

CUPID AND PSYCHE

VOCABULARY PREVIEW

Below is a list of words that appear in the story. Read the list and get to know the words before you start the story.

abyss—deep pit or canyon
adulation—extreme praise or respect
assaulted—attacked
bemused—confused; puzzled
broached—introduced; presented
brooding—worrying; thinking deeply
browse—feed; graze
conviction—strong belief
disfavor—disapproval
efficiency—ability to be quick and useful
embedded—firmly fixed into a surface
homage—public honor or praise
illuminated—lighted
imperious—bossy
mourning—grieving
somber—gloomy; dark
stupor—daze; trance
throng—crowd; mob
ushered—led; guided
wavered—trembled; flickered

Cupid and Psyche

The odds are against the two lovers in this story. Jealous family members and different backgrounds threaten their frail relationship. Yet in this case, the strength of a human woman proves more than a match for even the gods.

In ancient times in Greece lived one of the most beautiful of all women: Psyche.¹ This maiden was so lovely that she made even pretty women, such as her two older sisters, seem homely. She seemed like a perfect marble statue come to life.



Psyche's parents, a king and queen, were very proud of their daughter. They greedily schemed to have her marry the richest king in the land.

Every day, men would **through** the hallways of the palace just to catch a glimpse of lovely Psyche. They'd present her with flowers, jewelry, or rare perfumes. They gladly offered anything for just one smile from this beauty. For them, she was an earthly Venus.² In fact, they even dared to call her by the name of the goddess of love and beauty.

Naturally the real Venus soon discovered something was wrong. She first began to suspect trouble when she visited her altars and temples. There she found cold ashes heaped where warm fires used to crackle. Tall weeds grew in place of flowers. And the fountains were turning gray and dirty because no one scrubbed the stone surfaces.

The goddess finally found out why she was being neglected. All the mortals were paying **homage** to Psyche instead!

Immediately Venus was filled with jealousy and hatred for the mortal girl. She quickly formed a plot and sought out her son Cupid³ for help. She found the handsome boy polishing his love-poisoned arrows.

"My son, I need your help at once. My temples are in a shambles. Humans have stopped making sacrifices to me. And all because of a stupid mortal named Psyche!"

Venus stomped her lovely feet. "How dare she pretend to match my beauty? How dare she accept the gifts and honors that are rightly mine? This cannot continue! I want you to use your power and make the wretch fall in love with the ugliest creature alive. Go now. You will find her asleep in the palace below."

Cupid gave his mother a puzzled stare. "Mother, the girl can only fall in love with the one she sees when the arrow strikes her. How will you arrange for your creature to be nearby when she awakens?"

² (vē' nus)
³ (kū' pid)

Venus impatiently waved her hand. "Leave that to me. I'll be sure that the first creature she sets eyes upon will be quite special." Venus gave a sly smile.

Cupid shrugged his shoulders. "Well, it seems pretty cruel to me, Mother. But I'll do as you wish."

Cupid put the shiny arrows into his quiver⁴ and slung it over his shoulder. Then he unfolded his gorgeous wings and took flight.

Cupid easily found the palace and landed at Psyche's window. After making himself invisible, he slipped into her room.

Inside he found Psyche asleep. The moon **illuminated** her lovely face.

Cupid stopped and stared. He couldn't move. Never in all his long life had he seen a lovelier creature. For you see, like many sons, he never really thought of his mother's beauty.

Many times before, Cupid had let his arrows fly into human hearts. It was his job. But now, his arms raised, the arrow positioned, he couldn't do it. Not to this creature. He didn't want this lovely girl to fall victim to his mother's evil plan.

Cupid lowered his bow and stared some more. So intent was he that he didn't notice the arrow slipping off the bow. Before he realized it, the arrow was free. Straight into his foot it plunged!

At once Cupid felt the sweet poison spread through his veins. He felt his heart swell with passion. Then he grew numb and dizzy with great joy. So this must be what love felt like!

