages him;

*I'm not fooled by your display, Cupid, I know the quality of your skills; you've often proved your craft with similar issues. The world must remember who the true Goddess of Beauty is.*

*Take revenge on a false girl, take your arrows and strike at her heart; make her fall in love with the most dismal creature imaginable, make her desire the vilest thing that ever lived.*

## Cupid the trickster

Venus is so exasperated she foolishly neglects to consider how her amorous son will react to Psyche's overwhelming beauty. Cupid smiles; already he tastes the flavour of his success.

Even before Cupid has set eyes on Psyche, the amorous God is smitten with desire for her. He has never punished a girl of unique beauty before and he's not about to start on this now.

Abandoning the pretence that he lacks the warrior instincts needed for such action, he switches tactic and in typically false fashion, starts to comfort his mother with fictitious answers.

Cupid, hardly listening to Venus, can't fully imagine the task she is intent on setting out and he cannot strike from his imagination the picture of Psyche that she conjures for him.

The loyalty he owes his mother can't compete with his desire. Her replies to his questions do not impinge on his thoughts. Any attempt he makes to fight his capricious purpose is futile.

The impudent boy has no vindictive yearnings, but fickleness makes him a danger, even to himself. His crafty display of diplomacy has been known to make judges overturn verdicts.

He convinces Venus with charming ease that Psyche's terrible humiliation is as good as fact and the Goddess, briefly putting the wretched insult aside, conveys her gratitude with a kiss.

## Crimes against young virtue

It's inevitable that adolescent girls are cheered by the thought that their demeanour and looks are highly regarded by others. Cupid works with this to muddle belief in their fragile beauty.

We all need some outside verification when trying to sort truth from illusion, but young Psyche is too innocent to grasp that her beauty, if highly praised, will cause the envy of Venus.

With Psyche unaware of her gullibility, Venus will certainly torment her and Cupid will swell her confusion. Neither care. Both should be punished for their crimes against young virtue.

## A maiden ripe for picking

Venus retires to her chambers to revive her failing splendour with precious balms and oils. Cupid, driven by desire, loses not the briefest moment to seek out the fair delights of Psyche.

He flies like a wild hurricane to her father's palace. Seeing the contemplative girl seated alone in the gardens, his predatory instincts erupt. He preys on the vision of loveliness before him.

She's the revelation confirming every fantasy he's ever invoked. Not one fibre that's alive in him fails to resonate with deep passion. His desire to have her is like a voracious yearning.

Despite his wiles, this tricky boy cannot read human nature. He has no ear for those he must conquer and no substitute models of conduct. He vows he will possess Psyche's divine loveliness.

That Psyche has a fragile mind, that she fills it with dark issues and berates wretched fate for bestowing upon her the mixed blessing of her incomparable beauty, is utterly beyond him.

He cannot imagine that any living soul could deplore empty adulation. It would never occur to him that an endless stream of praise might cause misery. How could it when all desire it?

In Cupid's view, she's a maiden ripe for the picking, for all proud and alluring girls long to be taken. If the world marvels at her loveliness then she certainly bathes in the glory it brings.

## Waters of the sea explode

Psyche longs to be in a place where she's not a tormented prisoner, where she's not captive to the fear of her visions. She sits lamenting her solitary life, languishing in a state of torpor.

Fear pervades her body as the stagnancy that is the prelude to her visions again returns. Any brushes with malevolent forces now will send her agitated state beyond endurable torment.

She wonders why redemption never plays a rescuing part, but this time the visions are not of her conjuring, they come from Venus who has gathered her spiteful staff to intimidate Psyche.

Psyche slips into a trance, unsuspecting that the Goddess has declared war on her. Nearby, the waters of the sea explode and the daughters of Nereus rise out of it from their hidden depths.

Portunus, with bristling beard, also rises up along with Salita and Palemon, the driver of the Dolphin and the Trumpeters of Tryton who leap over the waters blowing heavenly noises.

At their head is Venus, beautiful and angry, rallying the spirits of heaven and earth to her aid. She rises above heaving waves to plead with the heavenly powers to soundly punish Psyche.

At first Psyche imagines her body is floating on the waters in a giant shell, but without warning, she's terrorised by a great tornado spinning towards her. Psyche then pleads for mercy.

Psyche turns to avoid its swirling mass, but the spinning waters whisk her out of the sea and deposit her on distant mountains. Here she's an exile, alone and confused in a desolate landscape.

## The Oracle of Apollo

Cupid sees Psyche slip forward, assumes she has fainted and touches her cheek. Her ghostly demeanour evaporates to reveal a blush of pink. He whispers sweet, enticing words into her ear.

Having relieved her tormented spirit, the scheming young God goes in search of the King. He flies into the state room where he finds the monarch seated in parliament with his court elders.

Their subject concerns all possible solutions to the mystery of Psyche's unmarried state. Cupid whispers in the King's ear; you must go to the Oracle, the wisdom of Apollo must be sought.

The King instantly echoes the solution and his statesmen take delight in this semblance of action. Cupid has made the King his unwitting accomplice and he smiles at his easy success.

At the Temple of Apollo, the monarch offers prayers and sacrifices and at the precinct of the Oracle he vows to follow the priest's advice providing it produces a husband for Psyche.

The priest insists this brief is too specific and refuses to be used as a trader of solutions. The monarch declares he'll wait and listen until the Oracle offers some words of positive portent.

Venus and Cupid are close by and the cheeky scoundrel places words into the priest's mouth. The man talks, thinking the Oracle speaks thro' him, but his words take him by surprise.

*Because you express the need for speed, the instructions I offer must be realized before the coming of the new moon. Psyche's body is to be clad in mourning weed and set apart from you.*

*She is to be placed on the highest rock of Petteril Mount, where her husband, one not born of human seed, but a serpent, dire and as fierce as you can imagine, will find and possess her.*

The King refuses to comply and the priest reminds him of his vow. *Even if her spouse is a creature that flies thro' the dark starry skies subduing everything in sight, you must obey.*

*He could be a husband even if the black rivers, the deadly floods of pain and darkness itself honour him. The Gods including precious Jove, might be subject to his power.*

Venus delighted by her son's work, never pictured such wily magic or a result so clean. She returns to her palace singing for all the world to hear, a thing she's not done for many months.

The King demands that the priest makes the Oracle's words clearer or offers him a closer interpretation of their meaning. *Never in times before was such a riddle offered by Apollo.*

The man insists the words are not his own, but they're plain enough. *Psyche must shun the attention of all mortal men. You must now take your daughter to Petteril Mount and leave her.*

The King cannot alter the meaning of the sacred words, nor refuse to comply with the priest's instruction without losing his honour. Utterly devastated, he returns woefully home to weep.

That his daughter is to be cast away from the civilised world is incomprehensible to him. It is a cruel God who plays sport with a young woman by throwing her such miserable circumstances.

## A vile misfortune

An impending new moon brings many tortured hours, but the King cannot alter the decree. He can't delay the terrible day or follow his wife's agonised plea to grant her daughter a reprieve.

Psyche, desolate, ponders an edict that's more pernicious than all her frightful reveries put together. Her visions destroyed her peace, but her father's ghostly revelations shipwreck her life.

She refuses to reconcile herself to the demands of this aberrant justice, but once black torches have been lit and the requiem sung she has no choice, the melodies are over and she must go.

Deadly howling fills the streets, sending tears down her cheeks. She gently wipes her eyes with her veil, faces the great court and asks the gathered mourners to cease their sad weeping.

The entire city wails at their loss and no word from Psyche can end their great lamentation. All know that this abysmal waste of a delicate and graceful life will be remembered forever.

With neither strength nor inclination, the Court gentlemen lay Psyche on her stretcher, on the unspeakable bed that will carry her dear body to the mountain plateau like one being buried.

Psyche speaks harshly to her wailing parents. *Don't pull your hair out or beat your breasts. Know only that this is the just reward for those who revel too much in outward appearances.*

*Why torment your unhappy age with continual dolour? Why trouble your spirits with fears that should be mine? Why let your tears soil the faces that I should adore and worship?*

*You see too late, the plague of envy this has generated. When I was honoured, called the new Venus, it was then you should have wept and sorrowed as though I were already dead.*

*Venus is behind this misery. For her the cruel punishment fits the crime. Now I'll go to the place appointed by fortune and there I will lie on that loathsome rock and meet abject fate.*

Psyche hurries those who dawdle, spurring them on to bring her to the rock with haste. The city's inhabitants walk along consumed with a sorrow way beyond their understanding.

Giving up their spirit to everlasting darkness, they lay Psyche on the high hill, extinguish the torches, kiss her with tears and depart lest their wretched grief wreck their frail souls forever.

## DECEIVED BY LOVE

### Like a hawk on warm winds

Psyche does not move. Her heart hardly beats. Her body is uncertain, not knowing if her soul reigns there still. Aware of the powerful magic on this mount she often starts up in fright.

Now and then she might glimpse a shadow moving slowly across the rocks and yet no forms are present to cause them. She sits rigid, clutching her knees, fear gripping every fibre.

Once the last orange glow of the sun dips out of sight she knows she has nowhere to shrink back to. She listens intently, fearing a wild beast of darkness is darting about, irritable for its prey.

Her troubled spirit trembles at the sight of a distant light. She gazes fixedly on the glow, watching as it increases in lustre, as it changes from colourless splendour to a dazzling brilliancy.

She sways and falls forward, a sad and grey silhouette of forlorn anxiety. Cupid watches her closely. He's consumed with pain to see his dear maid suffer so, and deems it time to rescue her.

Zephyrus, the wind, is at his side. The lovelorn boy instructs his friend to bring his prize to the palace he has prepared for her. Psyche, feeling a sudden breeze at her back, cries out in terror.

Zephyrus lifts Psyche into the air and flies with her over the valley like a hawk floating on warm winds. She surrenders, wondering if it is she who moves or if it is the dark world.

Suddenly she speeds, thunder-like, in mid-air, and all around her lightning flashes. Zephyrus turns in every direction to keep his precious cargo safe. Psyche, nevertheless, shrieks with fear.

Finally, Zephyrus gently lays Psyche to rest. In the light of a warm summer evening she imagines she has travelled through a span of time to a forgotten era that follows a new beginning.

## Divine Providence

Psyche gazes in astonishment at her setting. No bird under the sun has plumage to match this wondrous scenery. Cupid gazes at her. No person under heaven could be a match for Psyche.

The rascal has done all he can to ensure her comfort. The bed of sweet and fragrant flowers on which she lies is a riot of colour; purple, crimson, pure white, yellow, azure and saffron.

To refresh her tired senses, Cupid has created a river flowing with crystal sounds. Restored, she follows the water through majestic wooded groves to a lake that mirrors mountain peaks.

Psyche is enchanted. Her benign power brings heaven down to crown her. As the sun sets, her luminescent glory lightens the darkness, her radiance reflecting off a sea of silver trunks.

As the brightness dims, Psyche adjusts her vision to the dwindling light and sees a subtle illumination infuse the wood. The outline of a shining edifice glows through the twilight.

Pillars of gold, topped with soaring emblems carved in citrine and ivory stretch into the heavens. The walls are intricately engraved with countless images of Gods in human form.

The parapet, covered in architectural relief, is decorated with precious gems that glitter and shine like a halo. Tapestries of considerable preciousness clothe the windows and doors.

Psyche is in a state of intense delight. Cupid smiles confidently. Having spared nothing to create this palatial home, he is certain that he has secured the girl's heart and won the day.

Psyche breathes the rich scent of flowers and hears bewitching melodies that weave around the palace. They beckon her to enter. Torches come alive uttering praise and encouragement.

*We blush with the light of you. We beam with the light of you. We burn with the light of you. Be not afraid of our charmed presence. Let us hearten your boldness to come waltzing in.*

Psyche enters a hall with a luminous marble floor and circled by many porphyry columns. The filigree on each capital is carved in jasper and each delicate edge is picked out in gold.

Illuminated fountains sing and jets of water rise up through beds of chrysolite and pearl. It is certain that the abundance of riches needed to make such a scene is beyond mortal reach.

Psyche walks on to a second hall. Here clouds of heavy scent issue from musk, myrrh and ambergris burning in porcelain urns and silver censers. She is certain this is a God's home.

She hears deep and sombre voices coming from unseen spirits. They eulogize her virtues and confirm that the riches she marvels at and all that lies before her is at her command.

*We are your servants, ready to attend on your every desire. When you are hungry we will prepare a feast, refreshments, whatever you desire; meats, fowls, sweetmeats, preserves.*

*We are at your service. Every meal we prepare is a veritable tribute to the cook's art. Day or night, we will serve you the clearest of waters or delicious wine the colour of liquid rubies.*

*If you dream in your chamber of bathing in honey and scents, we will prepare this for you. We will dress you in silks and adorn you in jewels if you so desire. Here you are queen.*

Bemused by her new realm, Psyche prays that the prize is given by the Gods and that these beings come from a felicity granted by divine providence rather than the depths of foul depravity.

## Incorporeal voices

*Fear not Psyche, there's no wretched beast lying in wait for you. There's no threatening ogre waiting to exact his price or his revenge. Do not imagine that this is some kind of test.*

*Trust in us and open yourself generously to the wonders that lie before you. Don't ask if these are visions, if it is real, for there are no answers here to these kinds of rational question.*

*Keep your senses alive; believe that you will know what to do. Don't stand still until you become exhausted and frustrated by too much action. Advance as the incorporeal voices direct you.*

*Find a chamber to lie in. Explore your new domain. There's not one bedroom, but dozens to choose from and each is more elaborate, more luxurious than any you have seen before.*

## Wonders to obliterate grief

Psyche, devoting her heart to this adventure, lies on her vast bed inventing precious balms and oils in which to bathe. Each bath she steps into is prepared exactly as she has described it.

These magical wonders obliterate the memory of solitude and grief that plagued her tenure at her parents' palace. Here, she can languish in scented waters without a question in her head.

Psyche's appetite for fresh experiences drives her reveries and she skips about exploring new possibilities. Her playground is either her wardrobe or it is her abounding banqueting table.

She wishes she knew the names of a thousand divine fruits and precious cordials to test her attendants. As they prepare her dishes, they skilfully create clever new cuisines for her to taste.

Psyche, delighted by the game, is unconcerned that no-one appears before her. She eats little, but feeds happily on the sounds of many harps that accompany these ethereal services.

She sways to the music, entranced, unaware that the numerous harmonies issuing from the harps are weaving joyful tunes together like a collective breath of love breathing through her.

Dancing to the delicious melodies with tender expression, she surrenders her delicate frame in grateful thanks for her delivery from a life of fear. Her movement could charm the Gods.

*Gently, my beautiful girl, nothing will threaten you here. Keep fear from your generous spirit. Dance little flower; be light as the wind, future generations will remember you like this.*

## A contract with Cupid

Psyche still sleeps lightly. When she imagines an intruder close by, she is breathless and full of foreboding. Disturbed and troubled by quiet rustling, she is startled into wakefulness.

*Fear not; I have claimed you as my wife. I gaze upon your beauty with desire, not malice. Soon you will recognise me by my sound and you will not dread being here unprotected.*

*Tonight, I will entice you to enjoy the gentle strength of my caresses. Surely my kisses are more delicious than any you have dreamt of. Let my tenderness invite your acceptance.*

*Let the gentle warmth of love envelop you; let it fill you with desire. Of all your dreams of passion, surely none will match ours. Offer your submission and ask nothing in return.*

*In your heart you know this spirit is the God of Love. If your mind seeks a truth for it, silence it with your heart. This night we will enjoy the perfect consummation of our marriage.*

Uttering this one-sided contract as a statement of fact, Cupid indulges his passion and Psyche offers him her love. As day dawns he flies off, offering no further prospects of his attention.

