

# Cupid and Psyche

From Apuleius' *Golden Ass*, translated by Thomas Taylor

In a certain city lived a king and a queen, who had three daughters of conspicuous beauty. Of these, the two elder, though of the most agreeable form, were not thought too lovely to be celebrated by the praises of mankind; but the beauty of the younger sister was so great and illustrious, that it could neither be expressed, nor sufficiently praised by the poverty of human speech. At length, a multitude of the citizens, and abundance of strangers, whom the rumour of the exalted spectacle had collected together, full of ardent zeal, stupid with admiration of her inaccessible beauty, and moving their right hand to their mouths, while their forefinger was placed on their erect thumb, venerated her with religious adorations, as if she had been the Goddess Venus herself.

And now fame had pervaded the neighbouring cities and contiguous regions, and had reported that the Goddess whom the azure profundity of the deep brought forth, and the dew of the foamy billows nourished, now, every where exhibiting her divinity, was conversant with the midst of the people; or certainly, that once more, from a new blossom of the celestial stars, not the sea, but the earth, had produced another Venus, endued with virgin-like flower. Thus opinion increased immensely every day; thus extended fame wandered over the neighbouring islands, a great part of the continent, and a multitude of provinces. Now many mortals, by long journeys on the land, and over the deep passages of the sea, came to behold the glorious specimen of the age; no one sailed to Paphos, no one to Cnidus, nor even to Cythera, for the spectacle of the Goddess Venus. The sacred concerns of the Goddess were abandoned, her temples were deformed, her ceremonies neglected, her images uncrowned, and her desolate altars defiled with frigid ashes, while a girl was supplicated in her stead, and the divinity of so great a Goddess was appeased in a human countenance; and the name of the absent Venus was propitiated in the morning progressions, victims, and banquets of the virgin. And now the people frequently assembling in the streets, and throwing flowers entwined in garlands, or loosely scattering them, prayed to her divinity.

This immoderate translation of celestial honours to the worship of a mortal virgin, inflamed the vehement mind of the true Venus; so that, impatient of indignation, and raging high with her agitated head, she thus discoursed with herself: Behold the ancient parent of the nature of things, lo, the first origin of the elements; behold the bountiful Venus of the whole universe, the honour of whose majesty is divided with a mortal girl, and whose name, raised to the heavens, is profaned by sordid terrestrials. Indeed, by sharing in common the expiations which are offered to divinity, I sustain an uncertain part of deputed veneration, and a girl obnoxious to mortality bears about my celestial image. It is in vain that the shepherd [Paris], whose justice and faith the mighty Jupiter approved, preferred me to such great Goddesses, on account of my illustrious form. But she who thus rejoices, whosoever she be, shall not usurp my honours; for I will cause her to repent

of her illicit beauty. And immediately she calls her son; that winged and sufficiently rash youth, who, with his depraved manners contemning public discipline, armed with flames and arrows, running through other men's houses by night, and corrupting the matrimony of all, commits such mighty wickedness with impunity, and effects nothing useful and good.

Him, though haughty by genuine license, she stimulates by her words: she brings him to the city, and openly shews him Psyche, (for this was the name of the girl,) and having told him the whole tale concerning the emulation of her beauty, groaning and raging with indignation, "I beseech thee," says she, "by the leagues of maternal love, by the sweet wounds of thy arrow, by the mellifluous burnings of that flame, to afford thy parent full revenge, through your reverence of me, and severely punish that rebellious beauty. Above all, willingly effect this one thing, that the virgin may be detained by the most ardent love of the lowest of mankind, whom fortune has deprived of his dignity, patrimony, and safety; and so infirm that he may not find his equal in misery throughout the world." Having thus spoke, and for a long time, and closely embraced her son with ardent kisses, she sought the neighbouring margin of the refluent shore, and, with rosy feet, trod on the topmost dew of the vibrating waves.

Behold, now the water of the profound sea was appeased from its vertex, and the marine train which she just began to wish, appeared without delay, as if she had previously commanded its attendance. The daughters of Nereus were present, singing chorus; and Portunus, rough with his cerulean beard, and Salacia, heavy with her fishy bosom, small Palæmon, the charioteer of a dolphin, the company of Tritons, every where furrowing the sea; and while this softly blows his sounding shell, that, with a silken covering, resists the unfriendly ardour of the sun, another carries a mirror before the eyes of his mistress, and others swim under the two-yoked car. Such was the train which attended Venus, proceeding to the ocean.

In the meantime, Psyche perceived no advantage to herself from her admirable beauty; she was seen by all, and praised by all; yet no one, neither kings nor nobles, nor any one of the common people, approached as a suitor for her possession in marriage. They admired, indeed, her divine form, but they all admired it as an image artificially polished. Some time prior to this, her two sisters, whose moderate beauty had not been celebrated by mankind, having been married to suitor kings, now obtained happy nuptials; but the virgin Psyche, sitting desolate at home, lamented her deserted solitude, sick in her body and wounded in her soul; and, though pleasing to all nations, she hates her beauty in herself. But the most miserable father of the most unfortunate daughter, suspecting the celestial hatred, and fearing the wrath of the Gods, questioned the most ancient oracle of the Milesian God [Apollo], and sought of so great a divinity, by prayers and victims, nuptials and a husband for the sorrowful virgin. Apollo, therefore, though a Grecian and Ionian, on account of the builder of Milesia, gave the following oracle, in Latin verse:

On some high mountain's craggy summit place  
The virgin, deck'd for deadly nuptial rites;  
Nor hope a son-in-law of mortal race,  
But a dire mischief, viperous and fierce;

Who flies through æther, and with fire and sword  
 Tires and debilitates whate'er exists,  
 Terrific to the powers that reign on high.  
 E'en mighty Jove the wing'd destroyer dreads,  
 And streams and Stygian shades abhor the pest.

The king, whose days, till then, had been crowned with felicity, on hearing this sacred oracle, returned slowly home, oppressed with sorrow, and disclosed to his wife the mandates of unpropitious fate. Many days were passed, on this occasion, in grief, weeping, and lamentation. But the cruel injunctions of the dire oracle now require to be accomplished. Now preparations were made for the deadly nuptials of the most miserable virgin; now the nuptial was changed into a funeral torch, and the sound of the Zygian [or conjugal] pipe into the querulous Lydian measure. The joyful hymeneal song closed with mournful howling, and the wretched bride wiped away her tears with her own nuptial veil. The whole city likewise lamented the sad destiny of the royal house, and public mourning was immediately proclaimed on the occasion.

The necessity, however, of complying with the celestial mandates, importunately urged the miserable Psyche to her destined punishment. The solemnities, therefore, of the mournful marriage being accomplished with extreme sorrow, the living funeral takes place, followed by all the people, and the weeping Psyche attends not her nuptials, but her obsequies. However, while her sorrowful parents, who were overwhelmed with such a mighty evil, endeavoured to delay the execution of the nefarious sentence, she herself exhorted them to a compliance, in the following words: "Why do you torture your unhappy old age with long-continued weeping? Why do you waste your spirits, which, indeed, are more mine than yours, with such frequent groans? Why do you deform your countenances, which in my sight are so venerable, with unavailing tears? Why do you lacerate my eyes in your own? Why thus do you tear your hoary hairs? Why thus beat your venerable breasts? These must be the rewards which you are to receive of my surpassing beauty, the truth of which having suffered a deadly blow from villainous envy, you, too late, perceive. Alas! then should you have wept and lamented, then bewailed me as one lost, when the people and nations celebrated me with divine honours, and when, with one voice, they called me a new Venus. I now perceive, I now clearly see, that I perish through the name of Venus alone. Lead me away, and place me on the rock to which I am destined by the oracle; I am in haste to accomplish these happy nuptials; I am in haste to see this my noble husband. Why do I delay? Why do I avoid his approach, who is born for the destruction of the whole world?"

The virgin, having thus spoke, was silent, and, with undaunted steps, mingled herself with the splendid procession of the people that followed her. They advance to the destined rock of a lofty mountain, on the summit of which, having left the royal maid alone, with the nuptial torches extinguished with their tears, they returned home, with dejected heads and desponding hearts. And her miserable parents, indeed, sinking under the weight of such a mighty calamity, shut up the gates of their palace, hid themselves in darkness, and abandoned themselves to a perpetual night. But the mild gales of the gently-blowing Zephyr gradually raised Psyche, as she stood, trembling and weeping, on the summit of the

rock, her garments through the tranquil breath of the God, orbicularly expanding, and bearing her through the hollows of a valley, at the bottom of the mountain, softly reclined her on the bosom of a flowery turf.