Psyche stirred. She was beginning to awaken. Cupid didn't dare stay a minute longer. Though it broke his newly awakened heart, he turned and flew back to Mt. Olympus.⁵

⁴A quiver is a round, narrow holder for arrows.

⁵(ō lim' pus) Mt. Olympus is where most of the major Greek gods were said to live.

For days Cupid thought and dreamed only of Psyche. All too soon those lovely dreams were interrupted by Venus. The goddess had been expecting Psyche to fall in love with the ugly wretch she had sent. Finally, weary of waiting, Venus sought out her son.

"Why didn't Psyche fall in love with my monster? Didn't you do as I ordered?"

"No," Cupid calmly answered. Venus' voice grew harsher as she tried to contain her anger. "And why not?"

"Because I have fallen in love with her. And I couldn't let such an ugly fate happen to such a lovely maiden."

Venus no longer tried to control herself. "Out of my sight! The god of love struck by one of his own arrows? Let's hope the other gods haven't heard your news. Why, you'd be the laughingstock of Mt. Olympus! And then they would laugh at me!"

In vain Cupid tried to interrupt. But Venus angrily shook her head. "No! No explanations! Just go! And don't come near me again until this silliness has left you!"

Being ordered to leave made no difference to Cupid. He could dream about his love anywhere. So he took flight without another word.

But Venus was far from satisfied. She would teach her foolish son and that rude girl. She would teach them to respect her. Let them both find out what it meant to be in **disfavor!**

So Venus set about putting her second plan into effect. And soon a strange thing began to happen in Psyche's kingdom. Every young woman but herself was getting married. Many men still filed past Psyche's palace, but none asked for her hand. Even Psyche's older sisters were married off to rich kings. But there sat Psyche, the most beautiful girl in the land, quite alone.

When Cupid saw how lonely Psyche seemed, he darted back to Mt. Olympus.

"How dare you make Psyche an outcast in her own land!" he shouted at his mother when he found her. "You've put a spell on her so that no man asks for her hand! So she sits unwanted and unloved!"

Venus smiled. "Would you rather have her being offered and *accepting* a marriage offer?"

This enraged Cupid. "Jealous, that's what you are! All humans should worship Psyche's beauty! But you can't stop me from adoring her. And until you accept that fact, you'll have seen the last of me."

Concern began to dawn on Venus' face. "Oh, yes," Cupid added gleefully. "You're beginning to see, aren't you, Mother? Think of it. No one will fall in love! And no one will sing your praises. You'll soon find out what it's like to be in Psyche's place!"

Cupid didn't let his mother reply. He leaped into the air and was gone.

Cupid made good on his promise to Venus. All creatures stopped falling in love. No marriages were celebrated and no babies were born. No flowers bloomed, no plants budded, and no animals mated. Farmers, hunters, servants—everyone—did their jobs with a heavy heart. The world had become a desert of emotion. And once again, Venus' temples and altars were neglected.

Venus saw all this and realized she was beaten. She sent a message to Cupid. In a very short time, the determined god was back.

"Very well, son. You win," Venus coldly announced. "I hate being ignored! I'll give you anything you want."

"I want Psyche," Cupid simply replied.

"As you wish. May the girl be worth your efforts," said Venus. "Now hurry back to your work and return love to the world."

Cupid smiled and repeated his mother's words. "As you wish."

Cupid once again showered the world with arrows. As when water floods a dry river during a summer rain, so life gushed back into the world.

But love did not return to all. Venus had still not lifted her spell on Psyche. So the maiden remained alone and unmarried.

Naturally this began to concern Psyche's parents. Her father finally traveled to the oracle of Apollo.⁶ He hoped he would find advice there about finding a good husband for Psyche.

But the king received some shocking news. The oracle told him, "No mortal man is going to marry your daughter. She is destined for a being greater than man. Take her to the mountaintop and bid her farewell."

The king wept all the way home. He was certain his daughter was meant as a sacrifice to some monster. Yet though he grieved, he dared not protest the oracle.