## The anticipation of love

This woman, who only yesterday was a young girl, chatters excitedly to the invisible ones. Eager to please, they listen to her torrent of words, wishing they could engage in dialogue.

As the day passes, Psyche glides through the scent-filled gardens and ornate palace rooms occupying her time. She burrows in crowded wardrobes sampling the elaborate gowns.

She bathes endlessly in scented oils, studies herself critically in the abundance of mirrors and in each, she's the same superior vision of loveliness, the same outstandingly delicate apparition.

She never imagines she has been deserted by Cupid; all that changes between day and night is that her heart beats faster as evening begins. Nothing delights like the anticipation of love.

Each night she awaits her lover with growing desire; one night in robes of saffron, emerald braids in her hair, another dressed in silk with diamonds stitched in gold thread around her neck.

The multitude of servants sigh while attending upon her and when they inhale her scent, they imagine she's as fine as any rose. That she was conceived outside Olympus is not credible.

Cupid studies her progress around the palace. Her movements are like music to his ears. Each time she stirs, her lovable step resembles the sounds of a lute and his young soul throbs.

When she sings, her enchanting voice makes him blush. Her eyes are as bright as lightning. Her long lustrous lashes arouse such a stormy passion in him he feels envy of her loveliness.

As jealousy slowly seeps into him he is in no doubt that loving her is a dangerous affair. If losing her would drive the heaviest heart into a loathsome grief, what would such a loss do to him?

As soon as the sky is populated by stars, Cupid and Psyche settle into hours of perfect bliss. She submits to his heavenly embrace and honours his request to ask nothing in return.

Cupid is at his lover's side every night. In his eyes, she is the light to extinguish darkness. For Psyche, each successive hour she spends with this loving husband, she is simply in paradise.

Though her days are lived without Cupid her passion never wanes. Like a glorious beam shining brighter than the sun, he fixes her in a dream that fills her love with radiant mystery.

Psyche increases her delight with endless requests, each of them fulfilled. She suspects magic or the hand of eternal powers, but living in wonderment calms her questioning mind.

If ever she fears this magical existence will end, Cupid tenderly whispers in her ear. He instructs her to remain steadfast and regard her solitary life in this dream world as a sweet virtue.

She tells herself that if these rapturous visions expire this will be the time for doubt. Only if the light pales and she's rudely awakened will she perceive the need to sharpen her memory.

## Wild extravagance

Don't compare Psyche to those who squander the earth's riches by their voracious enjoyment of waste, don't associate her with those whose cravings mystify us. She is simply enchanted.

We all need to know that life can offer us wild extravagance or gay abandonment. Love is the ideal place to forget about the debts we owe, to fulfil desire without knowing how to pay for it.

Some, offended by Cupid, would splash their faces with his blood to put an end to his crafty schemes, but not I. I won't be induced by him or any villain to take up the role of aggressor.

If you must oppose offenders, Mariam, teach your people about connection not separation. Resist campaigns that drive the weak to arm themselves and go off in search of revenge.

## Panester and Detainer

Psyche's parents, the Court and the city have known nothing but heartache and lamentation since her unhappy departure.

Panester and Detainer hear of her miserable fortune and meet together before visiting their parents with pretence of comfort.

These sly princesses display great dolour. They're thick with each other solely because each sister deeply distrusts the other.

Trained in envy, they sense rejection before it occurs and see an insult coming before an executor is close enough to deliver it. Living a life of endless greed, they insist that others demand too much; it is their great responsibility to be judge and jury.

They're besieged by fools whose devious plans are transparent, who couldn't see artful scheming if it came with a diagram.

Outwardly charming, inwardly bitter, they practice the conceit that their grasping plots go unnoticed by any apart from them.

They try keeping their conspiracies secret from each other, but by such trickery their wicked strategies are easily revealed.

Cupid doesn't underestimate these cunning harridans. He can keep an eye on possible disruptions to his dexterous scheming.

They see things others don't, they're suspicious when others are innocent, and they're long practiced in the art of smelling a rat.

At the palace, he reads their false sorrow, their envy, their fake consolation and their devious methods of genteel interrogation.

He suspects there is nothing they deplore more than being out manoeuvred so he's intent upon contriving a way to do this.

### An eagerness to be deceived

Vipers' nests litter this world. Psyche can't walk here, there are too many villains; all succeed in mortal and immortal trickery.

She adopts credulity with ease, contrives her own downfall and matches their obscene treachery with her foolish generosity.

If their vile deceit has its counterpart in her eagerness to be deceived, she will also match their injurious ability to deceive.

## JEALOUS DESTRUCTION

### The lack of human comfort

Psyche may not see her lover, yet she knows when anxiety is in his breath and his eyes. Intuitively, she senses if trouble is near.

When she is agitated, he holds her close and begs her to attend to his words of comfort. Her ears are tuned to all Cupid says.

When Cupid speaks in urgent tones of her sisters' scheming, the innocent princess insists he is exaggerating their faults.

*Fortune is about to terrorize you. Take extreme care. You are now in imminent danger. Your sisters have menacing plans.*

*They have told the Court that they will verify your death, but by being at the mountain., they don't act in your best interests.*

*With weeping they feign troubled hearts to your parents, but trust me, if you hear their cries do not attempt to answer.*

*If you look up as they call out to you from up there you will bring utter destruction to yourself and on me untold sorrow.*

Psyche is content to do her husband's bidding, but gradually she laments her lack of comfort and desires tender consolation.

Slowly, her palace of pleasures is becoming a prison. Deprived of human conversation, she lives without food, drink or music.

Each night Cupid comes with gentle embraces to lighten her mood or stop her brooding, but still she is heavy hearted.

## Psyche learns to plead

*My dear Psyche, angry tears are your companion all day, will they stay with us all night or cease when you lie in my arms?*

*You must follow your heart when dealing with your sisters, but you will be buying destruction if you do their bidding.*

*If you persist and my words prove true, you'll think only of repenting, but it will be too late. You cannot guess the results.*

Psyche assures him that without a family her fate is death. *I must give comfort to them. I cannot live here like a hermit.*

Led by his love of her and against his better judgement, Cupid relents, promising to ask Zephyrus to take her to the mountain. *You must not follow their requests to see my shape. If you do so, you will deprive yourself of a great and worthy estate.*

*If your curiosity is aroused, it will be the end of all we have.*  
Psyche offers her thanks and agrees to follow his advice.

*I'd rather die than be separated from you. Whoever you are, I love you like my own spirit or Cupid himself, so hear my plea.*

*Please command Zephyrus to bring my sisters to the valley, just as he brought me. I want them to visit me in my home.*

Psyche kisses his hand, calls him her precious spouse, her intimate sweetheart and pleads with him to grant this request.

The God of Love reels in horror and insists her sisters would be terribly jealous of her new-found wealth. *It will end in disaster.*

Psyche heaps fond words on Cupid, she calls him her deep joy, her deepest solace, her only love, until at last, he acquiesces.

*If they come here, give them whatever their greedy eyes see. If they desire gold, jewels or trinkets, they must have them.*

Psyche agrees. The dejected Cupid departs with a heavy heart. He is distraught that he's given in to his lovely wife so readily.

## As patient as skilful anglers

Panester and Detainer are soon high up on the mountain where Psyche was deserted to fate. Finding no evidence, they cry out over the far valley for Psyche to respond to their entreaties.

Psyche, a delighted smile upon her face, calls Zephyrus to transport her to Petheril Mount. She arrives silently and swiftly at the plateau where Panester and Detainer call her name.

*I am with you, torment yourselves no further. Cease your weeping and wailing; you'll see I'm not dead.* The sly couple, well-practised in the art of recovery, conceal their bafflement.

They embrace, kiss and hug their sister, while sharing quizzical looks and quick glances at the terrain. They are itching to know how exactly she has made this incredibly sudden appearance.

They start with innocent questions about her well-being and happiness; working patiently like skilful anglers who know by experience that speed is not the way to make a good catch.

Psyche, true to her vow, reveals nothing about Cupid. When replying she insists the questions are beyond her ability to answer. Her sisters think she is enjoying her power to control.

They've no appetite for teasing games played at their expense and taking great offence, they recount the appalling distress of their parents, stopping only by a whisker from blaming her.

*If you are free you must return with us. Our pledge is to discover why you were brought to this place. None believe it was the wish of the Oracle and some suggest you planned it.*

Psyche, rises to the evil bait and proclaims her innocence. The twisted sisters claim to believe her, letting her know what kind of punishment she can expect if she has misplaced their trust.

Panester and Detainer share the certainty that round one has gone in their favour, but Psyche does not see their aggressive practice; she is not even aware that they compete with her.

Innocence should be her greatest regret, but when she is in danger she holds it closer still. Excited, she asks them to guess how they will travel to her home. They look anxiously about.

They suspect magic and quickly point out that their servants are nearby, ready to guard them. Psyche laughs. Humiliated, they silently vow she will regret her playful sport with them.

## Ugly piles of imagined pain

Panester would like to scratch her eyes out. Detainer would like to pull her hair out. Psyche blows on a pipe, calling Zephyrus to come. The servant wind responds to her, spiralling about them.

All are lifted into the air. The sisters screech with fear as if they have been thrown to the vagaries of providence. Zephyrus can hardly contain their fearful writhing and excessive kicking.

He places them on the ground without harm, telling himself that he has never heard so many abusive oaths of retribution. *These two are no more disturbed than feathers in the wind.*

*It's vanity that causes their frantic screaming, these false ladies who are yellow in hue. They're a comic pair of silly wretches, no better than two ugly piles of imagined pain.*

*Why do they roll their eyes and shrink from the view as if they are helpless paper sheets being introduced to a flame? Surely their bogus fear must subside without any cause to sustain it.*

*They are ludicrous, gaping as if they're preparing to scurry from vicious beasts, intent upon breaking free from the fetters that hold them with the sole purpose of gobbling up the pair.*

## A world coming apart

We know, of course, why Psyche's world is coming apart. She has one of the gentlest of characters, yet there's not one God or Goddess prepared to listen to her and offer their helping hand.

Zephyrus will carry these idle harridans to the valley, but no-one carries Psyche's prayers on a breeze, no-one scatters her words to the other worlds so that she can enjoy some justice.

Why are those with goodness so neglected? Is it true that they must learn something or do we invent such things as lies, as skilful tricks to hide evidence of disappointment and injustice?

Consider this; if all the mortals and immortals are traitors to Psyche's needs is she completely lost or are there other kinds of beneficent deity that might gather round to assist her recovery?

## A land of eternal spring

Panester and Detainer cannot hide their fear. They demand to know from Psyche who has taught her this magic and what other kind of spells she has learned since her sojourn here.

*Be consoled sisters. You have no need of such excessive worry. Look about you. Do you imagine that danger lurks here, that serpents lie in wait? You are in a land of eternal spring.*

*Look upon each other; is there not a rosy flush about your cheeks, is this not a warm bright morning in a world alive with possibility? Gaze on the landscape and let joy hold you.*

*Let the morning freshness envelope you, allow the fine breezes to blow on you. Walk with me through these pleasant gardens, past the silver tree trunks and sing of its wondrous praises.*

*Listen to the crystal sounds of the river and study this building of astonishing beauty. Let the strange, delicious melodies issuing from the rich, carved walls breathe softly into you.*

*Don't alert your consciousness to prepare for bewitchment. Listen, the stringed instruments call out to you, suggesting that delicate, tender love is not only possible, but immanent.*

## Under pressure from envy

Psyche invites her sisters to allow the magical sounds to reach into their spirits, to permit the music to dissolve and mingle with the exotic scent of flowers refreshed by sun and dew.

The ridiculous harridans want to be sick. They have no idea what to do with such feelings and are more concerned about keeping from each other the harsh nature of their greedy bliss.

Walking like infants, woken from a drowsy sleep, they enter the enchanted palace, studying every stone and marble used in its construction. To them it seems to be the world's source of light.

They can only believe this is a fairy land. They feel compelled to buoy each other up and defend their merciless beliefs from increasing onslaughts of indulgence and poetic fantasy.

Convinced that Psyche is a witch, they gloat over the soaring emblems in citrine and ivory seated atop the great pillars of gold and marvel at the walls engraved with animals and Gods.

Their deception is always close by. They feign squeals of delight and act out displays of polite etiquette; a well-practiced art steadily refined when trying to avoid the exhibition of desire.

They hide their envy of the precious gems on reliefs decorating the parapets and on textiles covering carved doorways by pretending their own craftsmen could do significantly better.

To relieve the pressure of envy they screw up their nostrils as they breathe the heady scent of flowers and close up their ears as they hear the exotic chords of the bewitching melodies.

Psyche doesn't see them swoon at the sight of the marble floors, the porphyry columns with their filigree capitals carved in jasper, or the gold-leaf edging that highlights the decoration.

She expects childish excitement, but Panester moans with the offence this excess imposes on her sensitivity and Detainer winces in disgust at water jets in beds of chrysolite and pearl.

Psyche lounges innocently in sumptuous silks of rainbow hues. The sisters utterly detest her, believing that she is scorning their discomfort while flaunting her role as the Queen of Love.

They ask if this place so ornately decorated, is her home, what kind of ominous magic created it? Is the man who owns it her husband? Has she paid too exorbitant a price for this luxury?

Psyche walks her sisters to the treasure house and insists they must take anything their hearts desire. She has no idea that this exhibition of exuberant wealth causes substantial pain.

The sisters, unable to resist, gather up as much as they can carry. Sick with a surfeit of greed and envy, bewildered by a mixture of anger and delight, their wits have deserted them.

They do not question the nature of Psyche's invisible servants and when soft disembodied voices invite them to dine, they go without a single concern that no shape or form can be seen.

When meats, divine wines and delicacies of every conceivable kind are placed before them they are hysterical with fear that a wizard's potion is responsible for this miraculous diet of excess.

They ask who is lord here, from which estate, and which other lands he owns. Psyche says he's a man of fine stature with a flaxen beard and insists she will answer no more questions.

Again, they ask where her husband is and if he knows that she gives away his precious gems. Psyche says he is hunting in the dales and hills and it his idea that she fills the laps of visitors.

## A God for a husband

Panester questions how they arrived here and Zephyrus swiftly blows in to whisk the defiant sisters back up the mountain. They are utterly baffled by the speed and timing of their flight.