Psyche, therefore, agreeably reclining in the flowery valley, on a bed of dewy grass, the mighty perturbation of her mind being appeased, enjoyed delightful repose. And, being now sufficiently refreshed with sleep, she rose with a more composed mind, and saw a grove, thick planted with vast and lofty trees, and a fountain in the middle of the grove, gently falling with glassy water. Near the lapse of the fountain there was a royal house, which was not raised by human, but by divine hands and art. You might know, from the very entrance of the palace, that you beheld the splendid and pleasant residence of a God. For the lofty ceilings, which were curiously arched with citron-wood and ivory, were supported by golden pillars; and all the walls were ornamented, in every part, with silver carving, beasts of various kinds presenting themselves to the view, in the vestibule of the palace. Wonderful was the man, indeed, and endued with prodigious skill; or, rather, it was some demigod or God, who fashioned the silver carving with such exquisite subtilty of art.

But the very pavement itself consisted of small shells, admirably decorated with pictures of various kinds. Blessed, thrice blessed, are those who tread on gems and bracelets! The other parts, too, of this wide-extended and regularly disposed palace were precious, beyond all price; and the walls being every where strengthened with bars of gold, were so refulgent with their own splendour, that, even in the absence of the sun, they made for the palace a day of its own; so bright were the bed-chambers, the porches, and the folding doors. The furniture, too, was answerable to the majesty of this abode; so that it might very properly be considered as a celestial palace, built by mighty Jupiter, for his correspondence with mankind.

Psyche, invited by the delightful aspect of the place, approached to it, and, assuming a little more confidence, entered within the threshold of the place. Presently after, being allured by the charms of the beautiful vision, every thing she surveyed filled her with admiration: and, in the more elevated part of the house, she beheld a magnificent repository, in which immense riches were contained. Indeed, there is not any thing in this universe with which this place is not replete. But amidst the admiration which such prodigious wealth excited, this was particularly wonderful, that this treasury of the whole world was not secured by any bars, or doors, or guards.

Here, while the eyes of Psyche were ravished with delight, a voice, denudated of its body, thus addressed her: “And why, my mistress,” it said, “are you astonished at such vast riches? All these are yours. Betake yourself, therefore, to your bedchamber, and refresh your wearied limbs on the bed, and, when you think proper, repair to the bath; for we, whose voices you now hear, are your servants, who will diligently administer to all your commands, and, while we wait on your person, prepare royal banquets for your repast.”

Psyche perceived the goodness of divine providence, and, complying with the admonitions of the incorporeal voices, first refreshed herself with sleep, and afterwards

with the bath. Immediately, too, perceiving, in an adjacent semicircular building, near an elevated seat, every apparatus requisite for supper, she willingly reclined herself, considering this place as accommodated to her refreshment; and, instantly, nectareous wines, and numerous dishes of various kinds of food, were served in, without any visible attendants, by the mere impulse of a certain spirit; Psyche, at the same time, perceiving no one, but alone hearing certain words, and having voices alone for her servants. After the table was furnished with this splendid banquet, a certain person entered, and sang, without being seen; at the same time an invisible musician played on the harp; and, last of all, her ears were ravished with a full chorus, from an invisible band.

After these pleasures were finished, the evening now persuading to repose, Psyche retired to her bed; and when the night was far advanced, a certain gentle sound approached her ears. Then, fearing for her virginity, on account of the profound solitude of the place, she trembles, and is filled with horror, and dreads that which she is ignorant beyond any calamity. And now her unknown husband approached, ascended the bed, made her his wife, and hastily left her before the rising of the morning light. Immediately the attendant voices, who were the ministers of the bedchamber, took care of every thing necessary on the occasion. This course was continued for a long time; the novelty, by its constant repetition (as it was natural it should), became at last delightful; and the sound of the uncertain voices was the solace of her solitude.

In the meantime, the parents of Psyche grew old in unwearied sorrow and lamentation; and the report of her destiny becoming more widely extended, her elder sisters came to know all the particulars respecting it, and immediately, being overwhelmed with sorrow, hastened to the presence of their afflicted parents. On that very night, the husband of Psyche thus addressed her (for the hands and the ears were the only media of their present communication): “Most charming Psyche, and dear wife, more cruel fortune now threatens thee with a deadly danger; which, I think, ought to be guarded against with the utmost attention. For now your sisters, who are disturbed through the belief of your death, in consequence of endeavouring to discover the place of your abode, will soon arrive at the rock on which you were lately exposed. If you should chance to hear any of their lamentations, neither make them any reply, nor even turn your eyes towards them; for, by doing otherwise, you will be the cause of the greatest grief to me, and of extreme destruction to yourself.”

Psyche assented, and promised that she would act agreeably to her husband's desire. But as soon as he, together with the night, were fled, the most miserable Psyche consumed the whole day in tears and lamentations, exclaiming that she was now entirely lost, since, securely confined in a blessed prison, she was deprived of human conversation, and not permitted to give salutary assistance to her sorrowing sisters, nor even so much as to see them. Neither refreshing herself, therefore, with the bath, nor with food, but weeping abundantly, she retired to rest. But her husband coming more early than usual, and embracing her weeping, thus expostulated with her: “Is this, my Psyche, what you promised me? What can I, your husband, now expect from you? What can I now hope for, since, neither by day nor by night, nor even in the midst of our conjugal embraces, you cease to be tormented with grief? But come, act now as you please, and comply with the pernicious

desires of your soul. However, when you begin too late to repent of your folly, call to mind my serious admonitions.”

Psyche after this had recourse to prayers, and, while she threatens that she shall die if her request is denied, extorts from her husband permission to see her sisters, to assuage their grief and enjoy their conversation. Thus he pardoned the entreaties of his new wife, and permitted her, besides, to present her sisters with as much gold and as many jewels as she pleased; but he again and repeatedly admonished her, with the utmost earnestness, not to be persuaded, by their pernicious advice, to inquire concerning the form of her husband; nor by a sacrilegious curiosity hurl herself, from such an exalted fortune, and by this means deprive herself of his embraces.

She thanked her husband for his indulgence, and becoming in consequence of it more joyful; “But,” says she, “may I suffer death an hundred times rather than be deprived of thy most pleasing embraces; for I love thee most vehemently, thee, whoever thou art, even as I love my own soul, nor would I compare thee to Cupid himself. But this also I beseech you, grant to my prayers, that your servant Zephyr may convey my sorrowful sisters in the same manner in which he brought me hither.” Then, pressing his lips with persuasive kisses, murmuring alluring words, and fondly folding him in her arms, she thus addressed him, in soothing accents: “My dear husband, sweet soul of thy Psyche, be not averse to my request.” The husband, vanquished by the power of Venus, reluctantly gave his consent, and promised that all things should be accomplished according to her desire; and afterwards, in consequence of the approach of morning, vanished from the arms of his wife.

But the sisters, having inquired the way, arrived in haste at the lofty rock on which Psyche was left abandoned, and there wept and beat their breasts, till the rocks resounded with their repeated lamentations. And now they called on their miserable sister, by her proper name, till the spreading sound of their mournful voices, gliding down the declivities of the mountain, reached the ears of Psyche, who, distracted and trembling, ran out of her palace, and thus addressed them: “Why do you in vain afflict yourself with miserable lamentations? I, whom you deplore, am now present; cease, therefore, your complaints, and at length dry up those tears which you have so long shed for my loss, since you may now embrace her whom you have so vehemently mourned.”

Then, calling Zephyr, she acquaints him with her husband's commands, who, entirely obedient to the mandate of Cupid, brought them, borne on the most gentle gales, in safety to Psyche. Now they embrace and are embraced, and mingle their mutual caresses with frequent and hasty kisses; and the joy of finding her alive, after they had considered her as dead, soon put a period to their lamentations and tears. “But come,” said Psyche, “enter with me into my house, and recreate your afflicted mind with your Psyche.” Having thus spoken, she led them into her golden palace, brought their ears acquainted with the populous family of voices that were subservient to her commands, and sumptuously refreshed them in a most beautiful bath, and with the delicacies of her immortal table. But as soon as her sisters were satiated with this affluence of celestial riches, they began to nourish envy profoundly in their hearts: and, at last, one of them, with a very particular and

curious importunity, inquired who was the master of these celestial possessions? And who, and what sort of a person her husband was?