At home, the king could scarcely bear to report the oracle's words. However, Psyche did not even shed a tear when she heard the news. Instead, she stood up and bravely said, "There is nothing for me here but heartache. I may as well meet my fate elsewhere. Let us leave tonight." That night the wind picked up. It blew in great gusts, hurling bushes and tearing branches. But Psyche was determined to go, no matter what the weather.

So Psyche and her family and some people of the kingdom set off for the mountain. Many muttered and shook beneath the blasts of wind. A few even fell back and returned to their homes. But Psyche went forward without a word.

When they reached the top of the mountain, Psyche finally turned and spoke. Looking at the **somber** faces around her, she said, "For years you have delighted in my beauty. But I can say now that it has given me little pleasure. I have felt like a hollow shell—a statue of Venus, as you have dared to call me. And that has been my downfall, I fear. Go now. I want to meet my fate alone."

⁶(a pol' iō) Apollo was the god of truth, archery, medicine, and music. People came to his oracle at Delphi to hear the truth or the future revealed.

Psyche watched until the group was out of sight. Then she climbed to the uppermost peak. Wrapping her robe around her, she sat down and faced the great **abyss** below.

Despite the howling wind and sharp rocks, Psyche was calm. This was the first time in her life she felt totally free. Free from smothering crowds. Free from **adulation**. Free from her beauty. Out in the wild, it didn't matter whether one was beautiful or plain. That was nice for a change.

But soon other thoughts began to run through Psyche's mind. What exactly did the oracle mean by the words "destined for a being greater than man"? What was her husband going to be? A monster? A giant?

Or was the husband part just a trick to get her to this mountain? Maybe she was actually meant to be a sacrifice to the gods.

Psyche shivered. In part, the chill wind caused her to shake. But she also was bothered by her thoughts.

Suddenly the temperature changed. The wind shifted and turned warm and gentle.

Psyche realized that Zephyr⁷ must be near. He was the sweetest and kindest of all the winds.

Closer and closer the god came. And with each step, the wind grew stronger. Psyche's robes began stirring again.

All at once, Psyche felt herself lifted into the air. Zephyr was completely supporting her weight!

Breathless with shock, Psyche watched as she floated down the mountain. On and on the wind carried her. She flew over valleys, forests, and then more mountains.

As she drifted over the miles of landscape, Psyche began to enjoy the ride. What a beautiful view she had!

At last Zephyr set her gently down in a grassy meadow and departed. Psyche gazed around her in wonder. But at that moment, the moon darted beneath a cloud. So among some sweet-smelling flowers, Psyche settled down for the night. Before long, she had drifted into sleep.

Psyche awoke the next morning to see millions of blue

⁷(zef' ir)

and white flowers. They dotted the landscape as far as she could see.

As she turned to view more of her new world, Psyche caught her breath. Next to a rushing river stood a glorious palace.

Hope stirred again in Psyche's breast. Might her husband-to-be live there? Surely only a being greater than man could own such a palace! Excited and curious, Psyche headed for the entrance.

When she arrived, the huge gates swung open without a noise. Psyche entered and stared. Not a soul could be seen. Yet everything was gorgeous and sparkling. The palace looked as though hundreds of servants had just polished it all.

And how rich everything was! Golden pillars held up golden ceilings. And between the silver walls stretched a floor embedded with priceless gems. She was standing on diamonds, pearls, and emeralds larger than her hand!

A voice from nowhere softly spoke to her. "This is your new home, my lady. We, your servants, welcome you. Ask anything and we shall bring it or perform it. Whatever you wish is yours for the asking.

"Now if you would like to visit your room, a bath awaits you. And your breakfast is ready whenever you choose."

The same soft voice led Psyche to her room. There she was once again struck by the mix of comfort, riches, and beauty. Gratefully she sank into the warm water of her huge bath.

After she finished bathing and dressing, Psyche found she was hungry. Quietly she called, "If you please, I would like to eat now."