*This can't have been a dream; the treasure we gathered up is here with us. Psyche's healthy demeanour and contented spirit are not signs of torture; she pays nothing for her luxuries.*

*The transforming alchemy is more striking than a magician's art. We have no purchase on this odd place; what can we do but pick up these bags of great fortune and return home?*

*She has injured my fine standing. What will we say to family?  
Her world indicates every sign of verifiable reality without  
any apparent threat attached. It's more than I can endure.*

*It's a cruelly perverse fortune. We're born of the same parents,  
yet we have such diverse destinies. We must now return to our  
difficult and ancient husbands who make handmaidens of us.*

*I am banished from my country and friends, while Psyche is  
waited upon by invisible servants, bathing every day in an  
abundance of treasure. She must have a God for a husband.*

*It is extremely unfair. She has no skill in the use of abundant  
riches and yet her palace reeks of them. No woman has need  
of such a quantity of jewels or this number of glittering robes.*

*I walked on gems and trod upon gold. We must not torture  
ourselves, sister, but we can't countenance her good fortune. If  
she has a husband there's none alive happier than she is now.*

*He will probably make her a Goddess. By our noble Hercules,  
such is her vain countenance already. She has voices to serve  
her and winds to obey her, how could she not be a Goddess?*

## Vicious noise

*Look at me, a poor wretch in comparison to Psyche - married  
to a husband older than my father and lacking his fine looks.*

*Look at me, married to a man with gout, balder than a coot,  
locked in all day to stop men from taking advantage of me.*

*My husband's weaker than a child. He refuses to pay my debts and I must rub his vile, stony fingers with oils all night long.*

*I must wrap my husband's feet in plasters and salves. Look at these hands, once dainty, but now sullied by his filthy clouts.*

*Feel the roughness of these fingers that know only the life of a servant. I live far from home and attend his irksome relatives.*

*Our sister was so rude to cast pathetic pieces of gold into our laps. Did you see how proudly and arrogantly she handled us?*

*Did you notice how keenly she flaunted her wealth? Never has she given utterance to such a rude mind and got away with it.*

*When we got close to her murky little secrets she smiled. When she was weary of us she instructed a demon to whisk us away.*

*I am not of this world if I do not exact my revenge upon her sneaky greed. I'm no woman if I don't deprive her of this bliss.*

*We will bring about Psyche's downfall, sister. We will ensure that news of her fortune never reaches the ears of our parents.*

*We will tell no-one. News of her grave state will cause great concern and we will get everyone to vilify and blame her.*

*We will hide our treasure, tear out our hair and rip apart our clothes to verify our terrible ordeal. Now we'll return home.*

*We must renew our false sorrow to refresh our parent's tears. Seeing us lamenting, will be enough to reinstate their grief.*

*If the Court questions us, we will say nothing. Let us pledge to cause Psyche's destruction and suppress her repulsive pride.*

*She has sisters; we too are princesses, not just abject women. She will soon understand that we are far worthier than she is.*

## Cupid's counsel

In urgent tones Cupid outlines to Psyche the perils that await her if she fails to recognise the dangers that lie ahead, but she simply cannot imagine the awfulness her sisters engage in.

She smooths his agitation with kisses and softens his mind with caresses, refusing to accept that evil fortune threatens her or that her sisters set snares to undermine and intimidate her.

Cupid gravely insists that if Panester and Detainer persuade her to look at his face and she has the misfortune to do so, it will sever all the possible future connections between them.

Psyche argues that he engages in wicked cunning to suit himself. *My sisters cannot be regarded as horrid hags armed with fiendish intent simply because they wish to visit me.*

*Without evidence, I will not accept they plan my downfall, nor will I promise to cease seeing them. It is entirely reasonable that a young wife should speak with her older sisters.*

Cupid concurs with this last point, but insists she must not answer questions, other than to make simple remarks or anodyne suggestions, and on no account, is she to discuss him.

*Why must you hurt me when clearly, I would never jeopardise our love. By your wish, I will not talk of you, but you must trust me dear angel, my sweet love; you must believe in me.*

Cupid yields and tells her that if she abides by his wishes the tender babe couched in her loving belly will be made immortal, but if she fails in this she will give birth to a mortal creature.

On hearing this overwhelming news, Psyche weeps tears of joy. *Giving birth is magical for any mother, but to bring a divine babe into the world is ambition beyond the wildest dreams.*

Motherhood bestows a joyful confidence upon Psyche. As the weeks pass she counts the days and marvels at the life inside her, but she also knows she cannot live in isolation forever.

## Predictable treachery

If you were Psyche, dear readers would you trust Cupid and bury your doubts? Is it innocence that keeps her buoyant? Or when belief brings pain, would she, like you, believe cautiously?

Why is this woman's fate with its particular failings relevant? She loves unwisely, but it is difficult to perceive any real fault compared to the predictable treachery of Cupid and her sisters.

Beauty deceives; it carries an explosive charge for those with it and for those gazing upon it. It has the power to destroy reason, but should a woman with a heart of goodness, be punished?

## Crouching jackasses

See now how the sisters perform when they arrive home. Panester wastes no time before sending out spies to gather information and summoning a local sorceress to attend her.

The sorceress promises she can divine who Psyche's God-like husband is, but in truth she is too scared to admit she has no such power. Panester demands an answer within the week.

The foolish sorceress tries to buy a little time, insisting it to be a most complex and rigorous undertaking, but the ugly sister cares nothing for her excuses and sends her away to get started.

A week later she visits the sorceress in her make-believe cave. Panester observes that the woman has constructed two fine manikins, one to represent Psyche, the other to signify Cupid.

She takes a seat and watches as the old witch draws a circle with her finger around the male manikin. It shimmers, giving off an evanescent green flame and Panester is much impressed.

The sorceress, speaking gravely, demands he reveal himself. Moving now with sudden flourishes, she draws a second circle around the female doll, pouring red unguents over its body.

She kneels by the manikin, mumbling obscure words of magic that sound like the drone of a bee and waits, but this time nothing happens. The apprehensive sorceress appears lost.

In a drastic attempt to keep her performance alive and prove her power, she draws lines between the two circles. Again, to no avail. Panester though, is oddly impressed by the performance.

She sees the sorceress drawing odd forms like jackasses and a pair of crouching baboons. Encouraged by this attention, the foolish woman dances wildly around the cave, droning horribly.

The sorceress bends to read signs in the dust; her face white-heated, her brow beaded with sweat. She addresses Panester. *All must fear the creature you speak of, all, my dear, but you.*

*Indeed, he is a God, but know that he tires of Psyche and even now he searches for another, one of mature mind.* With this the sorceress appears to faint. Panester rushes to revive her.

The sorceress, pretending drowsiness, claims to know nothing of the words she has spoken. Panester, caring little for memory, is delighted and pays the old woman a truly handsome sum.

## The God awaits your return

Detainer is similarly engaging the divination arts. She employs a man renowned for his art in prediction. When the princess visits him, he also has prepared a spectacular performance.

He swathes the upper and lower part of his face with linen, leaving only the lips and eyes exposed. Taking water from a jug, he sprinkles it liberally on his head, his arms and his feet.

Muttering incantations, he moves about the room, swaying gently. As he processes, he stops now and then to face a wall, kissing it lovingly and repeatedly calling out Psyche's name.

With each tender kiss, he sneezes loudly. After several such incidents, he starts tumbling about as though the place rocks with thunder and he utters the sounds of a great many animals.

He holds his throat as though the air has now become smoky with curling vapours. Next, he invents a cat and strokes it before pretending he is struggling to fight off a voracious tiger.

The old man mimes his subjugation of a writhing serpent then stoops as if listening to the animal. Suddenly his lined face displays the sign of revelation and he turns to Detainer.

*The God you spoke of now awaits your return. He saw you when you visited his palace and Psyche can't compare with your charms.* Detainer, proud and delighted, pays him well.

## Cupid

*Behold, dear Psyche, the day is upon us and the extreme case I talked of must now be tried. The enemies of your blood are armed against us. They have pitched their camp, set their host in array and now briskly march with confidence towards us.*

*Your sisters have drawn their swords ready to slay you. With great force, we are assailed this day. Dearest Psyche, take pity on yourself and on me, save your dear husband and this baby in your belly from the ensuing danger. Attend to my words.*

*Refuse to look at them and block your ears. It is their immense hatred and breach of sisterly amity that causes them to come like sirens to these mountains. Promise me that you will not yield to their piteous and lamentable cries. Promise Psyche.*

## Psyche

*Husband, you have proof of my faithfulness and I'll continue to persevere in the same manner. You have no need to fear my failure. Now be my dearest love and command your cherished wind Zephyrus to bring my sisters to me as he did before.*

*I pray you by these beautiful hairs, by these round cheeks, delicate and tender, by your pleasant hot breast, whose shape and face I shall learn at length by seeing the child in my belly, support me and grant the fruit of my desire. Please my prince.*

*Husband; refresh your dear spouse with joy. I am bound and linked to you forever and ever. I do not esteem to see your visage and figure and I do not regard the darkness of night with fear; you my dearest are my only light. I cherish you.*

## Married to a loathsome serpent

Soon, those pestilent and wicked furies breathing out their serpentine poison take ship to start their iniquitous enterprises.

Their parents no nothing of their voyage and they keep from each other their desperate ambition to win Psyche's husband.

Pretending their mission is a shared enterprise to belittle proud Psyche, they go to the rock where she was left to her sad fate.

They vilify her and study each other for clues of intentions, but neither can add certainty to their abject suspicion of deception.

Both Panester and Detainer pretend to call the wind. Neither makes a sound and both pretend they're scanning the valley.

As soon as one saunters to the edge so does the other. They play cat and mouse like this until both leap over the edge.

Zephyrus reluctantly obeys the divine commandment to catch the wretched pair mid-flight and deposit them in the valley.

Each straightens her skirt, tidies her hair and runs in great haste toward the palace. Without knocking, they fly straight in.

Not caring to announce their presence, they dart about, trying to find Psyche in the hope they'll locate her prized husband.

They glance at themselves in mirrors and check their sister's progress. There is no chance one will find her before the other.

Nothing distracts them; not even the lilting of ethereal voices. Unannounced, they burst in upon Psyche in her bedroom.

Psyche greets her sisters and they embrace their prey. They thank her for the treasure and then reel at the sight of her belly.

*Oh, my dearest sister, you know you are now a mother? Oh, what great joy you are bearing in your much-honoured belly.*

*What a comfort it will be to the family. It's delightful that your cherished infant nourished amongst such a wealth of treasure.*

*If the babe is like its parents, there's a young God or Goddess coming and we'll be the most gracious aunts you can imagine.*

They attempt to win Psyche over, but they're weary with travel. As soon as they're sitting in her easy chairs they fall fast asleep.

Psyche commands the attendants to play enchanted music in the hope that it might suppress the wickedness of these two.

Singing and playing instruments, their gentle harmonies and delicious modulations explore the bounds of magical themes.

The iniquity of these cursed women is not suppressed by these dulcet sounds. They snore loudly and shout in fits and starts.

When the harridans awake, Psyche invites them to the parlour where all kind of meats and delicacies have been prepared.

After tasting every morsel, the vile sisters continue working their treasons and encourage Psyche to talk about her husband.

*What parentage is he, what's his name,* they ask but Psyche rides the stormy words like a seabird riding warm air currents.

As her confidence increases, she accidentally reveals a picture of Cupid different to the one she invented on their last visit.

*He's a quiet man, not given to large company. A merchant, a man of middle age. His beard is interspersed with grey hairs.*

Realising she has made a momentous mistake she hastily fills their laps with gold, instructing Zephyrus to bear them away.

## Pernicious counsel of sisters

*I am filled with doubt and suspicion; what's your informed opinion of our Psyche's double description of her husband?*

*Doubtful, like you; first he's a young man of flourishing years with a flaxen beard, then he's a quiet man, half grey with age.*

*We can only conclude that either this cursed little queen has invented a lie, or she has never seen the shape of her husband.*

*If she has never seen him, then we must conclude that she is married to some God and has a young God in her happy belly.*

*But if she is to have a divine babe, it will be a disaster for us. If this fortune comes to our mother's ears, we will be exposed.*

## RUPTURED RESOLUTIONS

### The return to the mountain

The sisters return to their parents with renewed lies and well-practiced wiles to make certain that Psyche pays for their envy.

This dizzying illusion is doubly complex for they must pretend cheerful union while making plans for alternative aspirations.

By day they walk on thin ice, relying only on their obstinate objectivity. Nights, beyond their control, they spend in terror.

Being expert at deception, they triumph. Had they failed these tasks they'd have lost the only partner they have ever known.

They visit their parents, reveal Psyche's existence, confirm her mortal danger and return to her, before any questions arise.

Zephyrus again carries them to the valley and, stand upon the threshold, they rub their eyelids to display their weeping.

Psyche welcomes them, showering kisses. Armed with queries, they cannot wait to use their ugly ammunition against her.

Ignoring polite etiquette, preambles and news of their parents' wellbeing, the sisters instantly commence their pitiable lying.

## The harridans attack

*You can't remain ignorant of the evil around you; pretending happiness at home with no proper regard for your peril?*

*We care that no harm should befall you and, being credibly informed, we must tell you of the knowledge we now possess.*

*A great serpent full of deadly poison lies with you every night. He will surely devour you with his ravenous gaping throat.*

*Do you not remember the Oracle of Apollo? He said you would be married to a dire and fierce serpent and it is true, you are.*

*Many have spoken of seeing him. Those who hunt in the local area affirm that they saw him slithering here only yesterday.*

*Others speak of him swimming in the river. They say you will not be pampered with amorous intentions for much longer.*

*You are not the first to be seduced. Many fear that when the time of delivery approaches the monster will devour you both.*

*Both you and your child will be lost. Please understand the great danger you are in. Accept our view and act now.*

*We care for you. We promised our parents that we would save you from this despicable monster and your certain death.*

*Be content to live with us, you cannot remain with a serpent that will swallow you into the gulf of his vile belly in seconds.*

*You can't enjoy this dismal solitary life, engaged in bizarre conversations with absent, disembodied voices, can you?*

*Can you prefer your love for a serpent and reject your family? Are you so truly obsessed with servile and odious pleasures?*

*Look at your sallow countenance; you are too ill to walk. The freshness of your grief must be clouding your ability to think.*

*Psyche cries a halt. I can't reject love. You must realise he loves me and asks only that I love him in return. I must do this.*

*But death is your wooer. Your heart is young; this pain will not last. Your fate is our fate. We'll help you fight his wiles.*

*No. My life will be only weeping. Bring me those who saw a serpent. Let them persuade me they were truly talking truth.*

*We will, but you have never seen the shape of your husband. How will you know that their comments are honestly given?*

*Simply, my husband can't abide the light of day, but yet I hear his gentle voice each night. It is only his form that is uncertain.*

*You don't know where he comes from, where he goes? Then it is true and this confirms our worst fears; he is truly a beast.*

*I admit that I fear to see him; for he threatens great evil will befall me if I try to spy on him to discover his true nature.*

*Follow our advice and you will thank us for our kindness. We have a remedy for this danger and no fear of peril or danger.*

*We will show you the best way to save your dear life and avoid the pending catastrophe. Trust us, you now need rest.*

*Before he comes, have a burning lamp with oil hidden under the hanging in your chamber. With this you will see him.*

*Place this razor under the pillow. Practice sleeping with it before he comes, for you must not arouse his eager suspicions.*

*When he arrives, kiss him and tell him how agreeably the day proceeded. When he is sound asleep you can start your action.*

*With bare feet go and take the lamp. With razor in hand, you must take a look at the creature that sleeps in your bed.*

*If he is a monster, then, with valiant force, you must cut off the head of this poisonous serpent and finally end your woes.*

*When he is dead, we will marry you to a comely man. Now we must leave. If you comprehend your task, call Zephyrus to us.*

*We must make haste as we too are in danger, dear sister. Call the wind; we'll return as soon as your great task is complete.*

## Stirred by shocking furies

Psyche's mind, driven by these dreadful revelations, heaves as in a convulsive sea. Frantically she tries to resist their counsel.

She cannot clear her mind, make sense of the diverse opinions, nor imagine a life without looking once upon her dear husband.

Close to motherhood, she must crave family recognition; how can she give birth to a divine child living in an isolated desert?

She will act and then not. She feels bold; next she is full of fear. She mistrusts her sisters; then she is moved by their concern.