Psyche, however, by no means violated her husband's injunctions, or suffered them to depart from the secret recesses of her bosom; but, devising an answer adapted to the occasion, told them that he was a beautiful youth, whose cheeks were yet only shadowed with down, and that he was, for the most part, occupied in rural employments, and in hunting on the mountains. And lest, by any slip in the course of her conversation, she should betray the secret advice, having loaded them with rich presents of gold and jewels, she called Zephyr, and ordered him to carry them to the lofty rock. This being immediately accomplished, these admirable sisters, as they were returning home, burning with the rancour of increasing envy, discoursed much with each other, and at last one of them thus began: "Do but take notice how blind, cruel, and unjust, fortune has proved! Were you, my sister, pleased to find that we, though born of the same parents, should maintain such a different rank in life? We, who are elder, are delivered over to be servants to husbands, in a foreign country, far exiled from our native land and parents; but this youngest sister, the offspring of exhausted vigour, is raised to the enjoyment of this prodigious affluence, and of a God for her husband, though she does not know how to use, in a proper manner, such an abundance of good. You saw, sister, what a prodigious quantity of bracelets the house contained, what a number of shining garments, what bright gems, and what heaps of gold she treads upon in every part of the palace. If to all this she possesses a husband so beautiful as she asserts him to be, no one in the universe can live a happier life than herself. Indeed, it may happen, through long-continued association, and corroborated affection, that her husband, who is a God, may at length make her a Goddess. By Hercules, it must be so, for she already conducts herself in a lofty manner; and the woman certainly breathes the Goddess, who has voices for her servants, and commands even the winds themselves. But I, miserable creature, am, in the first place, tied to a husband more aged than my father; and, in the next place, to one who is balder than a gourd, and shorter than a pygmy, and who secures every part of his house with bolts and chains."

"But I," replied the other sister, "am destined to endure a husband, whose body is distorted with an articular disease; and though on this account he seldom rewards my pains with conjugal embraces, yet I am forced to spend a great part of my time in rubbing his distorted fingers, which are almost hardened into stone, with fetid fomentations, defiling these delicate hands with nasty rags and stinking poultices; thus acting the part of a surgeon, more than that of a wife. You, indeed, my sister, seem to bear all this with a patient or rather servile soul, (for I will speak what I think, without restraint,) but, for my own part, I can no longer endure that such a blessed destiny should have fallen to one who does not deserve it. For only recollect in what a proud and arrogant manner she behaved towards us. By her boasting and immoderate ostentation, she betrayed the haughtiness of her swelling mind; of her immense riches gave us but a very trifling part; and immediately after, being weary of our company, ordered us to be turned out of doors, and to be puffed and hissed away. But I am not a woman, nor do I breathe, if I do not hurl her headlong from such mighty possessions. And if our contumely affects you as it ought, let us both join, in vigorous consultation, how we may accomplish this design. In order to this, let us neither acquaint our parents, nor any one else, with our intention, nor inform them that we know

any thing of her safety. It is sufficient that we ourselves have seen what it repents us to have seen, and let us not be the messengers of her happy condition to our parents and the people; for those are not properly blessed whose riches no one is acquainted with. She shall know that we are not servants, but her elder sisters. And now, indeed, let us depart to our husbands, and visit our own poor habitations, for such they are when compared with her abode, and being furnished with more compressed thoughts, let us return with greater firmness to the punishment of her pride.”

The two wicked sisters consider this evil advice as good, and concealing the precious gifts which they had received from Psyche, dishevelling their hair, tearing their faces with dissembled grief, and renewing fictitious tears, returned to their parents. These, however, the wounds of whose sorrows they had again opened by their narration, they hastily take their leave of, big with the madness of envy, and return to their own habitations, machinating nefarious guile, or rather parricide, against their innocent sister.

In the meantime Psyche's unknown husband thus again admonished her in his nocturnal discourses: “Do you perceive what a mighty danger fortune is preparing for you at a distance, and which, unless you are more firmly guarded against than you have hitherto been, will soon assault you near at hand? Those perfidious she-wolves are, with mighty endeavours, forming base stratagems against you, the sum of which is, that they may persuade you to explore my countenance, which, as I have often told you, if you once see, you will see no more. If, therefore, those worst of sorcerers come again, armed with noxious minds, (and I know they will come), avoid all discourse with them; but if through genuine simplicity and tenderness of disposition, you are not able to accomplish this, at least be careful not to hear nor answer any inquiries concerning your husband. For now we shall have a family of our own, and thy as yet infantine womb is pregnant with an offspring, which, if you conceal my secrets in silence, will be divine, but if you profane them, will be mortal.”

Psyche rejoiced in the consoling thoughts of a divine offspring, and was elated with the glory which would result from her future pledge, and with the dignity of a maternal name. She, therefore, anxiously numbered the increasing days and departing months, and being ignorant in every thing relative to conception, wondered how her wealthy womb could receive such an abundant increase.

But now those pests and most cruel furies, her sisters, breathing viperous virulence, and hastening their departure, sailed with impious celerity. Then again the momentary husband thus admonished his Psyche; “The last day, and the most extreme misfortune, are now arrived. The malicious sex, and hostile blood, have taken arms, removed their camp, drawn the army into battle array, and sounded the charge. Now, thy nefarious sisters are aiming with a drawn sword at thy throat. Alas! most dear Psyche, what mighty calamities now press upon us? Take pity, both on yourself and me; and by a religious continence of tongue, deliver your house, your husband, yourself, and our little one, from the misfortune of impending ruin. Neither see, nor hear those wicked women, who, after the deadly hatred which they have conceived against thee, and having trampled on the ties of blood, deserve not to be called sisters, when, like the Sirens, standing on the mountain, they shall make the rocks resound with their deadly voices.”

Psyche, in words interrupted by sighs and tears, thus replied: “You have for some time had convincing proofs of my fidelity and taciturnity; and the strength of my mind shall be no less approved by you in the present instance. Only order Zephyr to repeat his former office, and at least grant me the sight of my sisters, since I am not permitted to behold thy sacred image. By thy fragrant and every way pendulous locks! By thy cheeks tender, smooth, and like my own! By thy breast glowing with I know not what kind of heat! By my hopes of at least knowing thy face in this little one, I beseech thee to comply with the pious prayers of thy suppliant, indulge me in the desired embraces of my sister, and recreate with joy the soul of Psyche who is devoted to thy will; for then I shall no longer be anxious to explore thy countenance. Now nothing can hinder me from thy embrace, not even the darkness of night, for I hold thee, my life, in my arms.”

The husband being fascinated by these words, and by her soft embraces, wiped away her tears with his fragrant locks, assured her that her desires should be fulfilled, and immediately anticipated the light of the emerging day. But the two sisters who were confederates in mischief, without calling on their parents, direct their course with precipitate velocity from the ships to the rock, and not waiting for the assistance of the elevating wind, leap on high with licentious temerity. Zephyr, however, not unmindful of the royal mandate, though unwilling to execute it, restored them, reclining on the bosom of the gently blowing gales, to the appointed place. Then, with feet equally rapid, they enter the palace, concealing the foe under the name of sister, embrace their prey, and veiling a treasury of profoundly hidden fraud under a joyful countenance, thus flattered her: “Psyche, not now so slender as you were before, since you are now almost a mother, what mighty good do you think you bear for us in your womb? With what prodigious joy will you exhilarate the whole of our house! O how happy shall we be through the nurture of the golden infant, who, if he corresponds in beauty as he ought to do to his parents, will be born a perfect Cupid.”

Thus, by a dissembled affection, they gradually invade the soul of their sister, who, as soon as they had refreshed themselves from the fatigue of their journey with warm baths, regaled them on a couch in a most splendid manner with all the dainties of a royal banquet. She ordered a harp to speak, and some one immediately sang to its harmony; flutes to be blown, and they immediately sounded; a musical band to sing in chorus, and it instantly sang; and, though invisible, ravished the souls of the hearers with the most mellifluous notes.

But the malice of these wicked women was not softened by the honeyed sweetness of the music; but turning their discourse to the destined fraudulent snares, they begin in a dissembling manner to inquire what sort of a person she was married to, and from what family he was descended. Then she, through her too great simplicity, having forgot the former account which she had given of her husband, invented a new story respecting him. She told them that her husband was of the next province; that he carried on a trade with abundance of money; and that he was now of a middle age, a grey hair being here and there scattered on his head. And without prolonging the conversation any further, she again committed them to the charge of the winds, after she had loaded them with costly presents. But while they return home, sublimely riding on the tranquil breath of Zephyr, they thus

discoursed with each other: “What can we say, sister, of the monstrous lies of that foolish creature? At one time, her husband is a young man, with the down just beginning to spread over his chin, and at another time he is of a middle age, shining with hoary hairs. Who can this be, that in a short space of time experiences the alteration of a sudden old age? You may depend upon it, my sister, that this vile woman either forged this lie to deceive us, or that she does not herself know the form of her husband. But which ever of these is the case, she must be deprived of these riches with the utmost expedition. Indeed, if she is really ignorant of the form of her husband, she must have married a God, and through this pregnancy of hers, she will present us with a God. However, should she happen to be the mother of a divine offspring, which heaven forbid! I should immediately hang myself. Let us, therefore, in the mean time return to our parents, and by a well-coloured deceit, prevent them from apprehending our design.”