Immediately a set table appeared. Then just as mysteriously, food drifted to her plate. At the same time, wine filled the goblet. Psyche sat down and ate the delicious meal. Invisible musicians kept her company with lovely songs.

After eating, Psyche strolled out into the gardens around the palace. With childlike joy, she explored the paths and gathered flowers.



Psyche enjoyed herself very much that day. Yet she was also bothered by a strange feeling. The feeling eventually grew into a **conviction** that she was being followed. Several times she turned around. Yet no one was ever behind her. At least no one visible.

Was it just the servants? Psyche didn't think so. Somehow, she felt that the hidden being was the one the oracle had spoken of.

That night, Psyche ate in the garden. Then as the moon rose, she went to her room. She stretched out on her comfortable bed and blew out the last candle.

Presently a soft voice came out of the dark. It was a male voice, friendly and soothing.

"Welcome to my palace, dearest Psyche. At long last, welcome," Cupid said. For, of course, it was the young god. He spoke gently. Yet Psyche felt as though lightning had struck her heart.

"Oh, who are you, kind lord? Please, who are you?" she whispered.

"Lovely Psyche, I am your husband. I have waited so long to be in your arms."

"And now hearing your voice, it seems as though I've been waiting my whole life for you," replied Psyche. "How can this be, my lord? Surely the gods must have brought us together. For already I love you with all my heart. Where are you, my husband?"

"Here, dear wife." Psyche felt Cupid's muscular body slip into her outstretched arms. She sighed with deep contentment. He smelled so sweet, like a meadow at dawn. And his skin was smoother than the richest fabric.

Cupid whispered, "You have been very brave, my love. Making your night journey to the mountain. Sending the others away. Then letting Zephyr bring you here. Your soul is as beautiful as your face. I shall love you forever, dear wife."

Psyche had been praised by thousands of men in thousands of ways. But she had never heard such sweet

words. "This must be love," she thought to herself. She tightened her arms round her husband.

When Psyche awoke the next morning, she was alone. But she didn't care. She knew her husband would be back.

All day long she danced in the gardens. Over and over she recalled her husband's tender words.

By nightfall, she could think of nothing but her husband. So she was delighted that the moment the candle was out, Cupid was beside her. In his arms, she felt so happy. She wondered which god to thank for such a husband.

Days and nights passed like this. Sometimes Psyche feared that her lovely life might be only a dream. But soon she was calmed by her love for Cupid.

Psyche felt her life was almost perfect. Just one thing bothered her. So one night she **broached** her concern.

"Dear husband, I only see you at night," she said. "And then I don't see you at all really. Is there some reason you wish to remain hidden?"

"Aren't the emotions you feel better than what you might see, dear wife?" came his reply. "Believe me, your heart is much more reliable than your eyes. And twice as honest. Weren't there times when you wished you could cover yourself? Just to see if people loved you for yourself, not your beauty?"

Psyche was not surprised Cupid knew her deepest wishes. It seemed they spoke, acted, and even dreamed as one.

Cupid continued, "Would you want me to adore you only for your beauty? Because I confess, dear Psyche, I first was attracted by your loveliness. But now after knowing you, I realize how much more I love you for your spirit."

"I would rather have your respect than ten thousand compliments about my face," Psyche admitted.

"Well, you understand then. I also do not wish to be judged by my appearance. No, judge me by my actions and your own heart."

Psyche knew this was very important to him. "Agreed, dear husband. It does not matter what you look like. As

for your actions, you have treated me like a goddess. And my heart . . . Well, it is the happiest in all the land."

They lovingly curled into each other's arms and slept. Yet with that cloud past, a new worry came to Psyche. More and more she thought about her family. She wondered if they were happy. Had they stopped **mourning** for her? She longed to see her sisters again. She wanted them to know she was happy and in love.

Finally Psyche's longing overwhelmed her. So she asked Cupid if her sisters could visit.