She believes their visions and she loves her husband. All this while she moves ever closer towards their wicked objective.

## Cupid's beauty

Cupid comes. Fervently he embraces Psyche, his lovemaking more passionate than ever and then he falls into a deep sleep.

Psyche, feeble in body and mind, is acutely aware of the cruelty of her fate. Reluctantly she gathers the razor and the lamp.

She moves with her fraudulent objects to the bed and stares, open mouthed and this, the meekest of all beasts fast asleep.

The lamp boosts its light for joy of seeing Him. The razor turns its edge. There is no monster or serpent, only splendid Deity.

Her mind stumbles and her face pales. She falls trembling to her knees, wishing she could turn back and begin again.

Moved by the sight of her husband and deeply fearful of acting out this wilful enterprise, her trembling hand drops the razor.

None can behold the beauty of Cupid without knowing that it is he who lies before them. Psyche's poor heart beats ever louder.

She gazes at golden locks that yield sweet savour, at his neck whiter than milk, at his vivid purple cheeks, his fine ruby lips.

As the plume of feathers strewn across his shoulders trembles like the wind, she is filled with tenderness, consumed with love.

She strokes the smooth softness of his body, observing how his bright skin makes the oil lamp appear dark by comparison.

*Your mother will be honoured to gaze upon the wondrous grandchild that lies in my belly. Will you introduce her to me?*

*Will you present me to the Gods of the immortal realm so that they might bestow their merciful blessing on your offspring?*

*Will you teach your son how to operate your prized bow and arrows, how to put them to good use? Will you forgive me?*

Moving to where Cupid's weapons lie, she swiftly takes from his quiver one of the loving arrows and carelessly pricks herself.

Blood flows from her finger. Willingly, she has added love upon love for the exceptionally fine God that lies asleep before her.

Psyche, her love for Cupid overflowing, embraces and kisses him a thousand times, taking extreme care not to wake him.

In a state of adoration and confusion, she tips the lamp and a drop of burning oil drops down on Cupid's cherished shoulder.

He flinches; unaware of causality, he imagines he has been bitten by some irritating insect. Psyche rebukes the lamp.

*Oh, rash lamp, so envious of my passion, you must intervene. It is most audacious of you to burn the God of love and fire.*

*He invented you to allow every lover greater joy by lighting the pleasure of fiery nights and now you have wounded him.*

Cupid awakes with a troubled heart; the moment he feared has now come. As he touches his shoulder it is clear this is no bite.

## Utterly forlorn

*What is this fire that sears my skin, bites my flesh and grows more pernicious the more it consumes my tender young body?*

*Why do you kneel over me with a lamp in your hand, my precious wife, and what is this razor that lies upon the covers?*

*You have broken your promise and your faith. The pain from the oil is killing me. I must fly away. Pray do not hold so fast.*

At a great height she holds on, until he spins round and she falls. Cupid follows her down, captures her and clasps her close.

Lovingly he places her on a Cypress tree. Psyche gazes up at him tenderly, but a storm of anger flows from Cupid's lips.

*Despite my mother's order to marry you to a man of woeful condition, I arrived from heaven to care and protect you.*

*I wounded myself with my weapons to have you as my spouse. Am I such a beast that you must cut off my head with a razor?*

*I loved you, submitted to you and advised you to reject the false counsel of those cursed counsellors you call sisters.*

*They will be punished, but your punishment is my absence.* He takes a last cherishing glance at the beautiful Psyche and flies.

Weeping and lamenting, Psyche casts her eyes after Cupid until he's out of sight. Without him she's bleak, frantic and forlorn.

## Breath containing life

Psyche can't survive; the entire mortal and immortal realms are against her; only an unseen sphere of intelligence can help her.

She can't console herself, her only option is to make connection with the healing rhythms of the natural landscape she inhabits.

Psyche, the personification of beauty, the exceptional princess, is hated by all so she must seek the help of the natural world.

She must now listen to stories from other forms of life on earth. Only they can coach her in the delicate art of natural survival.

Nature's not a fragile void. She must tune her senses and know that frailty results when the true nature of a thing is ignored.

She must learn that the imagination is pre-eminently in things out there, not in her and use this perception to make decisions.

She must begin to see that anything can act as a vessel for soul; a river can ease a tortured mind as well as fine words or ideas.

She must make herself available to the world, let it to teach her that it is filled with all manner of fine imaginative resonance.

A place is not only a physical location, matter is not just a convenient filling for supposedly harmonious but empty forms.

She must begin to see that the objects of this world contain life, they are at least containers for an elementary form of breath.

If Psyche can follow the teaching of the wind and learn that the physical realm is not a hollow, insubstantial realm of solids.

She recalls the visions she had tried to banish; the dark head of Despair, the ominous calm, the blackness that filled the air.

Instinct now causes her to jump into the river to save her skin, but she may yet see those baffling, sinister visions as omens.

Psyche propels herself in to the water. This time it understands her anguish and her misery at the loss of her beloved husband.

## The God of shepherds

The river, honouring Cupid who had bathed in its waters, raises young Psyche out and places her on the bank among the herbs.

Psyche cannot picture where she is. She has faced so many dire tragedies in swift succession, she lies trapped and restrained.

Pan, the rustic God, sits by the river embracing the Goddess Canna as she watches over her herd of goats eating the grass.

He sees Psyche's sorrow and knows the reason for her dazed look, her grief and abject misery. He makes her a cosy bed.

Pan directs Canna to tune her pipes and he addresses Psyche in lyrical tones sweeter than music itself. The princess hears him.

*A rustic herdsman in my old age, I have expertise in very many things, including that which wise men call divination.*

*I see by your short breath, your pale hews, your sobbing sighs  
and your watery eyes that you are in love and yet rejected.*

*Listen carefully. Cease this attempt to kill yourself and put an  
end to your weeping. You can't sit here immobile any longer.*

*Think of adoring the great God Cupid. One day you shall win  
his dear affection on account of your service to him. Trust me.*

Psyche falls into a deep sleep, but the God of shepherds has the  
urge to instruct her further and he continues to speak to her.

*Psyche, may the oblivion of cares and all other in this life, save  
that hidden piping and singing that comes from Canna's  
gathered companions, pillow and aid your drowsy head.*

*You wander through a maze where the sound of music washes  
over you. Before you there's a garden, golden with the light of  
lamps that hang in great profusion from many branches.*

*Before you, ripe pomegranates, quince, apples and pears are  
yours to eat. Lie here on this bank that we have piled with  
purple cushions and allow your limbs to recover and relax.*

*Believe you're clad in the richest figured silks, fringed like the  
ends of clouds round the sun. When you wake, you will not  
recall the many confused hours that preceded this fine sleep.*

*You may be dimly aware that some evil has recently befallen  
you, but these tyrannies will disappoint recognition as though  
a potent drug has charmed you into a lasting forgetfulness.*

*All that you will remember is the name of your husband, Cupid, and you will call out his name until you have no voice left and no more power in your heavenly body to utter it.*

*It is in this condition that you will begin your tireless journey through many lands and other worlds. Though very many hardships will hamper your journey, you will in time flourish.*

## Living in her bones

After her turmoil, Psyche is even now only at the starting point, at the first place where everything can truly begin afresh.

The most beautiful woman in the world is despised, vulnerable to every danger, and yet her life is to get more difficult for her.

A mother to be, a solitary beggar in a hostile landscape, totally exposed and utterly confused by all, is on the very lowest rung.

She has no resources, can't imagine how she'll be brave enough to start life again, or how she can live it as a mere pauper.

She has nothing, is without any idea how she will nurture the offspring she is carrying and has no means of feeding herself. Her child will not starve; it'll grow in that place, deep within, where she will exist and from where she must learn to grow.

Psyche must live in her bones, deep inside her body where the ancient tales and memories lie in wait to promote connections.

This is how the world began, the place where hope resides; the profound region, below that place where despair can operate.

Here, it's pure nature, everything subject to anticipation fails, here virtue thrives and submission is the only working rule.

Psyche's breath knows this, it is never without hope. It is the will of Psyche's breath that knows how to support expectation.

## Carnal desire

After travelling for days, Psyche discovers herself in the city where Panester lives. When she realises this, she sends a messenger to her sister requesting an invitation to the palace.

Panester, both alarmed and intrigued, instructs the messenger to bring her to the court. They embrace and Panester asks if she has yet discovered the identity of her monster of a husband.

Psyche, innocent, tells her sister that it was she who insisted she kill the vile beast that was feigning to be her husband. Panester, lost for words, can't wait to hear Psyche's news.

*As soon as I brought forth the lamp to catch a glimpse of his shape, I saw that he was none other than the son of Venus. Yes, it was Cupid himself who was lying with me in bed.*

*Then, being stricken with great pleasure and desirous to embrace him, I could not contain my delight. As fortune would have it, the oil of the lamp spilled and landed on his shoulder.*

*This caused him to wake and, seeing that I was armed with fire and weapons, he berated me, asking how I could dare to undertake such a great mischief on one so gentle and kind.*

*He said I must depart from him and take only those things that I brought with me. As you well know I came with nothing. After this he commanded Zephyrus to carry me away.*

Panester asks Psyche if Cupid would place her in his felicity and take her as his wife. *How is it you can think such a thing?*

Psyche asks. *He is hardly looking around for my replacement.*

*Rude girl, how can you say so much? He must have seen me when I visited your palace. Are you saying that you deserve him and I don't? I'm married, but I don't care for my husband.*

Panester instructs Psyche to visit Detainer and determine if she might live with her. The foul woman, pierced with the prick of carnal desire and wicked envy, runs quickly to her husband.

Feigning she has received word of the death of her parents, she instantly makes arrangements to be transported back to Petheril Mount, the place where Psyche's fateful journey began.

The next day, she arrives on the high plateau. Full of certainty that a contrary wind is blowing, she decides it is Zephyrus and cries out to Cupid to have him bring her to his blissful palace.

She declares she has wasted no time in coming to his loving arms and casts herself headlong from the mountain. She lands unrecognised in the valley far below, neither alive nor dead.

The various parts of her body are torn among the rocks while birds of prey and wild beasts devour what is left. Those who contribute nothing in this world, will leave nothing behind.

Psyche, the forlorn princess, wanders across the landscape until she comes to the city of Detainer's court. On seeing her despicable sister, she repeats the story she told Panester.

Detainer behaves exactly as her sister did. She makes excuses about urgent news, runs to her husband, flies to the fateful rock, and topples over just as the depraved Panester had done.

When Psyche hears news of her sisters, she knows it's no longer her duty to protect others from their fate, she wastes one last silly thought on them before forgetting about them entirely.

True to the prediction of the Shepherd God, Psyche travels through various lands seeking sight or news of her precious husband. She can learn nothing of him, but still she persists.

## PRESSURE FROM ABOVE

### Abominable treachery

Cupid has retreated to his mother's private chamber on Mount Olympus. He has lain prostrate for days, bewailing the end of love and the wound caused by the oil from the burning lamp.

Venus is not at the palace; she is reinvigorating her worn out beauty in a sea resort where spas and springs are renowned for rejuvenating the damaged bodies and spirits of all the Gods.

She is bathing in the ocean when a timid seagull in her employ, that has been posted near her, tentatively approaches to deliver his missive about the activities and condition of her impish son.

*Madam, I have urgent information to impart. Your son has been badly burned and is in danger of death. There are many about who speak evil of your family and blame it on you.*

*Worse still, there are common words in the mouth of every person that your son does nothing but visit a harlot in the mountain, a woman, they claim, who now bears his child.*

*The mortals say that you do nothing but riot lasciviously in the sea. They have now become ungracious to you. They're no longer pleasant or gentle, but spread uncivil, monstrous lies.*

*It's worse yet. They claim that marriages are no longer a bed of amity or suited for love of procreation, but a place that is full of envy, ravaged by dispute and discordant debate.*

*I'll soon see to his abominable treachery. Tell me gentle bird, what she is, this harlot who haunts the mountain. What is her name, this she-wolf who troubles my dear Cupid so intently?*

*Is she of the Nymphs, of the great number of Goddesses, of the company of the Muses or of the mystery of the Graces? Are there qualities in her that raise her above pitiable mortals?*

*Dear Mother of Beauty, I know not what she is, but she answers to the name of Psyche. What, my sworn enemy, the usurper of my beauty? She who Cupid was sent to punish?*

*What did my son think? That I was a mistress of harlots by whose introduction he could become acquainted with a maid who commandeers my name and fakes my finest virtues?*

*I shall have his feathers for a pillow and relish the loss. Come, courtiers, we must leave this ocean retreat and return to my chamber where Cupid lies on my bed mortally wounded.*

## The wrath of Venus

*Is this an honest thing you have done Cupid? Is this how you honour your parents? If you are wounded then I'll wound you even more. How can you possibly reason this vast injustice?*

*You've violated and broken a commandment of your mother and sovereign mistress. Your task was to vex my enemy with loathsome love, yet you wilfully employ the opposite strategy.*

*Your flesh is far too tender, your years unripe, and you have with too licentious an appetite embraced my most mortal foe. Can it be true that this pathetic mortal girl bears your child?*

*Don't attempt to explain, I need no hideous lies; please spare me that. Must I soon be her mother then? I cannot believe you would give me such a daughter to nurse my grandchild.*

*Don't presume I act on idle gossip; the whole world knows this. You trivial boy, you varlet without an ounce of suitable reverence, you deduce incorrectly that you're worthy of me.*

*Let me tell you, my excellent buffoon, that by reason of my age, I am not able to give birth to another son, but if I could there is no doubt that he would be far worthier than you.*

*Don't insult me with clever observations about the time it would take to make a grown man. I intend to ensure that you are in no doubt whatsoever of the extent of my displeasure.*

*I shall adopt one of my servants and give him these wings, this fire, this bow, these arrows and all other furniture given to you to work with and which you are determined to use badly.*

*I will not stop there, wretched creature. Hear this. I will take back all talents given to you by your father for the generous and noble purpose of regenerating amorous love in the world.*

*It is without doubt that you were wrongly brought up and poorly instructed in your youth. Your hands are now too eager, your practices too sharp and far too self-centred.*

*You forget who you are and constantly offend the ancients, especially me, your loving mother. You have pierced me with your darts and you have condemned me as an old widow.*

*You have too little regard for your valiant and invincible father and, to anger me, you have been amorous with many other harlots and wenches besides this thing called Psyche.*

*I can't bear to utter her name. Now you hear this. I am going to cause your repentance by detailing your every trick with this upstart. To this terrible point I am now completely driven.*

*What do I care if you know who the villains are, that they lie in pieces scattered over the mountain? I can still seek revenge even if the criminals are miserable wrecks upon jagged rocks.*

*Be assured I shall seek the counsel of every poor rustic woman; every woman who has ever been rejected by love, and enquire of them what the worst punishment should be.*

*What delightful tortures they'll invent and after listening to their retribution I'll ask Sobriety to conjure suitably horrid chastisements for you even though she's my sworn adversary.*

*I will invite her to correct you sharply, take away your quiver, deprive you of your arrows, straighten your bow, quench your fire and subdue your body with horrid punishment.*

*Never imagine you've been punished enough. Never will you return to your old ways. If your heart is in tatters and your body is eaten alive by this wound, you can still suffer more.*

*Many will applaud a tough penalty for the God of passion and I suspect mortals will fare well enough without naughty imps like you among them, concocting infatuations with arrows.*

*Oh, I can add more deformities yet. I could cut off every last lock of your flowing hair, oh yes, those fine locks that I dressed with my own hands and made to glitter like gold in sunlight.*

*After that I'll clip your wings, those fine gossamer extensions that I helped you to grow. Only then, Cupid, will I stop to consider if I have revenged myself upon you sufficiently.*

## Juno and Ceres

Juno and Ceres, hearing Venus raging in fury in her chamber, come to her side and demand to know the cause of her anger.