The sisters thus enflamed, having called on their parents in a hasty manner, and passed through a night of interrupted sleep; fly as soon as it was morning to the rock, and by the usual vehicle of the wind, descend rapidly down to Psyche, who, with forced tears, they thus craftily addressed: “Happy in your own imagination, and blessed only in your ignorance of evil, you sit here inattentive to your own danger. But we, who watch over your affairs with a vigilant care, are miserably tormented at your lost condition. For, by diligent search, we have discovered, (nor can we conceal from you the cause of our mutual grief, and your own misfortune), that a vast serpent who glides along the plain in various volumes, whose neck is swoln with noxious poison, and whose mouth widely gapes through profound gluttony, secretly sleeps with you by night. Now call to mind the Pythian oracle, which declared you were destined to marry a fierce and terrible beast; and many of the inhabitants of this place, who haunt all round the country, have observed him returning home from his prey in the evening, and gliding through the shallows of the neighbouring river. These declare, that he will not long feast you with delicious delicacies, but that, as soon as a full womb shall have given maturity to your pregnancy, he will then devour you as a richer morsel. So that you have only to consider whether you will comply with the desires of your sisters, who are anxious for your dear preservation, and avoiding death, live with us secure from danger, or be buried in the bowels of a most cruel beast. But if you are wedded to the vocal solitude of this country retreat, or to the filthy and dangerous enjoyment of clandestine venery, and the embraces of a poisoned serpent, we have at least acted like pious sisters in thus admonishing you of your danger.”

Then the miserable Psyche, as being full of simplicity, and of a pliant disposition, is seized with terror at the dire relation, and being thus quite beside herself, loses the remembrance of all her husband's admonitions and her own promises, and hurls herself headlong into a profound abyss of calamity. Trembling, therefore, and pale, and with an almost lifeless voice, she thus addressed them in broken words: “You, indeed, most dear sisters, have acted as it was proper you should, with becoming piety towards me; and it appears to me that those who gave you this information, did not invent a lie. For I have never yet beheld my husband's face, nor do I know who or what he is; but only hearing him by night, I endure a husband of an uncertain condition, and one that perpetually avoids the light of day. I am, therefore, of your opinion, that he is some monstrous beast, who always terrifies me from attempting to behold him, and threatens some prodigious evil as the consequence

of curiosity respecting his countenance. Now, therefore, if you are able to give any salutary assistance to your sister, who is thus dangerously situated, defer it not for a moment.”

These wicked women, having thus found an avenue to their pernicious design, by a full discovery of their sister's condition, laying aside the concealments of covered artifice, invade the trembling thoughts of the simple girl with the drawn sword of deception. At length, therefore, one of them thus began: “Since the ties of blood oblige us to have no fear of danger before our eyes in the pursuit of your safety, we will discover to you the only way which leads to your preservation, and which has been the result of long-continued cogitation. Secretly conceal a very sharp razor, which has been perfectly well set, in that part of the bed on which you are accustomed to lie; and provide likewise an elegant lamp, full of oil, and shining with a splendid light. Hide this lamp in some part of the enclosing tapestry; and having acted with the utmost secrecy in these preparations, as soon as with furrowed steps he ascends the accustomed bed, is stretched at length, and held fast in the fetters of his first and soundest sleep, then silently leaving the bed, and tripping along softly with naked feet, free the lamp from its dark concealment, take advantage of its light to accomplish your illustrious undertaking, and with a bold heart, elevated right hand, and strenuous exertion, cut off the head of the noxious serpent. Nor shall our assistance be wanting to you in this affair; but we shall wait near with impatient anxiety, till you have procured your own safety by his death; and then bringing away with you all your invisible attendants, we will join you, who are a woman, in votive nuptials to a man.”

With such pernicious discourse, having inflamed the bosom of their now perfectly ardent sister, they left her, fearing in the highest degree the very confines of such a mighty evil; and by the wonted impulse of the winged gale, being raised on the rock, immediately hurl themselves from thence with rapid flight, and having ascended the ships, depart to their respective habitations.

But Psyche being left alone, if she can be said to be alone, who is hurried along by pernicious Furies, is tossed with sorrow like a raging sea; and though her designs were fixed, and her mind was obstinately bent to accomplish what she intended, yet now she was beginning to apply her hands to the impious work, she staggers with uncertain determinations, and is distracted with the apprehension of her approaching calamities. She is now full of speed, then dilatory; now bold, then fearful; now diffident, then angry; and what is the most wonderful of all, in the same body she loves the husband, and hates the beast. However, as soon as the evening drew on the night, she prepares with precipitate haste the instruments of her nefarious enterprise.

The night came, the husband was present, and after the first embrace, he fell into a profound sleep. Then Psyche, who was otherwise of an imbecile body and mind, yet, the cruelty of fate assisting her, is now corroborated. Hence, taking out the lamp, and snatching the razor, her boldness transformed her sex. But as soon as, by the light of the lamp, the secrets of the bed stood revealed, she saw the most mild and sweet of all wild beasts, even the beautiful God Cupid himself, most beautifully lying on the bed; by whose aspect the lamp itself participated of hilarity, and the razor repented itself of its sacrilegious edge.

But Psyche, terrified at the amazingly beautiful countenance of the God, impotent of mind, sinking through deadly paleness, and trembling, fell on her knees, and could not tell where so properly to hide the steel, as in her own bosom, which, indeed, she would have done, had not the razor, afraid of a crime so prodigious, fled just then out of her rash hand. And now, as she kneels weary on the ground, by often beholding the beauty of his divine countenance, she finds herself refreshed. She sees the genial locks of his golden head, largely anointed with ambrosia; the ringlets gracefully entangled, wandering over his milky neck and purple cheeks, some pendulous before, and some behind, by whose excessive radiance the very light of the lamp shone with a wavering splendour. On the shoulders of the volatile God, wings of a shining whiteness were seen; and though they were not in motion, yet the outward tender and delicate down, tremulously rebounding, was unquietly wanton. The rest of his body was smooth and elegant, and such as Venus did not repent of bringing forth. At the foot of the bed lay his bow, his quiver, and his arrows, the propitious weapons of the mighty God.

These while Psyche with an insatiable mind handles, and explores with eager curiosity, and admires her husband's arms, she draws out of the quiver one of the arrows, and with the tip of her finger touching the point to try its sharpness, by the bold pressure of her trembling hand she pierced the flesh so deep, that some small drops of rosy blood spread themselves with dewy sprinkling on her skin; and thus ignorant Psyche voluntarily fell in love with LOVE. Then, burning more and more with the desire of Cupid, gazing on his face with insatiable eyes, and multiplying petulant kisses, her only fear was, lest he should wake too soon.

But while, astonished through such a mighty good, her wounded mind fluctuates, the lamp, whether through vile perfidy, or noxious envy, or whether it longed to touch, and as it were, kiss such a beautiful body, threw out a drop of boiling oil from the summit of its light on the right shoulder of the God. Strange, O bold and rash lamp, that thou shouldst burn the very God of all fire, though some lover first invented thee, that he might for a longer time enjoy by night the object of his desire. The God, thus burnt, leaped from the bed, and seeing the evidence of forfeited fidelity, silently flew away from the eyes and hands of his most unhappy wife. But Psyche immediately, with both her hands, caught hold of his right leg as he was mounting, being the miserable appendix of his sublime flight through the cloudy regions, till at length, through weariness, she fell to the ground.

Her lover God, however, not yet deserting her, as she lay on the ground, flew to a neighbouring cypress tree, and being severely agitated, thus spoke to her from its lofty top: "Most simple Psyche, I, unmindful of the commands of my mother Venus, who ordered me to cause you to be enamoured of some mean and miserable son of the vulgar, chose rather to fly to you as a lover myself. I know that I have acted in this respect lightly, and I, who am so excellent an archer, have wounded myself, with my own arrow, and have made you my wife, that I might, it seems, be considered by you as a beast, and that you might cut off my head, which bears those very eyes by which you are beloved. This was the danger of which I so often warned you to beware; this was the mischief I so benevolently admonished you to consider. But those egregious counsellors of yours shall speedily suffer from me the punishment of such pernicious advice; while you I shall only

punish by my flight.” Thus spake Cupid, and with the conclusion of his speech sprang with his pinions on high.

But Psyche lay prostrate on the ground, gazing on her soaring husband as long as he remained in sight, and afflicting herself with lamentations in the extreme. When, however, by the rowing of his wings, distance had rendered him invisible, she threw herself from the bank of the next river headlong into its stream. But the gentle river, in honour of the God, who used to burn the waters themselves, and fearing for himself, immediately, on the back of an innoxious wave, delivered her safe to the flowery bank.