Cupid hesitated for a moment. At once Psyche suspected he was holding something back. Yet when he spoke, he granted her wish. "For you, my wife, I would do anything," he vowed.

Cupid kept his promise. The very next day, Zephyr brought Psyche's sisters to her doorstep. The women were terrified at being snatched from their own palaces. They were even more amazed to see Psyche, whom they believed dead. Psyche was so happy to see her sisters, tears ran down her face. She hugged them for a long time before realizing she hadn't even invited them inside.

Psyche was quite proud of her home. She danced from room to room, showing her sisters one precious item after another. The sisters stared in wonder. Time and again they reached out to touch a treasure. And each time they felt certain it would pop like a soap bubble.

Eventually Psyche led her sisters into the garden. "Are you hungry, dear sisters? For I have a feast in store for you." The two older women glanced at each other. "We were wondering where your servants were. We didn't see any the entire time we were inside. We hoped that you had some help."

"Oh, I have help," Psyche said with a smile. "Let me show you."

Her sisters stared at Psyche as she spoke to the air. "We shall dine in the garden today."

At once a table and chairs for three appeared. Goblets and plates appeared as well.

Psyche's sisters stared with open mouths. She had to lead them by the hands to get them to the table.

Psyche laughed. "My servants are perhaps the greatest treasure in the palace. They are always at hand and yet never underfoot. They also are very talented musicians. Would you like music with your meal?"

With **bemused** looks, the sisters nodded.

Psyche spoke into the air again. "Could we have music, please?"

A lyre⁸ began playing. And as the music drifted through the garden, the sisters recovered from their shock. Slowly at first and then more quickly, they ate the heavenly food.

Yet once in a while, Psyche's sisters had trouble swallowing. For in place of their wonder, bitter jealousy was growing. In fact, they had always been jealous of their younger sister. Her beauty had outshone theirs from the moment of her birth.

Now here was Psyche, enjoying treasures the gods would envy! Their husbands, who were both rich kings, couldn't afford even one room of Psyche's palace.

At the thought of husbands, a little gleam came into the eye of the eldest. She traded a quick glance with the second eldest. Then she spoke.

"Psyche, we have been so greedy! Why, we completely forgot to wait dinner for your husband!"

Psyche went pale and lowered her goblet. "I—I—My husband is away hunting."

"Oh?" replied the eldest doubtfully. "So he likes to hunt? You know, that's the first thing you've mentioned about him." At that, Psyche grew even paler.

The second sister leaned across the table. With a voice full of false concern, she asked, "Dear sister, is something wrong? Perhaps you're not as close as you should be? Perhaps you don't love him?"

⁸A lyre is a harp-like instrument.

"With all my heart I love him," answered Psyche.

"Well, every new bride I've known couldn't stop talking about her husband," said the middle sister. "And that's especially true if he's as wealthy as yours seems to be."

"Yes," agreed the older sister. "And every new bride I've known has loved to praise her husband's looks. What does your husband look like, Psyche?"

"He is the most beautiful—" stammered Psyche. "He is the most beautiful being I've ever known. You should be happy for me, sisters."

"A 'being'? What do you mean by that? He is a man, isn't he?"

The eldest turned to the middle sister. "Maybe what the oracle said is true. Her husband is some kind of beast." They spoke as if Psyche were not even present.

Then they turned back to Psyche. With one question after another they **assaulted** Psyche.

Finally she broke down. "Please, please, stop!" she cried. "I'll tell you the truth. I've never seen him! He comes to me only at night. He could be anything—I don't know! But I do know he's beautiful. Beautiful beyond words."

"Beautiful things like to be seen, Psyche. Just look at you."

"Yes, you used to sit in the window just waiting for the crowds to appear," the other sister chimed in. "You loved to be on display!"

Psyche was so shocked, she didn't know what to say. She'd hated being pointed at and treated like an object! Before she could reply, the same sister continued. "Only a creature who has something to hide would refuse to be seen by day. I'm afraid you've married a monster, dear sister."