*It would have been better had you listened to my lamentations earlier, when I spoke of the danger. It's too late to act now.*

*All the wretchedness I prophesised has come to pass, but do one thing for me. Seek out one whose pitiful name is Psyche.*

*She's a vagabond in the country. You are not ignorant of my son, the brute, just imagine what he has done to offend me.*

*I am ashamed to reveal the detail, but you will know all when I say, it is business as usual for my defiant little son, Cupid.*

Inquisitive to know more of this scandalous affair they try to mitigate the ire of Venus and implore her to reveal her secrets.

*How has your son offended that you should so greatly accuse him of loving, by reason that he is amorous with such felicity?*

*Have you forgotten his years? There is still youth about him. Why should you seek the death of this girl, whom he fancies?*

*It's not the amorous nature of him that I decry, but the hurt he has caused. And don't imagine this harlot is an innocent thing.*

*We humbly entreat you to pardon him for spending his nights with a maiden. Do you not carer that he is still a young man?*

*You're his mother, known as a kind Goddess. Must you always discover his liaisons? Will you always blame him for luxury?*

*Will you bridle his love until he's old? Will you reprehend your own art and delights, having placed him in a disgraced orbit?*

*What God could endure your zeal to disperse your seed of love in every place and make restraint the norm behind your door?*

*Certainly, your actions will cause timidity and suppression for the young dames who inhabit the public places of lovemaking.*

They seek to pacify Venus and excuse Cupid. He is absent but still they are in great fear of his fateful darts and shafts of love.

Venus is not placated, they are trifling with her, taunting her for her injuries. She departs from them and hastens to the sea.

## Caring for the temple

It's hyperbole to say Psyche seeks Cupid. She drifts aimlessly, clearly hoping the eye of providence will facilitate her quest.

Her mind goes out to the future, down the ladder of all time, a gossamer seed blown about without a single breath of hope.

She fantasises about just resolution and when she reduces hope to a fervent prayer, she prays that her sweet babe will be saved.

She imagines Cupid, faintly appeased by her amiable flattery, taking mercy on her and listening to her continual prayers.

When she is low, Cupid rejects her servile presence and the resultant misery and despair is how she directs her lonely days.

She exacts homage from none, her child brings sickness to her stomach and all conversation is with the grass she lies upon.

This could be taken for madness, but with hostility prevalent, this form of contact provides Psyche with a form of healing.

She's not losing her mind; she'll easily defend herself, claiming nature speaks to her, offering her its wise and valuable advice.

The reeds by the river scan the horizon for her and whistle sounds that she translates into the facts that help her survival.

As Pan predicted, it is in this manner that Psyche discovers friendliness and some kind of familial attachment in the world.

One morning, with rare optimism, Psyche spies a temple on top of a hill and she imagines her husband and master rests there.

Moved by wilful breath, she undertakes the painful journey. The temple is deserted, it bears the same neglect she suffers.

Sheaves of corn in heaps, old rusty blades, withered garlands, reeds of barley, hooks and scythes, all of them tossed aside.

Sickles, and other reaping instruments lie in a disordered state as though they were cast to the floor by the hands of labourers.

Resting in the corn, she slips into a reverie. When she wakes, still exhausted, she feels affronted by the surrounding muddle.

Thinking it an offence to neglect the temple of any God, she gathers up the various items and gives them a form of order.

*Dear corn, it is better to get the favour and benevolence of all the Gods, rather than switch and change about with the wind.*

Ceres, seeing the princess busy in her chapel, calls out to the obliging maid. *Dear Psyche, I know you are needful of mercy.*

Psyche, strokes the corn, listening. *Venus is searching for you everywhere. She's intent upon exacting her revenge on you.*

*Her ambition is to punish you, yet you neglect your safety and are more in mind to be here caring for the order of my temple.*

## Pleading for pardon

Ceres appears before her and Psyche falls on her knees and waters the feet of the beneficent Goddess with her tears.

Wiping the ground with her hair, weeping with lamentation she pleads to Ceres to do all in her power to grant her a pardon.

*Oh, great and holy Goddess, I pray by the joyful ceremonies of your harvest, by the secrets of your long-honoured Sacrifice.*

*I pray by the flying chariots of your dragons, by the tillage of the ground of Sicily and by the holy marriage of Proserpina.*

*I pray by your daughter and the mysteries of the temple of Eleusis in the land of Athens, take pity on me, your servant.*

*Allow me to hide away among these sheaves of corn until the ire of the great Goddess Venus is past and I am out of danger.*

*Dear Psyche, I am greatly moved by your prayers and tears, please know I desire with all my heart to support you, but...*

When Ceres sees Psyche is with child, her words dry in her mouth. She feels her tears will flow and fights to stop herself.

*Pray give me what I need. Please let me stay here until I am refreshed from my great labour, my long, exhausting travels.*

*If I allow you to hide I'll increase the displeasure of my cousin. We both have a treaty of peace, an ancient promise of amity.*

*I dare not break it. Depart from here. I will at least refrain from giving the angry Goddess news of your whereabouts.*

*In other circumstances I would gladly allow you to abide and remain in my temple, for I cherish your innocent gracefulness.*

Psyche makes her weary body stumble out, a forlorn outcast. Now, contrary to her hopes, she's doubly afflicted with sorrow.

## Life without advocates

Leaving the mountain, Psyche sleeps in the shade of a tree and does not wake until the next day when the sun's high in the sky.

Seeing the shadow of a head lengthening on the wall before her, she starts up and gazes appalled as it fills and darkens the wall.

As Psyche leaps up the shadow disappears. Did she frighten an animal or is some unknown beast engaged in stalking her?

A cackled voice tells her not to fear. Psyche sees an old woman bent under the weight of a pile of withies she is carrying.

The woman smiles; Psyche loves her goodness, she doesn't ask what kind of messenger she is, so desperate is she for concern.

She unties a cloth bag, takes out a package of bread and meat and hands it to Psyche. *Eat this and listen to my counsel.*

*In that direction you'll find a fast-flowing brook where you can drink and refresh your forehead with its lovely coolness.*

*Like you I'm a wanderer and must go, but I will see you again, be sure.* With this, she lifts her stack of withies and walks on.

After the much-needed sustenance of bread and meat, Psyche looks for the brook to drink, wash and cool her weary body.

On the bank she sees a second woman, much like the first. She sits like a beggar, requesting alms with her hand outstretched.

A broad smile on her face. *Maybe not tonight, maybe not tomorrow, but you'll have the key to the mystery before long.*

*There is much fear. Don't heed it. Fear is what paralyses you. Stay ahead of it; it costs you nothing. We'll keep you in view.*

The woman walks awkwardly away from Psyche, who imagines a whistling sound in the air long after she has disappeared.

## Pleading for help

Psyche, her womb heavy, moves slowly. She rests on a hill and spies another Temple standing in a forest in a far-off valley.

Having no desire to pass a place where hope might direct her, she journeys the path to the sacred door of the fair temple.

Trees are adorned with precious riches and robes and prayers engraved with letters of gold are hanging on the fresh branches.

The Temple is dedicated to Juno, the columns bear her name. These days, she's happy to seek the pardon of any Goddess.

She enters within and kneels down before the altar, embracing it with her hands. She wipes the tears from her eyes and prays.

*Dear spouse and sister of the great Jupiter, you who're adored and worshipped at the great temples of Samos, hear my plea.*

*You who're worshipped at Carthage, who came from heaven by the lion, who is celebrated by all rivers, accept my prayers.*

*You, wife of the God, the Goddess of Goddesses; all the eastern world venerates you, the entire world calls you fair Lucina.*

*I beseech you, be my advocate, I plead with you to help in my tribulations. Deliver me from the danger now pursuing me.*

*Save my aching spirit, weary from labour. You give succour to pregnant women; who else can have claim on your justice?*

Juno, hearing Psyche's prayers, appears in her finest regalia. She wipes away the woman's tears and gently strokes her hand.

*Psyche, your claim is true. I'd gladly help you, but I can't act against the wishes of my daughter-in-law, Goddess of Love.*

*I love her as my child and by the law, I am forbidden to retain any servant fugitive against the will of her legal Mistress.*

*So, you, Juno, will cast me off as your sister did. Will you, like she, keep my location unknown to the great angry Goddess?*

*I will, just as we both know how to keep our forms from those with spying eyes for fault and too much anger to see sense.*

## Hiding in the dark

Left without hope of discovering that place where her husband resides, Psyche reasons that any action she takes on is futile.

When prayers aren't heard by the high Goddesses, then there is no comfort or remedy that will ease affliction or induce solace.

She knows the facts. She doesn't know what to do, where to go or in what vast hole she can hide to avoid the fury of Venus.

She may as well take good heart and present herself with humility before this Goddess whose anger she has wrought.

Her prince, he whom she seeks might be in his mother's house, so possibly it would be best to pray to Venus in her Temple.

No other alternative occurs to her, so Psyche prepares to face her dangerous and formidable foe on her own sacred ground.

## The careful reason of the soul

When Cupid offered the word marriage, did blood rush to your face in anger? Psyche never swore an oath to him. It is the mind that makes an oath, only intention gives form to words.

It is counsel and the soul's careful reason that shapes a pledge, for without judgement to set limits to the deed, no vow can be said to have force enough to have truly come into existence.

Imagine Psyche, her flesh wasted and hanging from her bones, her colour lacking the tint of blood and with the chill of iced water about it. She's a picture of utter weariness and misery.

She can neither weep nor speak. If her eyes cannot form tears, if her tongue cannot form words and her heart is frozen with a frozen frost, what use is she for either love or punishment?

But if these trials are really Psyche's destiny, the fault cannot be Cupid's. Her willingness to be deceived is a counterpart to his deceit. She must surely comprehend that she's deceived herself.

She didn't envisage Cupid could hurt her and she did nothing to deserve it, but now she must accept a world where trust and security can only come from something as fickle as the wind.

She can't imagine Cupid will save her. If he saw her now, going about the world beating her breasts and tearing her hair out, he would turn away and insist he had never before set eyes on her.

Psyche interrogates herself. Will Cupid fear her frantic need to remain his? Will he demand she forget his pledge? Will the Goddess cease reprisals if she is truly such a dismal wretch?

### With the aid of Mercury

Venus, weary of searching for Psyche by sea and land, returns to heaven to have her servants prepare her ceremonial chariot.

Her husband, Vulcan gave her the chariot as a wedding gift. Finely wrought; gold nor silver can compare to its brightness.

The four white pigeons, who guide the chariot with great care, are made ready as Venus enters to take charge of her transport.

Sparrows fly about, chirping, and many other birds sing sweetly in pleasure and delight at the appearance of the great Goddess.

These birds fear neither eagle nor hawk, or other ravenous fowl of the air. Venus, their protector, is famed for her punishments.

Clouds part and the heavens open. Venus arrives at the palace of Jupiter. With proud demeanour, she states her bold petition.

She pleads to have Mercury in her service and he freely agrees. Then Venus flies from Heaven with the swift God at her side.

## Revenge of the Goddess

*Dear brother, we were born in Arcadia, you know well that I rely on you to carry out the most complex of my enterprises.*

Mercury spreads out his arms; he is eager to do her bidding. Venus smiles, appreciating the cunning game she's invented.

*You know how long I have sought this elusive girl; it's beyond humiliation, so now I have no option but to seek your help.*

*Sound your trumpet, declare that there is a reward for any with evidence that leads to the discovery of the girl Psyche.*

*Execute this exactly. If any detain this girl purposely, against my will, they will find no defence by any means or any excuse.*

Venus sets a seductive mood in her palace and uses her charms on Mercury. He agrees to execute her instructions to the letter.

With Mercury ready to go, she hands him a written accusation of libel, naming Psyche as the perpetrator of crimes against her.

Her accusing publication complete, she returns to her lodgings, directing Mercury to proceed with the matter with great hast.

The God proclaims to the world that any with news of a servant of Venus by the name Psyche must bring word of it to Mercury.

The reward for this service is seven lovable kisses from Venus. Every man alive is inflamed with a desire to search out Psyche.

## A DIVERSIONARY TALE

### Tears from a faithful heart

Where is Cupid, now he's needed? If the wound Psyche caused him has healed he must surely fly to assist in her recovery. No hot oil burns her skin, but a poisonous spear pierces her heart.

He has no need of arrows to hurt Psyche; he can wound her from a distance. What would he do to one he hated when he abuses the one he claims to love with such destructive force?

Willingly Psyche gave Cupid the priceless gift a maiden gives only once and her submission included her body and her love. Now she has a woman's right to seek retribution against him.

It would have been better had she ceased her kindness sooner, but it is her fate to be found unwise, without counsel or insight. Innocent, like a pitiable vagabond, she travels over all the land.

What use is she to the immortal folk? She is without desire, doesn't dress her hair or find pleasure in garments. She enjoys nothing yet she forgives the wretched imp who tricked her.

What is her magnanimity? It is not driven by infatuation, as her love was; it is a pious need for unswerving devotion, a pressing need to work unstintingly for all who live, even for Cupid.

And still his mother, the wicked monster, is intent on taking away her life and her hope. It is certain that Psyche regrets her deed so she should surely be forgiven, not burdened with guilt.

What's a girl like her going to do with a razor? She sheds tears that come from a faithful heart. The crime was simple, she wanted Cupid and she loved unwisely, but Cupid caused it.

## Meeting the ass

Psyche, laden with unborn child, bewildered and lost in a wild landscape, arrives at a benign scene where the river has created a bountiful oasis. Here she sees a shabby ass, grazing amiably.

The ass, enjoying the grass on the bank, sees Psyche sidle up to him as if his contentment might rub off on her. He gives her a knowing look and Psyche imagines that he is smiling at her.

She wishes her life was as simple as his and hears him wish his life was as human as hers. Amazed that he can speak she asks how this is possible. The ass replies, oh this is a very long story.

Psyche responds that she's in no hurry as she is only travelling to her doom. The ass, vexed, declares his hope that this isn't true and agrees to tell her his story as a distracting diversion.

## The golden ass Part one

*In my youth, I went to Thessaly to conduct business affairs, I stayed the night in Hypata with a friend of mine called Milo.*

*I dreamt I was returning home when I met three robbers. To my surprise, I murdered each of them without a thought.*

*The next morning, I was awoken rudely by officers who had come to arrest me for the murder of the men in my dream.*

*The witnesses invited to testify against me laughed at my plight when I told of my dream. Confusion was all I expressed.*

*They were about to announce my guilt when the three widows of these men arrived, demanding to see their husband's bodies.*

*When the murdered men were displayed there were no bodies, only three puffed-up wineskins lying on timber stretchers.*

*To my great dismay, this escapade was a prank put on by townsfolk to entertain themselves royally at my expense.*

*I asked Milo how I could have a dream that became part of a real plot. He said that his wife had put the dream in my head.*

*I couldn't believe it, but his wife was an accomplished witch and said I would be remarkably surprised by her antics.*

*He invited me to peek through her bedroom door after lunch, saying that she would transform herself into a bird; she did.*

*Stupidly, I copied the woman's actions and turned myself into an ass by mistake. Unbelievable, but you now see the results.*

*I've no idea how long ago it was, it feels like a lifetime. The old witch said that I'd return myself to human form if I ate a rose.*

*This is a simple task. I trotted over to the nearest garden to eat a rose. I was caught by the gardener who started beating me.*

*His dogs, chased me, so I returned to Milo's house, where I ate straw in the yard. That night, asleep, I was stolen by thieves.*

*They planned a reprisal for the loss of their chief, Thrasileon, who'd been killed that evening while dressed in a bear suit.*

*They kidnapped me to facilitate the abduction of a woman, called Charity, who was in their hands before the night's end.*

*We were held captive in a cave. She didn't stop crying, so an old woman told her a story about Cupid marrying Psyche.*

## Endings and such like

Psyche reveals herself and the ass learns she is seeking Cupid. He is full of questions, but Psyche entreats him to continue.