It happened at that time, that the rural God Pan sat on the margin of the river, embracing the Goddess Canna, and teaching her to sing in all manner of gentle strains. Near them a wanton herd of kids browsed on the grassy bank. The shagged God, who was not ignorant of the misfortune of Psyche, called her gently to him, and thus allured her in soothing language: “Most elegant girl, I am indeed a rural person, and a shepherd; but through the benefit of an extended old age I have acquired abundance of experience; and if I rightly conjecture, since prudent men boast the power of divination, from your stumbling and often reeling gait, from the extreme paleness of your countenance, from your perpetual sighing and sorrowful eyes, you labour under an excess of love. Listen, therefore, to me; attempt no more to drown yourself, or to put an end to your existence by calling any other kind of death to your assistance; but cease to grieve, lay aside your sorrow, and rather by prayers worship Cupid, the greatest of the Gods, and strive to please him by bland obsequiousness, as he is a delicate and luxurious youth.”

The pastoral God having thus spoken, Psyche made no reply, but adoring the salutary divinity, departed from the place. But before she had travelled far, with painful steps pursuing an unknown path, she drew near to a city in which the husband of one of her sisters was king. This, as soon as she understood, she desired that her arrival might be announced to her sister. Psyche was accordingly introduced to her, and when the embraces of mutual salutation were over, to her sister inquiring the cause of her visit, she thus began: “You doubtless remember the advice you gave me, I mean, that I should destroy with a razor the beast that lay with me under the name of a husband, before, through voracious gluttony, he destroyed me: but soon as, by the assistance of the conscious light, I beheld his countenance, I saw a spectacle perfectly wonderful and divine, the very son himself of the Goddess Venus, Cupid himself I say, sunk in gentle sleep. And while struck with astonishment at the sight of such a mighty good, and disturbed through too great an abundance of pleasure, I laboured under the want of enjoyment, by a most dire misfortune, the boiling oil bubbled to the summit of the lamp, and leaped on the shoulder of the God. Being immediately awakened by the pain, when he beheld me armed with the weapon and the light, ‘From whence,’ said he, ‘proceeds this dire wickedness of thine? Immediately quit my bed, and depart from my sight. I will now immediately join myself in marriage to your sister (mentioning you expressly by name,) and then he ordered Zephyr to blow me beyond the boundaries of his habitation.’”

Psyche had scarcely ended her narration, when the sister, agitated by the incentives of lust and baneful envy, having deceived her husband by a preconcerted fiction respecting the death of her parents, immediately set sail for the rock on which Psyche had been exposed;

and though another wind then blowed, yet, elated with blind hope, she exclaimed, "Receive me, Cupid, a wife worthy thy embraces; and thou, Zephyr, receive thy mistress." Then leaping up as high as she was able, she fell headlong from the mountain, unable even when dead to arrive at the palace of Cupid. For her limbs were torn in pieces by the rocks as she fell, and her bowels became, as they deserved to be, food for birds and beasts of prey. Nor was the vengeance which remained to be inflicted slow in its approaches: for Psyche with wandering steps arrived at another city, where her other sister reigned, who, deceived, and sinning in the same manner, hastened to the rock, and died just in the same way her sister had done before.

In the meantime, while Psyche wandered over various realms, anxiously searching after Cupid, he, through the pain of the wound from the lamp, lay groaning in the bedchamber of his mother. Then that extremely white bird, the sea gull, who swims with his wings on the waves of the sea, hastily merged himself in the profound bosom of the ocean. There, placing himself near Venus, as she was bathing and swimming, he informed her that her son was severely burnt, that he was groaning with the pain of the wound, and that his cure was doubtful. That, besides this, the whole family of Venus was every where reviled; in the first place, Cupid, because he had retired to a mountain, in order to have illicit connection with a girl; and, in the next place, said he, yourself, by thus withdrawing to swim in the sea. Hence it is said, continued the bird, that there is no longer any pleasure, elegance, and festivity to be found, but that every thing is inelegant, rustic, and horrid; that nuptial ties, social friendships, and love of children, are no more; but in their place have succeeded enormous filth, and the bitter loathing of sordid compacts. Thus did this loquacious and impertinent bird defame the son of Venus, by murmuring scandal in her ear.

But Venus, being enraged at the information, suddenly exclaimed, in a firm tone of voice, "So, then, this hopeful son of mine has got a mistress! Come, tell me, thou who alone dost serve me with affection, tell me the name of her who has solicited the ingenuous and naked boy, and whether she is one of the tribes of Nymphs, or of the number of the Goddesses, or of the choir of the Muses, or belonging to my train of the Graces?" The loquacious bird was not silent: "But, my mistress," said he, "I am not certain, though, if I well remember, he is said to have been vehemently in love with a girl, whose name is Psyche." Then Venus, being indignant, exclaimed, "Does he then love her who is the rival of my beauty, and who is emulous of my name? And does he mean to make me, who first brought him to the knowledge of her, act the part of a bawd?"

Thus complaining, she immediately emerged from the sea, and hastened to her golden bedchamber, where she found her son sick, as she had been told, and so vehemently raving through the pain, that she heard him before she reached the doors. "This is fine conduct, indeed!" said she, "and very agreeable to our dignified birth, and your temperance. In the first place, that you should trample on the precepts of your mistress and mother, and, so far from tormenting my enemy with sordid love, take her to your licentious and immature embraces, on purpose that I might suffer the indignity of having my enemy for my daughter-in law. Doubtless thou dost presume, thou trifler, corrupted and unloved boy, that I am too old to have another son. Know, therefore, that I will beget another son, much better than thou art; or rather, that you may be more sensible of the disgrace, I will

adopt one of my little slaves, and on him will I bestow those wings and flames, that bow, and those arrows, and all my furniture, which I gave you for purposes very different from those to which you employ them: for you received no part of this apparatus from your father's possessions. But thou hast been of a perverse disposition from thy very childhood, and hence it is that thou hast so often struck thy elders, and even thy mother herself, even me, thou parricide. Besides, you despise me as if I were a widow; nor are you afraid of your valiant father in law, the mighty warrior God, whom, to my torment, you have supplied with many a virgin. I shall take care, however, to make you repent of this frolicsome trick of yours, and render your nuptials sharp and bitter.

“However, being thus derided, what shall I do? Where shall I betake myself? How shall I punish that little deceiver? Shall I solicit assistance of my enemy Sobriety, whom I have so often offended, through the luxury of this fraudulent boy? Must I have recourse to that rustic and filthy woman? I abhor the very thought; yet the consolation of revenge is not to be despised. I must therefore apply to her, and to her alone; for she will most severely chastise this trifler. She will rifle his quiver, disarm his arrows, unbend his bow, extinguish his torch, and punish his body with still sharper remedies. Then I shall believe atonement has been made for the injury I have received, when I have shaved off those locks, which, with these hands of mine, I have so often bound with a golden bandage, and cut off those pinions, which I have dyed in that nectareous fountain, my bosom.”

Having thus given vent to her passion, full of venereal bile, she rushed impetuously out of doors. But Ceres and Juno immediately attended her, and, perceiving her angry countenance, asked her why she did so great an injury to the gracefulness of her sparkling eyes, by such a sullen contraction of her brows? To whom Venus thus replied: “You are come very opportunely to be the executioners of that violence which has taken possession of my ardent breast. I beg, therefore, that with the utmost care and diligence you will inquire after the fugitive Psyche; for the infamous report respecting my house, and the conduct of my unworthy son, cannot be unknown to you.”

Then the two Goddesses, being ignorant of what had happened, thus endeavoured to mitigate the raging anger of Venus: “What offence has your son committed, that you so violently oppose his pleasures, and are impatient to destroy her whom he loves? What crime, we beseech you, can he be charged with in loving, without restraint, a beautiful virgin? Can you be ignorant of his sex and youth? Or have you, indeed, forgot how old he is? What, because he carries his years elegantly, would you always consider him as a boy? Is it possible, that you, who are his mother, and besides this a woman of understanding, can be determined always to pry inquisitively into his sport, blame his luxury and amours, and reprobate, in your beautiful son, your own arts and delights? But what God or man will suffer you to disseminate every where among the people amorous desires, when you restrain the gallantry of your own house, and thus shut up the public shop of female vices?” The fear of his darts induced them to pay this flattery to absent Cupid, in a gracious patronage of his cause. But Venus, indignant that her injuries were thus ridiculously treated, with haughty mien and hasty step, passed on to the ocean.