"How dare you speak of my husband in such a way!" cried Psyche. "You know nothing about him! Nothing except what your jealous minds have imagined!"

The elder sister shook her head, as though in great sadness. "Jealous? No, little sister. Just concerned." She

sighed and leaned back. "Of course, you're entitled to your secrets. You don't have to prove anything to us, Psyche."

"Of course not," the second sister chimed in. "But what about yourself? I think you're the one with doubts, sister. So why not light a candle tonight? Just to see what your love looks like. What could be the harm in that?"

Psyche stood up, shaking with anger. "Keep your hateful suggestions to yourself! I'm sorry that I invited you here! I am even sorrier that I wept and rejoiced at your coming. Now I only want you to go and never come back!"

Zephyr was close by and heard Psyche's wish. Before the sisters could even rise from the table, he had whisked them away. This time he gave them a wild, bumpy ride before dumping them at their palaces.

The rest of that day, Psyche stayed in her room. She didn't feel like walking through her gardens. She didn't even request her evening meal. She simply paced back and forth, **brooding** about her sisters' words:

" 'I think you're the one with doubts, sister. So why not light a candle tonight? Just to see what your love looks like. What could be the harm in that?' "

As much as Psyche hated to admit it, her sisters did have a point. What could be the harm in one look? That's all she'd need. Just one look at her beloved husband's face.

"No, I mustn't," Psyche argued aloud. "He trusts me. It's the only thing he's asked of me."

But as the hours wore on, she grew more convinced by her sisters' arguments. If her husband weren't a monster, why wouldn't he show himself? She had begged him. Yet he still wouldn't let himself be seen. If he truly loved her, he would show himself just to satisfy her curiosity.

He must be a monster! Psyche trembled at the thought. She had shared her bed with who knows what kind of creature!

With that terrible thought, Psyche decided. She would see her husband's face tonight!

At dusk, Psyche slipped into bed. As always, she blew

out the candle. Then she lay with her eyes open, waiting for nightfall.

When the last spark of light faded, Psyche felt her husband slip into bed beside her. If Cupid had even kissed her, Psyche would have given up her plan. But her thoughtful husband, who didn't want to wake her, never even brushed her lips. So Psyche's fear remained greater than her love.

Psyche listened as Cupid's breath became even and slow. Then she crawled out of bed and lit the candle. The poor girl also grabbed a knife. If some fearsome monster awaited her, she would be prepared.

As the flame wavered in her shaking hand, Psyche tipped back to the bed. She shone the light on her husband's face and gave a gasp.

There was a god sleeping in her bed! And a bow and quiver rested on the floor!

Cupid was her husband? Cupid, the god of love? Psyche breathed a sigh of relief. Then she leaned closer for another look. His beauty took her breath away. His face was so youthful, so strong, so handsome! Shining golden hair ringed his face. And a pair of pure white wings were folded behind his shoulders.

But Psyche had leaned too close. Before she could catch it, the candle tipped in her hand. A large drop of hot wax fell onto Cupid's shoulder.

Cupid awoke with a start and looked straight into Psyche's eyes. It was as if he were reading her mind. Then in a flash, he had seized the candle and blown it out. Next moment he was out of bed and on his feet.

Psyche reached out to hold him. But he pushed her away and lifted into the air.

"No! Please, dear husband! Don't leave me!" Psyche cried.

Cupid's voice came from the window ledge. "Did I have to be beautiful for you to love me, dear wife?"

"No!" Psyche shouted. "I loved you before!"

"No, Psyche. If you had truly loved me, you wouldn't have had to see my face. You would have trusted your heart."

With that, Cupid flew out the window into the night air. Psyche ran into the courtyard after him. She tried to follow the sound of his voice.

"True beauty lies in the heart. That is why I loved you, Psyche. Your heart was beautiful. But it has grown ugly from fear and doubt. And love cannot live where the heart does not trust. Farewell."