He guessed something of the sort the moment he saw her, because she was certainly the most beautiful woman on earth.

Psyche explains that Venus is out to destroy her and she will surely succeed. She asks if he will tell her how the story ends.

The ass states that he is bound by the laws of narrative to keep endings for the end and reminds her that he has hardly started.

She begs him to press on with the story, hoping she'll discover useful clues and possibly a hint about how she might proceed.

## The golden ass Part two

*Charity and I escaped from the cave, but we were caught by other thieves who immediately decided to sentence us to death.*

*Luckily, a man appeared to these rough fellows, declaring that he was the renowned thief, Haemus, the famous Thracian.*

*Haemus says it is stupid to kill captives, for any wise man could see that it was a much more profitable thing to sell us.*

*That night, he revealed himself secretly to Charity and she recognised the young man as her dear fiancé, Ptolemus.*

*He got the thieves drunk and once asleep he slayed each of them. Ptolemus, Charity and I then escaped back to the town.*

*Sadly, I was entrusted to a horrid boy who could only torment me. I imagined that my life was never ever going to improve.*

*Luckily, the boy was killed by a bear. I returned to the house of Ptolemus, but neither he nor Charity were at their home.*

*I took refuge in a barn, but the boy's mother, blaming me for her son's death, claimed that she was now going to kill me.*

*My story is as bad as yours. Next, a man arrived at the house of Ptolemus and Charity to announce they were both dead.*

*He'd been hired by the men who stole Charity. They'd invented the story to help him abduct her without raising questions.*

*The mother, who was still after me, entered the house and told the slaves that Ptolemus was in fact dead and they were free.*

*The slaves ran away, taking me along. They were very stupid fellows and I knew this was not going to bode well for me.*

*Next morning this group of slaves were mistaken for a band of robbers and attacked by farmhands from a nearby estate.*

*I reached a village where I was taken in by a catamite priest who made me carry the statue of a Goddess on my back.*

*While I carried out my professional activity, the priest spent the time gadding about town with many girls of poor repute.*

*The priest was disturbed by a man who mistook me for his own animal. The priest ran quickly off, taking me with him.*

*We went to city where the priest told lies about the fame of his ministry and he was well received by one of its chief citizens.*

*As dinner approached, the cook, realising that the meat to be served that night had been stolen by a dog, became frantic.*

*At his wife's suggestion, he prepared himself for the task of killing me and serving me, a tough old ass, as the meat dish.*

*My escape from the cook coincided with an attack by rabid dogs, and my current wild behaviour is due to their viral bites.*

*I was then sold to a baker who made me drive the mill-wheel. I walked all day and had the time to reflect on many things.*

*It realised that being an ass allowed me to hear stories. If I were to tell you all I know, I would never stop until next week.*

*After living with the baker, I worked for a farmer who made advances to me. His tricks discovered, he was imprisoned.*

*I was owned by a legionary, but the man never fed me. I was sold to two brothers; one a confectioner and the other a cook.*

*I was stolen by a magician, who taught me tricks, but rumour of my skills spread far and a woman desired to buy me.*

*She paid off my keeper and I discovered she desired to take me to her bed. Fearing for my life, I ran off to a quiet life at sea.*

## **A balm for an aching spirit**

Psyche, tears of joy in her eyes, a smile around her sensuous lips, asks how long it will be before he reaches the present time.

*This morning I said a prayer to the Queen of Heaven for my return to human form. I cited the names of all the Goddesses.*

*To my big surprise the Queen of Heaven appeared to me in a vision and revealed that it would be easy to stop being an ass.*

*I have to eat the crown of roses that is being carried by one of her priests in a religious procession at Amalysis on Saturday.*

*The place is over there and Saturday is tomorrow. If you will accompany me you'll see me returned to the form of my birth.*

*In return for my release the Goddess asks that I be initiated into the priesthood, honouring Isis, but first things first.*

*For some reason I believe you are part of my redemption. I sense that I should help you survive and help fight your case.*

*When I have assisted you, I will return to my ancestral home and give praise to Isis, who will then be my only inspiration.*

Psyche thanks him, lies beside the ass and whispers that he is surely the truest balm for an aching spirit that has ever lived.

## The prince of mortals

Psyche, calm after a relaxing night beside the ass, sits upon his strong back on the road to Amalysis. Once in the city she hears Mercury's proclamation and knows that she must quickly leave.

She has no doubt that Venus' promise to give seven kisses to the man who can confirm her whereabouts will quickly produce an abundance of men interested in accomplishing her capture.

Psyche, not wishing to be caught, thinks it would be better if she went to Venus willingly and save the Goddess the offensive task of kissing some base and thoroughly unattractive fellow.

Knowing she must present herself to Venus without delay, she explains her plight to the ass. He sadly agrees and advises that it would be best if she avoided all places of human habitation.

*Now you must follow my advice; keep to the hills, avoid slipping into melancholy and take on the challenges before you. You will find help from remarkable quarters before long.*

*Being an ass has taught me that every living thing whispers if you can tune your ears to it. Remember this above all else. I am sorry that I cannot help you further. I love you; be brave.*

*Oh, dear ass, if you are half as handsome as you are kind, you are the prince of mortals. If ever I get this thing settled and have cause for celebration, you shall be the first I invite.*

The ass gets on with the task of returning to human form by nourishing himself on the roses and Psyche lifts her hood to hide her face and steps quietly and quickly out of Amalysis.

## SURPRISING DIVINITES

### Psyche's punishment begins

Psyche, sad at having to leave the delightful ass, climbs up into the hills where she discovers a Temple dedicated to Venus.

The door lies off its hinges, leaves are blowing into the deserted sanctuary and disregard and neglect are everywhere to be seen.

Psyche has no time to utter her first prayer, for a servant of Venus, a swarthy maid called Custom, shrieks in a gruff voice.

*Wicked harlot; now you will know you have a mistress who is above you. I am ordered by Venus to haul you to her palace.*

*Why the surprise, you make yourself ignorant, as though you didn't know the great many efforts we undertook to find you?*

*I'm glad you have come to me, for I shall delight in taking you to the gulf of Hell. I'll witness your pain with great pleasure.*

*Your punishment for this conduct will be a lesson to the world. No one will ever think to set themselves above Venus again.*

Custom pulls Psyche from the temple by her hair, throws her in a chariot and with speed brings her to the Goddess of Beauty.

Venus eyes her, smiles, nods her head and bites roughly at her lip, as all wicked persons are accustomed to do before igniting.

Psyche is about to speak, but Venus raises her hand in censure, mocking her as the absurd substitute for the Goddess of Love.

## **Cruelly tormented**

*You imagined that your visit to this place would be to see your husband, not to receive the abysmal punishment I've planned.*

*You deserve reprisal because your husband is at death's door and no-one has any doubts that you are the very cause of it.*

*Now you have this piece of notoriety added to your exploits. I will not try to list the numerous reasons I have to punish you.*

*You can rest assured, I have no intention of treating you like a daughter. To me, you are a witch. Where are my maidens?*

Sorrow and Sadness come and Venus delivers Psyche to them, instructing the maidens to injure and torment her cruelly.

Delighting in her words, Venus lets forth a hideous screech that could easily be the laugh of a woman possessed by demons.

*When you have fulfilled my decree, after you have piteously scourged her with rods and whips, then drag her back here.*

*We'll see what skills she has left for talk then, but I suspect the tongue she used for sweet talking the world is exhausted.*

*Goddess, anger is your first response, but what reasons have you to receive such obvious enjoyment from inflicting pain?*

*I was innocent and easily duped, I was the victim of everyone else within my orbit. To beat me for this is entirely unjust.*

*The beating I get will cause pain to your grandchild, whether you accept it or not. Please think of your grandchild's pain.*

*Ha, she thinks that her great belly, which she has by playing the whore, will move me to pity and make me a grandmother.*

*Do you imagine I'm happy - in the time of my age - to be called a grandmother to the child of an abject mortal, a vile harlot?*

*Do you imagine, after all you've done, that you'll be accredited with the title, step-daughter of Venus, the Goddess of Love?*

*I don't imagine. I gave myself into your hands because I didn't want to give you the irksome task of kissing a mere mortal.*

*Oh, how kind. You weren't caught by my servant then? How is it that women like you need to be rewarded for every action?*

*I am only responsible for myself and this child I bear. I cannot imagine why you refuse it the rightful name of grandchild.*

*Marriage when couples are not equal, without any witnesses, without the willing consent of parents, is simply illegitimate.*

*This child of yours, if we are generous enough to tolerate you living long enough to deliver it, will be born a bastard.*

Venus leaps upon the face of Psyche, tears at her apparel, pulls her along by the hair and dashes her head upon the ground.

*Sorrow, Sadness, I think I will have the pleasure of dealing with this harlot myself. I'll enjoy the satisfaction it will bring.*

## Quick sons of the ground

The maidens transport Psyche to a storeroom where a great quantity of wheat, barley, poppy seed, peas and lintels lie in complete disarray. Venus mixes them all up together in a heap.

*Now, you evil girl, you seem unable to get the grace of a lover by any other means than by your diligent and painful service, therefore, I will determine the full extent of this fine skill.*

*Divide this pile of grains one from another and arrange them into separate piles. And, so you don't think the trial is all too easy, ensure that you have the job complete before nightfall.*

Venus screeches an appalling laugh for all to hear and, leaving Psyche to her appointed task, she locks the door and goes to a place where a great banquet has been prepared in her honour.

Psyche can't begin the chore of separating the grains, it being a thing that's impossible to achieve. Astounded by the cruel behaviour and mean demands of Venus, she weeps in misery.

A little ant, taking pity on Psyche's immense difficulty and labour, runs hither and thither. Cursing the injustice of the Goddess of Love, she vows revenge on her insulting behaviour.

*Come my dear friends, my quick sons of the ground, mothers of all things, take mercy on this poor maid. Cupid is in danger and he has high regard for her. Gather now to assist her.*

Soon one ant after another arrives and with all diligence they begin dissevering and dividing the grain. After they've put each kind in order they run away in haste, fearing to be caught.

Having drunk far too much, Venus returns from the banquet smelling of balms and wearing a garland of roses. When she spies what Psyche has achieved she spits out her sadistic anger.

*This has not been achieved by your labour, but by my impish boy who you've tricked and caused to become amorous of you. Attend on me Sorrow and thrash this awful girl severely.*

*Afterwards give her a morsel of brown bread and see that my son, Cupid is closed fast in the surest chamber of the house. I don't want him engaging in any further dalliance with her.*

## A gentle and benign reed

Neither Cupid nor Psyche is aware they are so closely separated in the palace. When Venus visits Psyche the following morning, she gives her another impossible trial to accomplish by herself.

*Do you see the forest, extending the length of the river? Golden sheep graze there, roaming freely. I command you to cut the wool from their golden fleeces and bring it all here to me.*

Psyche sets out, determined to throw herself into the river. As she approaches the bank a green reed, inspired by his love for all things, speaks to her with gracious tune and sweet melody.

*Oh dear, kind Psyche, I beg you, please don't trouble or pollute my water by your death. Take care not to go anywhere near the terrible golden sheep until the heat of the sun is cooler.*

*When the sun is at the zenith, the sheep are most dreadful and furious. They have sharp horns, stony foreheads and have great gaping throats. They are armed only for destruction.*

*Until they have refreshed themselves in this river, you must hide here by me, under this great plain tree. As soon as their time of great fury is past, you may wander into their field.*

*Only go among the thickets and bushes under the wood side, here and there you can gather pieces of their golden fleece, which you shall find hanging in locks upon the tangled briars.*

Once the great fury of the sheep has abated, Psyche gathers up the locks, puts them in her apron and takes them to Venus, grateful that the gentle and benign reed has save her life.

## The royal bird of great Jupiter

The success of this labour does not please the Goddess, who claims that she has still not gained proper evidence of Psyche's skills. She growls viscerously, another sour imitation of laughter.

*It is certain this is not your doing. I will prove that you are not so stout, as good at courage or as singularly practical as you appear to be. In this test, failure will mean the death of you.*

*From the top of that great hill water runs out with a black and deadly colour. These waters nourish the floods of the Styx. I charge you to go there and bring me a vessel of that water.*

Menacing her severely, Venus gives Psyche a bottle of crystal. The princess does not take the journey to the mountain to fetch water; she takes it in the hope that she will end her short life.

A week later, Psyche arrives at the ridge of the mountain and sees a great rock gushing out thunderous fountains of black water. She knows it is useless for her to attempt the trial.

The shrieking blackness is born downward over rocks and ravines to the dark valley far below. On each side, great green dragons stretch out long, bloody necks, searching for intruders.

They never stop to rest, terrifying, corrupt, watchful, always an eye on the river should any try to approach. The waters cry out in fearsome tones. *Away, away, fly or be slain. Away, away.*

Psyche stands utterly rigid, as if she has been transformed into stone. Present in body, she is absent in spirit and sense. The peril here is so great, even the ability to weep is beyond her.

The royal bird of great Jupiter, the eagle, sees this and wants to help her. He generously recalls how Cupid's dart assisted him to bring the boy Ganymede up to the heavens to serve as butler.

Certain that Jupiter would want to return the favour he swoops down, intent upon doing service to Cupid's dear wife. Landing on a rock, he addresses the frightened and bewildered princess.

*Oh, simple woman, without all experience, do you think you can manage to dip up any drop of this dreadful water? No, no, assure yourself that you will never be able to get close to it.*

*You are innocence itself. Have you not heard? It is a custom among men to swear by the grace of the Gods and the custom of the Gods to swear by the high majesty of the River Styx?*

*The Gods themselves fear the very sight of this place. It's better if I assist you.* Psyche hands him the bottle without a thought and the valiant bird plunges into the loathsome valley.

The majestic bird hovers high above the vile river, then dives abruptly down to the water and fills the flask. Taking his escape midway between the many dragons, he offers Psyche the flask.

Amazed at the support that comes from such unlikely quarters, she places a grateful hand on the eagle's wing and returns to Venus with a bottle that is full and a heart that is empty.

## A visit to Proserpina

The Goddess is not appeased. She terrorizes Psyche with cruel threats calling her the very description of witch and sorceress. *Before long I will set you the one and only impossible task.*

*That which you have accomplished is not what we expect mortals to achieve, so beware; the next commission I set you will undeniably put an end to your long run of incredible luck.*

Venus leaves Psyche alone for days, hoping to sap her spirit. When she returns, she holds a small box in her hands. She informs Psyche that she must take this precious casket to Hell.

The look of horror and confusion on Psyche's face clearly indicates her misery. In her view, she is already in Hell; the kind of Hell that comes from a dark and forlorn state of mind.