In the meantime, Psyche was driven about from place to place, variously wandering, and with restless mind enquiring after her husband; her desire of finding him increasing in proportion to the difficulty of the search. For, though she had incurred his anger, she hoped she should be able to appease him by suppliant prayers, if she could not allure him by the tender blandishments of a wife. Perceiving, therefore, a temple on the summit of a lofty mountain, "How can I tell," said she, "but this may be the residence of my lord;" and immediately she directed her hasty steps thither, incited by hope and desire, though spent with unceasing toil. And now, having gained the highest ridges of the mountain, she enters the temple, in which she saw ears of corn, some of which lay in a heap, some were twisted into garlands, and some were mingled with ears of barley. Here, likewise, were scythes, and all the instruments of harvest, but scattered in a confused and careless manner, and thrown, as is usually the case in the heat of summer, out of the weary hands of the reapers.

Psyche, on seeing this confusion, curiously separated the mingled heaps, and properly arranged them, when separated, believing that she ought not to neglect the temples and ceremonies of any divinity, but that she should implore the benevolent pity of all the Gods. The bountiful Ceres, whose temple this was, finds her thus anxiously and sedulously employed, and addresses her, at a distance, as follows: "Alas! miserable Psyche, Venus, full of rage and indignation, inquires after thy footsteps with anxious search, dooms thee to the most severe punishment, and importunately demands revenge, with all the powers of her divinity. Canst thou therefore now busy thyself about my affairs, or think of any thing else but thy own safety?"

Then Psyche, throwing herself at the feet of the Goddess, watering them with abundant weeping, and sweeping the ground with her dishevelled locks, entreated pardon of her divinity with numerous prayers. "I beseech thee," says she, "by thy fruit bearing right hand, by the joyful ceremonies of harvest, by the occult sacred concerns of the *cistæ*, by the winged car of thy ministrant dragons, the furrows of the Sicilian soil, the rapacious chariot, and the detaining earth, by the dark descending ceremonies attending the marriage of Proserpine, and the ascending rites which accompanied the luminous discovery of thy daughter, and by other arcana which Eleusis, the Attic sanctuary, conceals in profound silence, support the soul of Psyche thy suppliant! Suffer me to conceal myself in that heap of corn, for a few days, till the raging anger of so great a Goddess is mitigated by time; or at least permit me to stay here till my bodily powers, weakened by long continued labour, become invigorated by an interval of rest."

To this prayer Ceres thus replied: "I am moved by your weeping supplications, and desire to assist you; but I cannot with propriety incur the displeasure of a kindred Goddess, to whom I am united by an ancient league of friendship. Depart, therefore, from this temple immediately, and take in good part my not detaining and making you a prisoner."

Psyche, being thus repulsed, contrary to her hopes, and oppressed with a double sorrow, retired from the temple, and in a dark grove of the valley, beneath the mountain, beheld a fane of elegant structure; and, unwilling to omit any way, though dubious, which might lead to better hope, and determined to implore the pardon of every God, she suppliantly approached the sacred doors. Here she perceived splendid gifts, and parts of garments interwoven with golden letters, fixed to the branches of the trees, and the pillars of the

temple; the letters signifying, that these were votive offerings for benefits received, and exhibiting the name of the Goddess to whom they were dedicated.

Then Psyche, throwing herself on her knees, and embracing the altar, having first wiped away her tears, thus prayed: “O sister and wife of the mighty Jupiter! whether thou dost possess the ancient temples of Samos, which glories in thy querulous infancy, and in thy nurture; or whether thou dost frequent the blessed seats of the happy Carthage, which adores thee as a virgin, riding through the heavens in a lion yoked car; or dost preside over the illustrious walls of the Argives, near the banks of Inachus, which celebrates thee now married to the Thunderer, and Queen of the Gods! O! thou whom all the east venerates under the name of Zygia, and all the west denominates Lucina! be thou, Juno, the saviour in this my extreme misfortune, and deliver me, weary with the toils of such long-continued labours, from the fear of my present impending danger; for I know that thou art accustomed voluntarily to relieve the distresses of the pregnant.”

Juno immediately presented herself to Psyche supplicating, in all the august dignity of her divinity, and said, “I would most willingly have my daughter in law, Venus, yield to your prayers; but decency will not permit me to act contrary to the will of Venus, whom I have always loved as my own daughter. Besides, the law forbids me to receive into my protection any fugitive servant, without the consent of her mistress.”

But Psyche, now terrified with this second shipwreck of her fortune, and despairing of being able to recover her volatile husband, having laid aside all hope of safety, thus consulted with her own thoughts. “What other relief for my sorrows can now be either attempted or procured since even Goddesses cannot, though willing, afford me assistance? To what place shall I again direct my wandering steps, when entangled in such inextricable nets? Concealed in what habitations or darkness, can I escape the inevitable eyes of the mighty Venus? Assume, therefore, a masculine mind, my soul, bravely renounce all thy vain little hopes, voluntarily surrender thyself into the hands of thy mistress, and try, though late, to mitigate her rage by the modesty of thy behaviour. Besides, thou mayest perhaps find him in the house of his mother, whom thou hast so long sought for in vain.” Being thus prepared to enter on her dubious duty, or rather certain destruction, she considered with herself how she should begin her supplications to Venus.

Venus, however, refusing to employ earthly remedies in her inquiries after Psyche, returned to heaven. She orders the chariot to be made ready, which Vulcan, having fabricated with subtle skill, arched like the horned moon, and precious with a waste of gold, had presented her before the consummation of her marriage. Four white doves, out of many that nestled about the bedchamber of their mistress, joyfully turning about their painted necks, assume the yoke, decorated with gems, and, having taken up their mistress, gladly fly with her to heaven. The chariot of the Goddess was attended by a flock of sparrows, wantoning with loud chirpings, and by other birds who sing sweetly; all of them announcing the approach of Venus in the most mellifluous notes.

The clouds give way, the heavens unfold themselves to their daughter, and the lofty æther receives the Goddess with joy; nor does the singing family of Venus fear opposing eagles, or rapacious hawks. Then immediately she directed her steps to the royal palace of Jupiter,

and proudly demanded the necessary assistance of the vocal God Mercury; nor did the azure brow of Jupiter refuse assent. Then Venus, accompanied by Mercury, joyfully descended from heaven, and, in her flight, thus anxiously addressed him: "My Arcadian brother, you well know that your sister, Venus, never did any thing without the presence of Mercury, nor are you ignorant how long I have sought in vain for my lurking female slave. Hence nothing remains to be done, but for you to proclaim her in a public manner, and propose a reward to him that shall find her. Take care, therefore, that my commands are speedily executed, and clearly describe the marks by which she may be known, that no one may plead ignorance for the crime of unlawfully concealing her." At the same time, she gave him a small volume, in which the name of Psyche was written, and every other particular respecting her, after which she immediately returned home. Nor was Mercury negligent in the performance of her commands; for, running every where, through all nations, he cried her in the following words: "IF ANY ONE CAN SEIZE IN HER FLIGHT, OR DISCOVER WHERE A FUGITIVE KING'S DAUGHTER, A SERVANT OF VENUS, AND OF THE NAME OF PSYCHE, LIES CONCEALED, LET HIM OR HER REPAIR TO MERCURY, THE CRIER, AT THE TEMPLE OR VENUS MURTI, AND RECEIVE, AS A REWARD OF THE DISCOVERY, SEVEN SWEET KISSES FROM VENUS HERSELF, AND ONE EXQUISITELY DELICIOUS TOUCH OF HER CHARMING TONGUE."

Mercury having thus executed the proclamation of Venus, the desire of such a mighty reward excited ardent endeavours in all mortals to obtain it, and this circumstance took away from Psyche all thoughts of any farther delay. And now, as she approached the gates of her mistress, she was met by one of the servants of Venus, named Custom, who immediately exclaimed, as loud as she was able, "At length, then, most wicked slave, do you begin to know that you have a mistress? And do you likewise pretend to be ignorant of the great fatigue we have endured in endeavouring to find you out? But it is well that you have fallen into my hands; for now you have entered within the very gates of hell, to receive, without delay, the punishment of such obstinate contumacy."

After she had thus reviled Psyche, she audaciously twisted her hands in her hair, and dragged her along without resistance. But Venus, as soon as she beheld her thus brought into her presence, burst into a loud laugh, such as agitates those who are transported with vehement rage; and, shaking her head, "At length," says she, "have you thought proper to come and pay your respects to your mother-in law? Or did you rather come to see your sick husband, who is yet dangerously ill through the wound which you gave him? But take courage, for your reception will be such as a good mother in law ought to give. Where then," said she, "are my servants Solicitude and Sorrow?" These, immediately attending, in obedience to the commands of their mistress, scourged and inflicted other torments on the miserable Psyche, and afterwards brought her again into the presence of Venus.