A big whoosh of wind made Psyche turn around. The palace had disappeared! The gardens were gone! All the remains of her delightful life vanished with Love.⁹

Psyche ran to the grassy meadow where Zephyr had first set her down. She called out to him and then leaped into the air. But this time the god did not come to carry her. Psyche fell to the ground and wept.

When she had exhausted her tears, Psyche's strong spirit reawakened. At once she set off on a search for Cupid. Many dangers she faced along the way. But Psyche didn't fear death. The pain in her heart told her there were far worse things.

Psyche's search continued for days and then weeks. Finally she realized it was hopeless to search for her husband on earth. She would have to go to Olympus itself. Better yet, she should seek out Venus.

At once Psyche went to one of Venus' temples. She didn't even have to call out, for the angry goddess was waiting.

"So you dare to come crawling here!" Venus scolded. "After you tried to take my place as goddess of beauty! After you betrayed and wounded—yes, actually wounded—my son!"

Psyche stared back, pale and numb.

"What he sees in you, I can't understand. Such an ugly girl. Really, the comparisons between us are laughable. The only possible value you have as a wife would be in

⁹Cupid was also known as Love.

housekeeping. If you were good at such things . . . Well, perhaps you might convince me that you were worth something to Cupid, after all. As a servant perhaps. Shall we put you to the test?" Venus asked.

But it wasn't a question. Psyche knew she dare not refuse. Not if she hoped ever to see Cupid again.

The great goddess led her to the storehouse of her temple. With an **imperious** gesture, she said, "Sort these seeds into separate piles, girl. And do it by nightfall."

Psyche stared in despair at the heap of seeds. Thousands upon thousands of seeds were mixed together. She could never do it by nightfall.

Yet do it she tried. And as she sifted the seeds, she noticed black spots swarming before her eyes.

Was she losing her sight? She rubbed her tired head and looked again. No, the spots were ants. As the astonished Psyche watched, the little creatures moved over the pile of seeds. With quick **efficiency**, they sorted the grain. By the time Venus came back, the one huge pile had been turned into twenty smaller ones.

Venus frowned when she saw the neatly sorted piles. "Well, you've managed somehow, little fool. But I don't think you did it by yourself. Tomorrow we'll see if you're so lucky." Throwing a crust of bread to the girl, she marched out.

In the morning, Venus was ready with another grim task. "At the riverbank are a herd of sheep with golden wool. Bring me back a basket full of their wool at once."

Psyche went to the river, once again determined to try. But again, someone was watching over her, for the river god spoke up. "Psyche, don't go near the sheep whose wool you seek. Those fierce creatures will tear you to pieces."

"But how am I to get their wool?" she asked.

"Among the bushes nearby, you'll find what you seek. The thorns catch the wool when the sheep **browse** there."

Psyche did as the river god suggested and gathered a heap of bushel of wool. But, of course, the present didn't please Venus.

"So you have completed another of my tasks," said Venus. "Or have *you*? Well, perhaps you can try this next task by yourself. Go to the waterfall beyond those dark hills. Fill this pitcher with water and return to me."

When Psyche reached the falls, she paused in bewilderment. How could she ever get down these steep, jagged rocks to the falls? And once down there, how could she get back up?

"Try," she told herself. "You must try for his sake." Biting her lips, Psyche moved forward. But just as she was about to start down, an eagle flew up. Snatching the pitcher from her hand, it darted toward the waterfall. Then dipping into the falls, it filled the jug. Before Psyche could even whisper a prayer, the eagle was back.

When Psyche returned from this mission, Venus glared at the girl. "Another job done. And I suppose you're expecting to rest? Ah, if only I could. Day and night I've been nursing dear Cupid. I don't know when he'll ever recover from that nasty burn you gave him."

Psyche knew Venus was lying just to torment her. Yet she couldn't keep her worry and shame from showing. Venus laughed. "Such a face, silly child. It reminds me that my own beauty isn't quite what it should be. All those long hours at my son's side."