*Your assignment is to take this to Proserpina. You are to ask her to place a little of her own beauty in it, just enough to keep me going for a day. You know where she lives I presume?*

*She doesn't give up her beauty lightly, so you must tell her that I have consumed a great quantity of my own beauty because my dear son, Cupid has been horrendously wounded.*

*Whether she will or not depends entirely upon her mood, not upon the cause, but try to return without the box being filled and I will make you wish you had remained with Proserpina.*

*The Theatre of the Gods begins next week, so isn't a journey of coquetry and gazing about. If I do not have my beauty by then my vengeful wrath will know no bounds. Now get yourself off!*

## A harp of sorts

As she stumbles on, Psyche perceives the end of all fortune. How can she find the skills to enter such an awesome domain when none but a few great heroes have accomplished it?

Recounting all the dreadful ventures, her heart chills. A passing shepherd calls out. *Seeing you there, any might think you were compelled to go to the very gulf and furies of Hell itself.*

She sadly responds that this is just the start of her undertaking. The fellow laughs, wishing her luck and recommends the nearby mountain as the surest way of reaching the awful realm.

Psyche, certain she will never return from this trial, finds the effort of the climb a wretched misery. Only the notion that from the top she could surely throw herself down spurs her on.

As she contemplates this terrible act she hears a voice on the wind. *What brings one such as you to this sad and lonely place?* Psyche exhausted and bewildered, falters at the voice.

To her right lies an old tower covered in ivy. Beautiful and sombre, it seems almost to be a living thing. She moves slowly towards it, wondering if someone or something is within.

The old ruin is empty, save a beautiful gossamer butterfly fluttering about its outer walls. She looks through a broken window and hears a faint insistent whistling from within.

The more intently Psyche listens, the more her hearing is acute. She imagines that the wind blowing through the tower's fabric, that it is turning the silent ruin into a supernatural voice box.

For Psyche, delicately holding on to whatever loose threads are still connected, this ancient ruin is a living, active, breathing construction and it is offering that wisdom known to the wind.

*What's your direction? A voice speaks. I seek Hell, says Psyche, tell me, who or what are you? I'm no tower, as you imagine, made with stone and mortar, I am truthfully a harp of sorts.*

*My days are spent with poetry and music. If you would like to hear my inspiration, I may find words to connect you to the insights of nature and give you advice to lift your drab spirits*

*Lift my spirits? I doubt I would recognise my spirit, lifted or otherwise. I am threatened by Venus herself. The Goddess regards me as an enemy and it is her demand that I go to Hell.*

*Oh, poor miser, is this why you wish to slay yourself? Why yield to this final peril? Once your spirit is separated from your body, you shall surely go to Hell and never return again.*

*You are soul and mind and breath and life, these are all the forces within you. There are many things you can do to challenge the ire of Venus if you know how to activate them.*

*You must have angered her greatly. Was it your beauty? I wish I had eyes to enjoy it. So now you must travel to Hades to stay alive and somehow, you must discover how to get there.*

*Venus has given me this box; demanding that I ask Proserpina to fill it with beauty. Once achieved I must return to Venus and I must complete the assignment before the new moon.*

*Time is a complex issue, but in Hell it doesn't exist. You need not be in a hurry there. Now listen. There is a city by the name Lacedaemon, not far from here, first you must go to this place.*

*Enquire for the hill Tenarus. There you will find a hole leading to Hell, even to the Palace of Pluto. But take heed, you cannot think of going to that land of darkness if you're empty handed.*

*You must take with you two sops sodden in the flour of barley and honey and two old pennies, which you must carry in your mouth; that's a penny for going in and one for coming out.*

Psyche stares hard in the direction of the voice and from her silence the tower realises that she knows nothing of the venture she is being forced to embark upon. He lets out a low sigh.

## THE IMPOSSIBLE CHALLENGE

### What the wind knows

*My poor, innocent woman, there is much I must tell you. I will act as your guide. When you have reached the base of Tenarus Hill, you must go in the direction that looks to be the darkest.*

*It is neither up nor down, neither rocky nor smooth. Moss covers everything and there is an insidious dampness. Only by the dark alone will you know the direction. Remember this.*

*Don't imagine that your heart will fail before you get there. It is difficult, but you have no reason to fear. Even the robbers among its many inhabitants take no benefit from robbing.*

*You must stay alert and you must look out for tricks. Attend closely. When you've passed a good part of that way, you'll see a lame mule carrying wood and a lame fellow driving him.*

*The fellow will ask you to pick up the sticks that have fallen from the mule, but pass on and do nothing. Don't ask me why. You can forget why. Only your wits will get you through this.*

*Your intention is all that matters. Eventually you will come to the River Styx, where Charon is the ferryman. You must pay him; he refuses to freely carry souls over the river in his boat.*

*You might take note that avarice reigns, even among the dead. Neither Charon nor Pluto do any work for nothing. If a poor man wishes to pass over and has no money, he must swim.*

*The water is freezing, none succeed unless they take the boat, but no mercy is shown to those who are penniless. You must pay; you can only pay if Charon receive it from your mouth.*

*An old woman will give you the two pennies. She is given to sitting beside rivers in the guise and pose of a beggar. She's your guardian and has most certainly been kind to you before.*

*There is also another old woman, one who walks about these lands carrying withies; she is also a guardian and she'll give you the two sops sodden in the flour of barley and honey.*

*Sitting in Charon's boat you will be aware of an old man struggling to swim in the icy river. He will relentlessly wave his deadly hands, pleading with you to take him into the boat.*

*You must pay no regard to his piteous shrieks. No matter how much he cries out, you must ignore him. This, it seems, is not a skill you learned in life, but now's the precious time to learn it.*

*When you've passed over the Styx you will see many women spinning. They'll ask for your help, but do not consent. They are counterfeit. These waifs have been placed there by Venus.*

*Their baits and traps are designed to make you drop one of your sops. Keeping your sops safe is not a simple matter; if you lose one you will never return to the human world again.*

*Now you must rest. No danger can come to you while you're sleeping. No dreams will come to infuriate your spirit and no intrusive apparitions will aggravate you and cause you fear.*

*Remember, nothing will demand you exert physical energy on this sinister mission. When you are awake, be alert and most importantly, you must never let fear get the better of you.*

## The breath of the wind

*I am the breath of the wind and if you can hear my words of instruction then know that the breeze imparts wisdom. Listen, remember, relate; do this and you'll travel many worlds.*

*As you are about to enter the gates of Hell, a hideous dog with three heads will hurtle out of nowhere, gnashing his teeth, trying to frighten the life out of you. This monster is Cerberus.*

*The task of capturing Cerberus alive, without using weapons, was the final labour assigned to Heracles by King Eurystheus. It was by far the most dangerous and difficult of his missions.*

*The mission was given to him when Eurystheus discounted the two previous errands Heracles had completed, believing he'd received help. Venus believes this of you. Prove her wrong.*

*Cerberus barks continuously at the many souls trying to enter Hell. He is an awful sight and his bark is horrifying, but it can't harm you. Fear is the only thing that will damage you.*

*Cerberus lies, day and night, before the gate of Proserpina, protecting the realm of Pluto with great diligence. If you give him one of your sops, you can have access to the underworld.*

*Once past him, you will come to the Palace of Proserpina. She will welcome you in and she will attempt to entertain you by offering a fine array of her best delicacies, meats and wines.*

*You must remain outside, sit on the ground, refuse her victuals and tasty cuisine and ask only for brown bread; only in this way will you be able to make your request known to her.*

*It doesn't matter how you speak to her, there is no code of address, no formal etiquette. Be rude and brusque, for polite visitors are easily fooled. Be true to yourself and have no fear.*

*When you have received her beauty into your box, don't delay one second. Don't even stop long enough to thank her. Imagine that the box is yours and she has stolen it. Nothing else works.*

*On your return, you must satisfy the rage of the ever-watchful Cerberus by throwing him the sop. Keep in your mouth the penny that the covetous Charon will quickly snatch from you.*

*Make certain that you come back into the world the same way that you left. All powers must obey this law, including the evil ones and it has been like this since the beginning of all time.*

*Above all things you must not look in the box. Move heaven and earth to eliminate your curiosity about the treasure that lies within it. The divine beauty it contains is not for you.*

*You may think that you will not be so moved, as having too much beauty has already been the cause of your many trials, but do not doubt that temptation is never very far away.*

*Don't imagine you'll not do it because you've made up your mind against it. One can act instinctively for good or bad. How to invite generous intuition is your great assignment.*

This wisdom was the last word from the tower. Coming down the mountain, Psyche gives thanks to the breath of the wind blowing through the tower, for its tuition and insight.

## The tricky light ahead

Trusting now to fate, for what else can she do, Psyche moves across the landscape in the direction of Lacedaemon. Seeing her pregnant belly, many along the way stop to help her.

Psyche retains a pleasing demeanour and keeps secret the trial she is about to face. With all her heart, she wants to condemn the unjust mission and she would do anything to avoid it.

What prays most on her mind is the revelation that Venus might employ all kind of trickery to distract her, engaging the aid of a number of devilish creatures to bring about her failure.

If viscous phantoms from Hell monopolise her deliberations, she fights the despondency with optimistic thoughts about the pleasure Venus will receive from Proserpina's box of beauty.

Uncertain of Lacedaemon's direction, Psyche asks the way from those who appear friendly. They all direct her to go straight on, saying it's not far to go, but she never reaches the fabled city.

Before each hill, she wills it to appear. Gazing through the shimmering waves of heat rising from the rocky plain, she can think she sees it in the tricky light, but each time she's misled.

Psyche strains her eyes in a desperate effort to separate illusion from reality. First the city is there and then the view is devoid of anything but rock. The mirages are unfathomable to her.

Whenever she sees the image more clearly, she fears the hand of a powerful sorceress plotting her demise. She knows very well that Venus can easily work false imagery for her eye.

She boosts her resolve, but the shape-changing landscape fills her with fear as do the many shadows that cross her path. The dear old woman carrying withies is a welcoming presence.

*Fear not. These visions are not designed to act as siren to your innocent sailor. If you are looking for Lacedaemon you have passed it and Tenarus Hill is up there, just ahead of you.*

*Take this bag. In it are the sops sodden in the flour of barley and honey with which you must feed Cerberus. Look out for the brook and the beggar woman who will give you the coins.*

*You will reach the brook soon, but don't veer from the bank looking for the woman. It will take you off course. Expectation can lead you astray. Don't be fooled; keep straight on track.*

*Believe that the Fates have you in view and that the hill of Tenarus is before you. Don't be afraid. If you see a spring beneath you or a hole in the ground, know Hell is near.*

Suddenly Psyche is frozen to the spot, amazed that water could appear so abruptly at her feet. With great speed it rushes, escaping down the valley, desperately trying to pull her with it.

She stands fast, gazing longingly, wishing it would transport her from this baleful place. Unexpectedly she sees the second old woman sitting beside her, her hand extended, begging.

*I met a man today who told me he was once an ass but now he's a poet. He spoke of you as the most beautiful of women. Perhaps he is still an ass. I took him for an intelligent fellow.*

*Take these coins. Once you are beside the Styx put the first in your mouth. Having Charon's hand close to your face is not a thing you will enjoy, but this is the only way he will take it.*

With that, the old woman and the spring disappear. All that is left is a dark gaping hole. Intuitively, Psyche steps into it. As she steps into the dark, the breeze and the sun are no more.

## The Styx and Cerberus

Having passed over into an unexpectedly cold and damp Hell, Psyche walks on in the dark. Every moment she expects and dreads the appearance of the lame man and his useless mule.

*A favour from you, dear woman, I am not wealthy enough to lose a single stick and yet this mule of mine continually drops them. Please pick them up for me and return them to his back?*

Psyche ignores the request and runs from him. It's not difficult to stay in the darkness for the land is flatter here. She keeps to the appointed route and hears the Styx before she sees it.

No gentle flowing river this. The very sight of it makes her shiver. She keeps walking, but the ground is now a mass of jagged black rocks. Nothing else lines the bank of the vile Styx.

Expecting every moment to see a place where the ferry might be boarded, Psyche places a coin between her lips in readiness, yet she is anything but ready. No one travels here willingly.

She stays alert, but each step is taken with reluctance. She tries not to fear the aggressive currents, nor allow the foul smell of decay that rises from the river to pollute her poor nostrils.

Suddenly she is pushed from behind, she falls forward into the darkness and lands sprawled on an upturned boat. Terrified, she steadies herself and looks about, but she sees no-one.

The boat swings violently, throwing her to one side. As it slowly turns, the loathsome face of Charon rises up. The fetid smell of his breath and his rank sneezes are just beyond abomination.

He grabs the coin from Psyche's mouth and shoves the boat onto the water. Impatiently he waits for her to board, but the thought of being near his putrid body fills her with desolation.

Psyche cannot step into the boat; she stares fearfully at the opposite bank. Haunted by the hostile, forbidding presence of Despair, she senses he is close. Then she feels his icy touch.

Psyche freezes and remains fixed until an old man in the river gestures a frenzied arm at her. He pleads with her to pull him out and Psyche, desperate, flings herself into Charon's boat.

Only such a fiend and the abysmal threat of Despair could have persuaded her to dive into the craft, but on landing she cracks her head and she now has a torturing pain to contend with.

With anguished eyes Psyche turns to look back to the place where Despair had stood, but he has gone. As the boat hits the far bank, Psyche scrambles frantically for the blackened shore.

She lies on the bank of the Styx coughing, her eyes full of water and her head fit to burst. The river and Charon have horribly contaminated her, but she struggles to her feet and walks on.

Now the spinning women plead for help with the most pitiful cries. Psyche ignores them, but they become vindictive. They are spinning pain itself, feeling each fibre they must produce.

No matter how hideously they plead she does not help them escape the machines that have captured them, she runs off, covering her ears, knowing she can't save them from their fate.

Now the giant gates are before her. They lie half open, inviting and filling with trepidation any who expect to pass within. Cerberus, the size of a horse, flies out from behind them.

Psyche is mesmerised by the heads flaying in all directions, each a cavernous trap, a fang and saliva-filled nightmare that could end her life in seconds. She is agonised by the panic.

The barking from all three mouths deafens, cracking apart the decaying, ugly quiet that pervades the place. His speed shocks and he is at her face before her hand can even find the sop.

How she takes it from her pocket and throws it into the dog's jaws she'll never know and how it disappears so unexpectedly into one of the animal's despicable mouths is unfathomable.

## A box of beauty

Once fed, Cerberus ambles away contentedly, his hysterical job done, but Psyche shakes with fear for a considerable time. She does not see Pluto and Proserpina's edifice standing nearby.

Two minutes beyond the gates is a shadowy palatial mansion, hardly visible in the murkiness. Psyche glimpses Proserpina standing on the steps, beckoning her forward into the palace.

She walks closer to ensure her voice is heard and asks the Goddess if she may sit in her grounds. Spiritedly, Proserpina runs at her, pleading with her visitor to enter her chamber.

The princess sits on the ground, attempting a casual pose while servants of the dark Goddess deliver delicious hampers of food so lavishly prepared they'd grace a guest at any royal table.

Psyche asks for coarse bread, but the Goddess ignores her, complimenting her on her fine complexion. Psyche allows her to chatter on until she recalls the advice the tower gave her.

*Act naturally and come straight to the point. Psyche addresses Proserpina. I have been sent by Venus who asks if you would fill this box with your beauty as she has immense needs of it.*

No sooner is the sentence out than Proserpina takes the box, breathes into it and returns it. She starts chattering about a banquet and the grand festival she is hosting this evening.