Then Venus, again laughing: "Behold," said she, "her swelling belly moves my compassion, since it is through this that she is to make me a happy grandmother. Happy, indeed, am I, who, in the very flower of my age, shall be called a grandmother! And the son of a vile slave shall be dignified with the appellation of the grandson of Venus! Though, indeed, I foolishly call him my grandson, for marriages unequal, and, besides this, made in a village, without any witnesses, and without the father's consent, can never be deemed

legitimate; so that thy offspring must be a bastard, even if I should suffer thee to bring him into the light.”

Having thus said, she flew upon her, rent her garments in many places, tore her hair, beat her on the head, and severely chastised her in various ways. Then, taking wheat, barley, millet, poppy seed, vetches, lentils, and beans, and, mixing them into one globular heap, she thus spoke to her: “You seem to me a servant so deformed, as to be incapable of deserving your lover by any other means than the diligent performance of menial employments. I will, therefore, myself make trial of your abilities as a housewife. Take and separate this mass of seeds, and having properly disposed the several grains apart from each other, give me a proof of your expedition, by finishing the task before evening.” Thus spoke Venus, and immediately after departed to a wedding supper.

But Psyche, astonished at the prodigious command, sat silent and stupid, without moving a hand to the disordered and inextricable mass. Then a little ant, a native of the fields, vehemently commiserating such prodigious difficulty and labour, and execrating the step-mother's cruelty towards the wife of the mighty God Cupid, rapidly summoned together the populous tribe of neighbouring ants, and thus addressed them: “Take pity, ye active nurslings of the all parent earth! Take pity, and with prompt celerity, assist the wife of Love, a beautiful young woman, who is now in a dangerous situation.”

Immediately the six footed people rushed forth to her assistance in undulating tribes, and with the utmost diligence separated the whole heap, grain by grain, and, having properly sorted the confusedly mingled species, rapidly vanished from her sight.

But Venus, on the commencement of night, returns from the nuptial banquet, moist with wine, fragrant with rich ointments, and having her body elegantly bound with shining roses. And as soon as she saw the diligence which had been exerted on the wonderful labour, “Most vile creature,” said she, “this is not the work of your hands, but of his whom, to your own and his misfortune, you have pleased;” and, throwing her a piece of household bread, she retired to rest.

In the meantime, Cupid was very closely confined to his bedchamber, in the interior part of the house, partly lest he should injure his wound by petulant luxury, and partly lest he should associate with his beloved. Thus the lovers, being separated from each other under one roof, passed away, exhausted with grief, the cruel night. But as soon as Aurora had ushered in the morning, Venus having called Psyche, thus addressed her: “Do you perceive yonder grove which stretches itself to a considerable distance along the margin of a river, whose deepest whirlpools look down upon a neighbouring fountain? There shining sheep of a golden colour wander about, feeding without a shepherd. I think it fit that you should bring me immediately a flock of that precious wool, whatever may be the difficulty of procuring it.”

Psyche willingly rose, not with any intention of executing this command, but to procure rest from her misfortunes, by hurling herself headlong from the rock into the river. But when she came to the brink, a reed, the sweet nurse of music, being divinely inspired, thus prophetically spoke in soft and harmonious murmurs: “Psyche! exercised in mighty sorrows, neither pollute my sacred waters by thy most miserable death, nor yet venture to

approach the formidable sheep on the opposite bank, while, borrowing heat from the burning radiance of the sun, they are transported with savage rage, and are the destruction of mortals, either by their sharp horns, stony foreheads, or venomous bites. But when the meridian sun has driven the cattle to the shade, and the serene spirit of the flood lulled them to rest, then you may hide yourself under yonder lofty plane tree, which drinks of the same river with myself, and as soon as the sheep have mitigated their fury, on shaking the leaves of a neighbouring grove, you will find the woolly gold every where sticking to the roots of the trees." Thus the simple and humane reed taught the wretched Psyche how to accomplish this dangerous enterprise with safety.

Psyche, therefore, observing all the directions, found her obedience was not in vain, but returned to Venus with her bosom full of the delicate golden fleece. Yet she was not able to procure the approbation of her mistress by this her second perilous labour. But Venus, smiling bitterly with severe eyebrows, thus addressed her: "I am not ignorant that you are not the performer of this task also; but I will now try whether you are endued with a courageous mind and singular prudence. Do you see the summit of yonder lofty mountain, from which the dusky waters of a black fountain fall, and which, confined in the channel of the neighbouring valley, irrigate the Stygian marshes, and supply the hoarse streams of Cocytus? Bring me immediately in this little urn, liquid dew drawn from the most inmost influx of the lofty fountain." Thus speaking, she gave her a vessel of polished crystal, and at the same time threatened her more severely than before.

But Psyche, with the utmost celerity, ascended to the very summit of the mountain, presuming that there at least she should find the period of her most miserable life. However, when she arrived at the confines of the vertex, she saw the deadly difficulty of the vast undertaking. For a rock enormously lofty, and inaccessibly rugged, vomited from its middle the horrid waters of the fountain, which, immediately falling headlong in winding streams, rushed suddenly through a narrow channel into the neighbouring valley. On the right and left hand they creep through hollow rocks, over which fierce dragons stretch out their long necks, and with unwinking vigilance keep a perpetual watch. And now the vocal waters shook themselves, and exclaimed as they rolled along, "Depart; what do you attempt? Look and see what you do; take care, fly, or you will perish."

Psyche, therefore, petrified through the impossibility of accomplishing the task, though she was present in body, was absent in mind, and being perfectly buried under the huge bulk of the inextricable danger, was even deprived of the benefit of tears, the last solace of the wretched. But the sorrow of the innocent soul is not concealed from the penetrating eyes of Providence. For the rapacious eagle, that royal bird of Jupiter, on a sudden flew to her with expanded wings, calling to mind his ancient obligations to Cupid, for enabling him to elevate to heaven the Phrygian cup bearer [Ganymedes] to Jupiter; and reverencing the divinity of Cupid, in the labours of his wife, deserted the lofty paths of Jupiter, and bringing with him seasonable assistance, thus addressed her: "Can you, in other respects of an undesigning disposition, and unexperienced in attempts of this kind, ever hope to steal one drop of this most holy and no less terrible fountain? Have you not heard, at least, that these Stygian waters are formidable even to Jupiter himself, and that as you swear by the divinity of the Gods, so they are accustomed to swear by the majesty of Styx? But give

me that little urn.” Immediately, therefore, taking it in haste, and poising it on his moving wings, he sailed between the cheeks of raging teeth, and the three forked vibrating tongues of the dragons, and steering his course to the right and to the left, drew off the reluctant waters, which previously admonished him that he might depart in safety, because he pretended Venus herself wanted some of the water, and had ordered him to procure it. And on this account, his access to the fountain was facilitated.

Psyche, therefore, joyfully receiving the full urn, returned with the utmost celerity to Venus. Yet she was not able, even by the accomplishment of this dangerous enterprise, to appease the anger of the raging Goddess. For, threatening her with still more severe endurance, she thus addressed her, a smile, the harbinger of ruin, accompanying her words: “You appear to me to be a profound and malevolent magician, or you never could with so much dexterity have performed my commands: but there is one task more, my dear, which you ought to perform. Take this box, (she immediately gave it her), and direct your course to the infernal regions and the deadly palace of Pluto. Then presenting the box to Proserpine, say, Venus requests you to send her a small portion of your beauty, at least as much as may be sufficient for one short day; for she has consumed all the beauty she possessed, through the attention which she pays to her diseased son. But return with the utmost expedition; for it is necessary that I should adorn myself with this beauty of Proserpine, as I must go to the theatre of the Gods.”

Psyche was now truly sensible, that she was arrived at the extremity of her evil fortune; and clearly perceived that, all further pretences being laid aside, she was impelled to immediate destruction, since she was forced to direct her steps to Tartarus and the shades below. Hence, without any farther delay, she ascended a lofty tower, that she might from thence hurl herself headlong: for she considered that she should thus descend by a straight road, and in a beautiful manner, to the infernal regions. But she was no sooner arrived there, than the tower suddenly addressed her in the following words:

“Why, O miserable creature, dost thou seek to destroy thyself by falling headlong from hence? And why dost thou rashly sink under this thy last danger and endurance? For as soon as thy breath shall thus be separated from thy body, thou wilt indeed descend to profound Tartarus, but canst not by any means return from thence. Listen, therefore, to me. Lacedæmon, a noble city of Achaia, is not far from hence. Near this city, concealed in devious places, seek Tenarus; for there you will find the cavity through which Pluto breathes, and the impassable road presents itself to the view through the yawning gates. As soon as you have passed the threshold of this cavity, you proceed in a direct path to the palace of Pluto. You ought not, however, to pass through those shades with empty hands, but should take a sop of barley bread, soaked in hydromel, in both your hands, and in your mouth two pieces of money. And now, when you have accomplished a good part of your deadly journey, you will meet a lame ass laden with wood, with a driver as lame as himself, who will ask you to reach him certain cords to fasten the burden which has fallen from the ass; but be careful that you pass by him in silence. Then, without any delay, proceed till you arrive at the dead river, in which Charon, immediately demanding his fee, in his patched boat ferries over the passengers to the farthest shore.