The goddess clapped her hands, as though suddenly thinking of an idea. "What I need is some help from Proserpina.¹⁰ With her looks, she can surely spare me some of her beauty. Anyway, she's buried in the Underworld with that gloomy husband of hers. What does she need it all for?"

Venus grabbed a box and shoved it into Psyche's hands. "Hurry now and fetch some for me."

Psyche was utterly lost. How did you get to Hades? And

¹⁰ (pro ser' pi na) The goddess Proserpina was married to Hades (hā' dēz), god of the Underworld (also called Hades).

once there, how did you get through and back?

Psyche decided to look for the entrance to the Underworld from a high tower nearby. Again, some kindly god stepped in to help. This time the spirit of the tower told her how to safely reach Proserpina.

Psyche listened carefully and did all that her mysterious guide suggested. Through a hole in the earth she went. Then she crossed a dark river in Charon's¹¹ ferry. She also passed a fierce, three-headed dog after first throwing him a cake.¹²

Finally she found Proserpina. That goddess, lovely as autumn flowers, placed some of her beauty in the box. With many thanks, Psyche quickly left and returned to her own daylight world.

Yet even as she prepared to enter Venus' temple, Psyche paused. Longingly she looked at the box in her hand.

"Oh, how I wish I had some of Proserpina's beauty," she murmured. "How ugly I must seem with my cut hands and feet, dirty face, and red eyes. Will Cupid ever bother to look at me again? Surely a little of this beauty wouldn't be missed. I wonder what it looks like?"

Psyche cracked open the box. With a nervous glance, she peered inside. It was empty!

The thought barely occurred to Psyche before she fell to her knees. Exhaustion poured over her. Almost instantly she fell into a **stupor**. While Proserpina's beauty might suit a goddess, it cast mortals into a deep sleep.

But once again, rescue was near. All along Cupid had been keeping a watchful eye on his wife. In fact, he was the one who saw that others helped Psyche through each task.

When Cupid saw Psyche fall to the ground, he was out the window at once. Forgotten were his pride and anger. All he could remember were Psyche's loving eyes.

In a moment, he was by Psyche's side. A gentle touch from one of his arrows broke the spell. Slowly Psyche stirred

¹¹ (ka' ron) With his ferryboat, Charon carried the souls of the dead into Hades.

¹² The three-headed dog Cerberus guarded the gates of the Underworld.

and opened her eyes. Then as she stared up at him in wonder, he gathered her into his arms.

"My husband!" she cried in delight.

"Dear, dear Psyche," he murmured. "So brave, so lovely, so loyal. And so curious. How I love you."

After a long kiss, Cupid released her. "Now go to my mother and complete your task. I will be busy with my own mission."

Cupid flew at once to Olympus and sought out Jupiter.¹³ If anyone could end these games of his mother's, it would be the king of the gods.

Briefly Cupid explained what had happened. Then he made his request.

Jupiter smiled at the young god. "It's pleasant to see you in the role of the lover. I hope your suffering makes you go easier on the rest of us next time you shoot an arrow."

Cupid started to protest anxiously. But Jupiter waved his hand. "Yes, yes, boy. It's your job. And mine is to pass judgment. Today, the scales tip in your favor. Your request is granted. Fetch your wife here."

With a joyful exclamation, Cupid flew off. In no time he had returned with Psyche.

After the young wife was bathed and freshly dressed, she was **ushered** to Jupiter's throne. With the eye of a true lover of beauty, Jupiter looked her up and down.

Finally he said, "Your husband has told me of your bravery. You have the form to match your soul, my dear. Such beauty must not be allowed to fade." He gestured and a god brought forward a cup of nectar.

"Drink that, Psyche. Drink it and become immortal, like your husband. For there is an invisible cord which ties your hearts together. May it remain unbroken to the end of time!"

With those words, the wedding feasting began. All the gods came—even Venus. Selfish and jealous as she was, the goddess knew when to give in. After all, no one can defeat the most powerful force in the universe: Love.

¹³ (jū' pi ter)