Psyche wants to ask if her request has been granted, but she cannot delay. She leaps to her feet and runs towards the gates. She has not a second to contemplate her state of readiness.

Without anticipating the loathsome keepers, she throws her second sop at the hideous dog and places the last coin in her mouth, oblivious to the pathetic pleas of the weaving women.

Psyche snarls at the man who begs to be taken on board just as Charon snarled when ripping the coin from her lips. Once across the Styx she hurries homeward, her task now complete.

## SYMPATHIC CONNECTION

### Past transient stars

Psyche, ecstatic, imagines she is travelling in space, past transient stars towards a place where she feels at one with the Universe. Life on Earth is unexpectedly changing rapidly.

New winds sigh from the mountains, clearing mists that have mustered in the valleys, gently refreshing waters that have long stagnated in hidden brooks. Many secret wells flow again.

Rain washes the land and soaks the vegetation, filling the air with fresh green scents. The sea becomes as calm and clear as a mirror and the birds, perched in their trees, pipe merry songs.

Another fragrance, richer than the first, issues from the garland of roses that crowns Psyche's head. It fills every garden with bright sunlight and bathes them in the rich hues of vermillion.

The breath of Pan resonates across the bright blue oceans, filling the air with a sweet music that multiplies with endless variations from mountainous terrains to boundless deserts.

Psyche grows miraculously tall and sings; her magical voice reverberating across continents, resounding through a million hearts. All who hear the echoing sounds talk of a new dawn.

Love springs into the air; the world is excited at the prospect of starting anew. Timid smiles rise up on the faces of children like a blessing, an offering or a promise of their gentle devotion.

Golden sunsets flame in the western skies and adventurers return to their ancient homelands. Poetry, like a kiss, is on every lip; the joy of passion informing every action, every song.

## Back in the breeze

Psyche, her valiant and exhausting mission almost complete, staggers back the way she came. She is in no hurry and there is no lame man with a totally useless mule to demand assistance.

She follows her intuition, anticipates nothing and avoids fear. She has no idea how she can return to the land of the living, but she had no idea how to get to the land of the dead either.

She trusts that the same kind of magic that transported her from the mortal world will also transport her back again. She remembers it as a sudden transformation, so she remains alert.

There are no signs displaying the way and no visible geography or devices to gauge it by. She makes for the high ground and takes in the vast panorama that is spread out before her.

On top of one of the hills she spies a tower in a ruinous state. Certain it is the tower that is companion to the wind, her heartiness increases and her spirit sings out with gladness.

She runs toward it, feeling the faint breath of the breeze getting stronger as she approaches. She touches its walls lovingly and waits for the words of the tower to assist and revitalise her.

On a window sill, a butterfly rests; its wings folded. A tiny crack between door and jamb reveals a bright shaft of light. Psyche gently steps up to the threshold and looks at the world inside.

A draught of air whistles through the opening. She pushes the door open and steps inside. When she closes the door, she is again in the mortal world, breathing in the sky and sunlight.

## A beautiful wife

Psyche's exhaustion turns to tiredness and she sleeps sweetly, hardly moving a muscle. When she wakes, she gazes towards the sunrise and reflects upon her fearlessness and her success.

She hopes her trial is complete. She thinks of Cupid for the first time in weeks and wonders if Venus will find it within her to embrace her son's bride. Now she can think about pleasure.

She gazes proudly at the box of beauty she has retrieved, knowing that the beauty demanded by Venus is within. Idly, she runs her finger nail between the lower box and the lid.

Creating the slightest of cracks, she falls into an infernal and deadly sleep. A blast of air gusts swiftly from the tower, but it is too late, the disastrous contents of the box have invaded her.

With her entire body frozen, she lies on the ground, a sleeping corpse. Psyche has no idea what caused her to jeopardise her happiness, but now her reward is clear, it can only be oblivion.

Why did her finger nail lift the lid? Was it to glimpse its contents, to steal a little beauty for herself, a reward for her efforts, something to attract Cupid with? We will never know.

The tower, recognising that only Cupid can save her, dispatches the iridescent butterfly from its own window sill to the palace sill where Cupid stands contemplating the brooding sky.

Cupid, healed of his wound and malady, is ready for action. He instantly recognises the butterfly and realises that it would not be here with him now if Psyche were not in mortal danger.

Love spurs him on. He descends from the window, down the vines and off in search of his arrows and wings. He finds them in the storeroom, the very place where Psyche was held captive.

Once regaled in his finery, recharged by the power of his wings and armed with his sacred weapons, Cupid flees to find Psyche, caring nothing for the injunctions of his vengeful mother.

He smothers his precious muse with kisses and tenderly erases the spell from her body. Deftly he returns the beauty to the casket and gently awakens Psyche with the tip of a new arrow.

*Oh, most beautiful, cherished wife, you will never know how close you came to oblivion. Oh, most beautiful husband, you will never know how close you still are to remaining a boy.*

*You're not a man just because I am with child. Venus will not recognise our offspring until you convince your immortal relations to recognise your manhood and accept our love.*

*If they flatly refuse to give us their consent, if the marriage of Heaven and Earth is beyond them, then it is beyond you and me to facilitate it. I have tried everything my realm allows.*

*There are things I have learned that you have yet to harness. When voices on the breeze speak, I listen, when I must have ambition I advance by using my will. You must learn this.*

*You follow your heart, but now you must speak your mind, have the will to become a man, find the honesty to declare me as your wife and declare that our love must be honoured.*

*I am in no doubt what I must do. I am more in love with you, my dear wife, than I am fearsome of the displeasure of my Mother. Be without fear, I will rally the Gods to our cause.*

Cupid lifts his treasured wife up to the skies and transports her to the chambers of Venus. The Goddess is too shocked to move or speak. Stuttering speech was never her hurdle before now.

*You come here, a proud triumphant woman, curtsying to me, the Goddess of Beauty, to present the box I gave you? You can hand it to me. I doubt there's beauty in it; it must be a trick.*

As the box opens, a translucent cloud issues forth, instantly causing a diaphanous shimmer of radiant splendour to rise up in Venus like a blush triggered by an inflated compliment.

It lasts no longer than a flattering remark and Venus rapidly turns upon Psyche, screaming and asserting that if Cupid has had a hand in her success her trial must be counted a failure.

Psyche is silent. *No doubt, little wretch, you were hoping the refreshing fragrance out of the box would soothe my tortured state, but I'll disabuse you of this wild and fantastical notion.*

Cupid has heard quite enough. Again, he lifts Psyche, this time to take her to the palace he built for her. This cleverly secured haven is will never be susceptible to his mother's prying eyes.

Psyche is delighted to be back in the palace. She's tranquil now for the first time in ages. Physically restored and confident of her faith of Cupid, she settles in the home to attend to her babe.

## The end of spite and envy

Like the wind, Cupid pierces into the heavens and bursts in upon Jupiter to declare his cause. Jupiter, taken by surprise, first embraces his son and then listens closely to his entreaties.

*Dear Father, you know about the recent events concerning me and no doubt you are privy to the reasons that give rise to the extraordinary state of agitation and discord amongst us all.*

*If I cannot persuade you to accept my love of Psyche, if our marriage is unacceptable to you and you have no resolve to support us, then we simply cannot make our union work.*

*We don't know why we've been thrown into an orbit of true love, but we accept our fate in the best of faith and we will do everything we can to make our marriage a victorious alliance.*

*My well-beloved son, you have not given me the reverence and honour that is due to me. Your haste with these eager words has spoiled my concentration and wounded my old breast.*

*Your attitude unbalances the manner in which the law and the order of the Elements and Planets are disposed. You have offended me with your continual assaults against protocol.*

*You oppose the laws of heaven and the utility of the public weal. You have transformed my divine beauty into an endless circus of vile serpents, savage beasts and birds of prey.*

*Be that as it may, I still remember my modesty and this I must do, for it was I who nourished you. I am prepared to support all that you desire, for I truly perceive your case is just.*

*We must in future times, rid ourselves of all spiteful and envious persons, be they Gods or mortals, and we must now recognise when beauty is beneficial and when it is not.*

*When beauty wields too great a power to do anything other than harm, we must formally put an end to it. I will bestow benefits to all those who pledge allegiance to this cause.*

*If you declare honestly that you will honour Psyche and support her children through all possible trials, I will show this woman, your wife, the same love she shows towards me.*

Cupid embraces his father Jupiter, with a loving attitude that has never been seen before in the heavenly realm. The celebrated God commands Mercury to call all to his counsel.

*Give all the Gods notice that if any celestial power fails to appear tomorrow, they will be fined such an amount of currency that the charge will make them eternally poor.*

*That should provoke sufficient panic among the Gods and Goddesses to ensure that the High Theatre is full by the time I speak my mind on the most sacred subject of marriage.*

## Generous conjunctions

*Dear Gods, registered in the book of Muses, honoured since time began, here is Cupid who I nurtured by my own hands.*

*The raging flames he showed in youth were of such heat that I could only think it prudent to bridle and restrain his actions.*

*Despite this, he's still defamed in every place for his adulterous living, but now a woman has come to change his errant ways.*

*We must agree on a radical exception to laws we have so far kept, by accepting that Cupid is in love with a mortal woman.*

*I rule that he be allowed to marry her and that all existing accusations against him and her are hereby null and void.*

*He has chosen a woman who loves him, so it's my intention to allow them to live together gladly according to their pleasure.*

*Venus, please do not to take this decision as a slight against your name. You must not fear that this will dishonour you.*

*Your progeny and estate will receive great honour, so do not imagine this mortal marriage will leave you in poor regard.*

*The marriage is just, lawful and legitimate by civil law and it will be blessed by me, so all will accept it without exception.*

*Go now Mercury, fly to earth and bring Psyche to the Palace of Heaven so I might introduce her to the waiting assembly.*

*Don't be astounded, fellow Gods, you couldn't have imagined that a mere mortal would be raised up to be with the Gods.*

*I will tell you what I know of Psyche's extraordinary qualities even though they may be too numerous for you to take in.*

*The extent to which her union with nature has developed is so profound that my words might strike you as an exaggeration.*

*One of Psyche's talents is to engage her duty to others without giving up her compassionate sense of connection with them.*

*Having reconciled intuition and will, Psyche has bred such a skill in listening she can engage in dialogue with a lazy breeze.*

*No easy task to forge these qualities into a single personality without anyone's support or indeed with endless interference.*

*Cupid is inspired by her example. He has tempered his desires, exposed them to proper ambition and is mindful of his actions.*

*Psyche possesses extraordinary beauty, but this isn't the cause of her esteem, she's admired for living without spite and envy.*

*She'll be called, Goddess of Bountiful Harmony and admired for the union of complex dualities while valuing difference.*

*Her marriage to Cupid manifests her skill to inspire unlikely conjunctions and this, dear Gods, is to be our new beginning.*

## A quality to melt hearts

Mercury returns with Psyche. They all rise to welcome her, finding her more splendid than any imagination could conjure.

Mercury carries her baby daughter and Cupid rushes to take the babe in his arms. He kisses the infant and kisses his bride.

He's exalted by the chance to ratify her right to be here, to have a host's right to bid this fair wild-flower welcome to his land.

Psyche stands on the dais before Jupiter, Cupid's father. The God holds up the cup containing the prize of immortality.

*Before all you Gods gathered here, I ceremoniously lift this cup with my hands and offer it to Psyche to drink and join us.*

*Drink from this chalice Psyche, so you will become immortal and live here in holy union with Cupid in eternal matrimony.*

No God has seen this ritual before. The outcomes are unknown and the eager anticipation is monumental, even for Jupiter.

Psyche wipes a tear, takes the cup, drinks and returns it. With a smile of thanks, she displays her fine quality to soften hearts.

Cupid, the proud father, hands the babe to Psyche, who lifts her infant high and presents it to the Assembly with this prayer.

*Acts of reunion and connection need devotion. The reward for fidelity is pleasure. I pray, accept this child we call Pleasure.*

Psyche has a new assurance and all recognise it in her poise as she breathes into Pleasure the breath of life that is hers to give.

The ecstatic applause of the Assembly shows that the ceremony has in some way washed them all clean and rejuvenated them.

Venus is blissful. Reconciled by the wise words of Jupiter and the ritual of Pleasure's baptism, her wilful orbit is realigned.

She joins Cupid and Psyche on the dais and kisses them both. Psyche watches in disbelief as Venus takes her granddaughter.

She bemoans her fight against the babe, declaring that from now on she'll be its champion. Jupiter addresses the Assembly.

*It is our custom to hold a marriage feast and, when reunion occurs, to hold the dance festival, known to us as The Spring.*

*Tomorrow, dear Goddesses, you will perform the dance of reconciliation, but tonight, a fine banquet has been prepared.*

*I invoke our Muses, the sponsors of our poetic art, to inspire us. Come, most revered Melete, Aoide and Mnemosyne.*

*I call upon you to lead our celebrations. Juno, take my arm to the marriage feast that has been so sumptuously arranged.*

*The hall has been decked with a scene of bright flowers offering colour and fresh scents to honour the occasion.*

*Ganymede, my boy, fill the cup of your master. Bacchus, gather your aides and serve one and all with their every wish.*

*Tonight, we drink the finest Nectar, the best wine of the Gods, thanking the stars that we've been granted a new lease of life.*

*Psyche, Cupid wishes that you remain in his arms forever. I concur and lift this cup to promise you my undying love.*

*Cupid, I'll do everything to make clear the love you've shown me. I lift this cup and promise you loyally my undying love.*

Until the end of the world, no-one will forget Cupid's marriage to Psyche or Psyche's fateful elevation to the realm of Goddess.

During the supper, the Goddesses Satirus and Paniscus play on their pipes and Apollo tunes pleasantly to the golden harp.

The Muses, Euterpe and Polyhymnia sing harmonies to please all ears, while Calliope and Erato recite epic and lyric poetry.

Terpsichore dances and they all move to the same spirit that pageants enjoyed in ancient days when dance was a vital force.

## The dance of reconciliation

Venus leads The Spring, the dance of reconciliation. By custom, Gods perform with order and Goddesses with pandemonium.

Her dance honours the Muses who inspire life and skilfully promote prosperity, friendship and artistic imagination.

She then invites Psyche to dance. She starts with an expression of turmoil and credibly converts the chaos to a harmonic state.

Her movements display an extraordinary skill in improvisation and a finesse at retrieving complexity. All stop to gaze at her.

For the first time the pantheon of immortals recognises how well a dancer can express the conjunction of body and spirit.

All is read from the beauty of her gestures; dance alone takes care of meaning. No-one doubts that a new era has begun.

## How the world fills its heart

Psyche fills the hall with enchanting songs. It's a bride's voice, the kind that can hush children and wring the hearts of men.

Cupid's spirit sings to Psyche's beneficent eyes, to the spark in them, to the dance in them, to the enduring love in them.

His heart sings to the sounds coming from her breast, to the set of her head, her delicate neck and to her kind and loving soul.

Psyche catches a glimpse of Cupid. She blows a vagabond kiss from her fingertips in his direction and this radiates her love.

Cupid flies to her and holds her close. Hearing his heart beat, feeling his breath in her hair, Psyche lifts her heart to his.

Their whispers are like gold and Psyche senses that now she can live free of those delusions that subjugated her youth.

The immortals are beguiled by Psyche's voice. They heard the timeless breath of birds and flowers, of waves and fair winds.

In future they'll remember her beguiling melodies, knowing this is how the world will always rejuvenate and fill its heart.

I give you this story. There's no tale in the entire world that bears freight equal to its precious cargo. Keep it close to you.