“Avarice, therefore, lives among the dead. Nor does Charon himself, nor the father Pluto, though so great a God, do any thing gratuitously. The poor man, dying, ought to prepare his viaticum; and no one suffers him to expire without having money at hand. To this squalid old man give one of the pieces of money which you carry with you; yet in such a manner, that he may take it with his own hand from your mouth. While you are passing over the sluggish river, a certain dead old man, floating on its surface, and raising his putrid hand, will entreat you to take him into the boat. However, be careful that you are not influenced by an unlawful piety. Having passed over the river, and proceeded to a little distance from thence, certain old women, weaving a web, will request you to lend them a helping hand; but it is not lawful for you to touch the web. For all these, and many other particulars, are snares prepared for you by Venus, that you may drop one of the sops out of your hands. But do not suppose that this would be a trifling loss; since the want of only one of these sops, would prevent your return to light. For a huge dog, with three necks, and heads sufficiently large, fierce, and formidable, barking with his thundering jaws, terrifies in vain the dead, whom he cannot injure; and always watching before the threshold and black palace of Proserpine, guards the empty house of Pluto. Having appeased this dog with one of your sops, you may easily pass by him, and then you will immediately enter into the presence of Proserpine herself, who will receive you in a very courteous and benignant manner, desire you to repose yourself on a soft seat, and persuade you to partake of a sumptuous banquet. But seat yourself on the ground, and having asked for a piece of common bread, eat it. Then telling your message, and receiving what you came for, bribe the cruelty of the dog by the remaining sop. Afterwards, having given to the avaricious ferryman the piece of money which you have reserved, and passed his river, you will return to the choir of the celestial stars. But, above all things, I think you should particularly be cautious not to open or even look on the box which you carry, or explore that concealed treasury of divine beauty.” In this manner the propitious tower delivered its prophetic admonitions.

Psyche, therefore, without delay, proceeded to Tenarus, and taking in a proper manner her pieces of money and her sops, ran down the infernal avenue. Here, having passed by the lame ass in silence, given the ferryman his fee, neglected the entreaties of the floating corpse, despised the fraudulent prayers of the spinsters, and lulled the rage of the horrid dog with a sop, she penetrated the palace of Proserpine. Nor did she accept the delicate seat or delicious banquet; but humbly sat at the feet of Proserpine, and being contented with a piece of common bread, delivered her embassy from Venus. Immediately after this, she received the box secretly filled and shut; and having barred the barking of the dog by the fraud of the remaining sop, and given the ferryman the other piece of money, she returned from the infernal regions much more vigorous than before. Then again enjoying and adoring the fair light of day, though she was in haste to finish her errand, she was seized with a rash curiosity: “Behold,” said she, “what a foolish bearer am I of divine beauty, who do not even take the least portion of it, that I may by this means appear pleasing in the eyes of my beautiful lover.” As she ended this soliloquy, she opened the box; but it contained no beauty, nor indeed any thing but an infernal and truly Stygian sleep, which being freed from its confinement, immediately invades her, oppresses all her members with a cloud of profound sleep, and detains her, fallen down in the very place

where she opened the box; so that she lay motionless, and nothing else than a sleeping corpse.

But Cupid, being now recovered of his wound, and not enduring the long absence of his Psyche, gliding through the narrow window of the bedchamber in which he was confined, and having his wings invigorated by repose, flew far more swiftly than before; and dispelling the sleep from the prying fair, and again concealing it in its ancient seat, the box, roused Psyche with an innoxious touch of one of his arrows. "And behold," said he, "miserable creature, thou wouldst again have perished by a similar curiosity. Now, however, strenuously perform the task imposed on thee by my mother, and I myself will take care of the rest." Having thus spoke, the lover raised himself on high with the rowing of his wings, and Psyche immediately carried the present of Proserpine to Venus.

In the meantime, Cupid, wasting away through excess of love, and dreading the sudden severity of his mother, returns to his armoury, and having with rapid wings penetrated the summit of heaven, supplicates the mighty Jupiter, and defends his cause. Then Jupiter, stroking the little cheeks of Cupid, and kissing his hand, thus addressed him: "Though you, my son, endued with the authority of a master, never pay me that reverence which has been decreed me by the synod of the Gods, but perpetually wound this breast of mine, by which the laws of the elements and the revolutions of the stars are governed, and frequently defile it with earthly intrigues, contrary to the laws, the Julian edict,<sup>1</sup> and public discipline, injuring my reputation and fame by base adulteries, and sordidly changing my serene countenance into serpents, fire, wild beasts, birds, and cattle; yet remembering my own moderation, and that you have been nursed in these hands of mine, I will accomplish all that you desire; and at the same time you must be sensible that you ought to guard against your rivals, and to recompense me for this service, by presenting me with any girl of transcendant beauty that may now happen to be upon the earth."

Having thus spoke, he ordered Mercury immediately to summon all the Gods to attend; and at the same time to proclaim, that, if any one of the celestials was absent, he should be fined ten thousand pieces of money. Through fear of this, therefore, the celestial theatre being immediately filled, lofty Jupiter, sitting on his sublime throne, thus addressed the assembly of Gods: "Ye conscript Gods, whose names are registered in the white roll of the Muses, you are all well acquainted with that youth whom I have reared with my own hands, and the fiery impetus of whose first years I thought would have been restrained by some bridle or other. It is sufficient that he is every day defamed in conversation, for the adulteries and all manner of corruption of which he is the cause. Every occasion of this is to be taken away, and his puerile luxury ought to be bound in nuptial fetters. He has made choice of a girl, and deprived her of her virginity. Let him, therefore, hold her, let him possess her, and embracing Psyche, always enjoy the object of his love." Then turning his face to Venus, "Nor do you, my daughter," said he, "be sorrowful on this occasion, nor fearful that your pedigree and rank will be disgraced by a mortal marriage; for I will now cause the nuptials not to be unequal, but legitimate, and agreeable to the civil law." Immediately after this, he ordered Mercury to bring Psyche to Heaven; and as soon as she

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<sup>1</sup> Alluding to the law against adultery, instituted by Augustus Caesar.

was arrived, extending to her a cup of ambrosia, “Take this,” said he, “Psyche, and be immortal; nor shall Cupid ever depart from thy embrace, but these nuptials of yours shall be perpetual.”

Then, without delay, the wedding supper was served in great abundance. The husband, reclining at the upper end of the table, embraced Psyche in his bosom; and in this manner, Jupiter was seated with Juno, and after them, the other Gods and Goddesses in their proper order. Then Jupiter was presented with a bowl of nectar, which is the wine of the Gods, by that rustic youth [Ganymedes], his cup bearer; but Bacchus supplied the rest. Vulcan dressed the supper; the Hours purpled over every thing with roses, and other fragrant flowers; the Graces scattered balsam; the Muses sung melodiously; Apollo accompanied the lyre with his voice; and Venus beautifully danced with steps in unison with the delightful music. The order, too, of the entertainment was, that the Muses should sing the chorus, Satyrus play on the flute, and Paniscus speak to the pipe. Thus Psyche came lawfully into the hands of Cupid; and, at length, from a mature pregnancy, a daughter was born to them, whom we denominate Pleasure.

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Taken from books 4-6 of the *Golden Ass* (or the *Metamorphoses*) by Apuleius.

The *Golden Ass* is, like *A Thousand and One Nights*, a kaleidoscope of tales within tales – all told with a vivacious charm and vigour. The overarching story concerns Lucius whose curiosity and love of experiment leads him to be changed by magic into an ass; the many adventures he undergoes after this revolve around the attempt to recover his human form, and culminate in his being restored and initiated by the power of the Goddess to whom he turns in despair.

Apuleius (c. 124 – c. 170 AD) himself was a Platonic philosopher (amongst his works is an introductory summary of the philosophy of Plato, and a treatise on the Guardian Daemon of Socrates). He wrote in Latin being a Numidian who lived under the Roman Empire; he was from Madauros (now M'Daourouch, Algeria). He studied Platonism in Athens, travelled to Italy, Asia Minor, and Egypt, and was an initiate in several mystery cults. The *Golden Ass* and other philosophical writings are published together by the Prometheus Trust.

The translator, Thomas Taylor, first published the *Fable of Cupid and Psyche* as a single tale in 1795, but later published the entire *Golden Ass* (1822). Details of this and his other writings and translations can be found on the Prometheus Trust website.