

Cupid and Psyche

A Roman Myth

By: Lucius Apuleius

A Readers Theater by: Cindy Grigg



Parts:

King

Queen

Antonia

Julia

Psyche

Venus

Cupid

Narrator 1

Narrator 2

Oracle of Apollo

Voices (servants)

Reeds

Voice from the tower

Jupiter

King: Good morning, wife. How is my queen today?

Queen: I'm fine, Your Majesty. It is an exciting day. Our daughter, Psyche (SIGH-kee), is celebrating her eighteenth birthday!

King: (sighing) Ah, yes, our little Psyche is all grown up. I think she grows more beautiful every day.

Queen: Why, we cannot even go to the forum to buy cloth for new clothes for her without crowds gathering just to look at her. And this morning when we came home from shopping, some people actually threw flowers at her feet! They act as though she is Venus herself, the goddess of beauty and love.

King: Do crowds gather for Antonia and Julia, too?

Queen: No. They are pretty enough, I think, but Psyche's beauty is far greater. I wish it were not; I am afraid that Venus will hear of it and become angry.

King: Perhaps we should keep Psyche busy here at home.

Queen: Yes, perhaps we should.

Narrator 1: The goddess Venus returned to her home, shaking with righteous anger. Her son, Cupid, was there.

Cupid: Hello, Mother. You are looking exceptionally lovely today.

Venus: Thank you, my dear son. But I am very angry!

Cupid: What's wrong, Mother?

Venus: My altar was deserted today. No one was there to worship me or to leave me gifts. The people have given their affection to a young princess. I saw her walking through the streets today. The

people sang her praises and threw flowers at her feet. She is not a goddess! I will not be overshadowed by a mortal girl! She shall not usurp my honors! I will give her cause to regret so unlawful a beauty.

Cupid: What will you do, Mother?

Venus: Not I, my son. It's what will YOU do. I want you to find this girl. Her name is Psyche. I want you to punish that traitorous beauty. Give your mother revenge as sweet as my injuries are great. Make her fall in love with some mean, unworthy being, so that she may suffer hardship as great as her present triumph.

Cupid: I will go and do as you say, Mother.

Narrator 2: Cupid prepared to obey the commands of his mother. There were two fountains in Venus's garden. One had sweet waters that brought joy; out of the other flowed bitter waters. Cupid filled two vases, one from each fountain. He tied them to the top of his quiver. Then he hurried to find Psyche, who was sleeping.

Cupid: She truly is beautiful— maybe even more beautiful than my mother. I will show mercy— No, I must do as my mother commands.

Narrator 1: He poured a few drops from the bitter fountain over her lip. Then he touched her side with the point of his arrow. She awoke and looked in his direction.

Narrator 2: Cupid was invisible, so Psyche could not see him. But he saw her and bore the full force of her beauty. He was so startled by it that, in his confusion, he wounded himself with his own arrow. His whole thought then was to repair the mischief he had done. He poured the drops of joy from the other vase over Psyche's silken curls. Then he left.

King: Hello, my beautiful Psyche. I have called you here to tell you some wonderful news.

Psyche: Hello, Father. What is this wonderful news?

King: Both of your sisters are to be married soon. Antonia is to be wed to Prince Octavian. And Prince Maxentius has asked for the hand of Julia in marriage.

Psyche: (sadly) Yes, that is wonderful news, Father.

King: Now, Psyche, you should be happy for your sisters. Both of them are to marry royal princes! They will be taken care of for the rest of their lives. Don't despair of a husband yet. You are the most beautiful one of all!

Psyche: Yes, Father, I am happy for them. But neither king nor prince nor plebeian has come to you to ask for my hand in marriage. I am lonely! I am sick of my beauty! It has gained me flattery but failed to awaken love.

King: Perhaps we have unknowingly angered the gods. I shall ask the oracle of Apollo what to do.

Narrator 1: The king did ask the oracle of Apollo for advice about his youngest daughter. And the oracle said:

Oracle of Apollo: The princess Psyche is destined to be the bride of no mortal. Her future husband awaits her on the top of the mountain. He is a monster whom neither gods nor men can fight.

Narrator 2: These dreadful words of the oracle filled all the people with alarm. Psyche's parents gave themselves up to grief.

Psyche: Why, my dear parents, do you now cry for me? You should rather have grieved when the people showered upon me undeserved honors and, with one voice, called me a Venus. I now see that I am a victim to that name. I submit. Lead me to that mountain to meet my unhappy fate.

Narrator 1: Psyche's parents took her to the top of the mountain. With sorrowful hearts, they left her there and returned home. Psyche stood on the top of the mountain with eyes full of tears.

Narrator 2: Then the gentle Zephyr raised her from the earth and carried her to a flowery valley. There, Psyche felt calm and peaceful, and she laid herself down on the grass to sleep.

Psyche: (yawning) That nap was refreshing! I'm so thirsty. Perhaps there is a spring hidden in that grove of tall trees.

Narrator 1: Psyche entered the grove of trees. She heard the gentle sounds of rippling water and, following the sounds, she discovered a spring, out of which flowed clear and crystal waters.

Psyche: Oh, what a magnificent palace! Look at the golden pillars that hold up the vaulted roof. It seems so grand that I wonder if it was built by the hands of the gods.

Narrator 2: Drawn by admiration and wonder, she approached the building and went inside. Every object she saw filled her with pleasure and amazement. The walls were covered with carvings and paintings, beautiful and precious pieces of art. Everywhere she saw all manner of treasures.

Voices: Beautiful lady, all that you see is yours.

Psyche: Who's there? Where are you?

Voices: We whose voices you hear are your servants. We shall obey all your commands with our utmost care. You may go to your chamber and lie on your bed of down. A bath will be prepared for you. Supper awaits you in the next room whenever it pleases you.

Narrator 1: Psyche enjoyed the refreshment of a bath and then seated herself in the next room. A table immediately presented itself without any visible aid from servants. It was covered with the greatest delicacies of food and drink. Her ears, too, were feasted with music from invisible performers. One sang while another played on the lute. She grew pleasantly tired and retired to bed.

Narrator 2: That night while she was sleeping, her intended husband came to her. They talked of many things, but before the dawn of morning, he left her. Each night, he came to her only in the darkness and fled before the dawn. His voice was full of love, and she fell in love with him.

Psyche: Husband, what is your name?

Cupid: Some call me Eros.

Psyche: Eros, when morning comes, will you stay? I want to see your face.

Cupid: Why should you wish to behold me? Have you any doubt of my love? Have you any wish unfulfilled? If you saw me, perhaps you would fear me. Perhaps you would worship me, but all I ask of you is to love me. I would rather you would love me as an equal than worship me as a god.

Psyche: Very well, husband. I am so happy that I will do anything you say.

Narrator 1: But as time passed, Psyche thought of her parents and of her sisters. The thought of them wondering about her fate preyed upon her mind. She knew her family would be sick with worry for her. The palace began to feel like a splendid prison.

Psyche: Eros, I am so distressed about my family. My mother and father must be sick with worry. Please, may I go to see them? Or at least bring them here to see me?

Cupid: My beautiful wife, please do not be distressed. I am uneasy about letting anyone know of how happy we are. Why tempt the gods? But if it concerns you so much, I suppose your sisters can come to see you.

Psyche: Oh, thank you, husband! You have made me so happy!

Narrator 1: The next morning, Psyche called Zephyr to come to her. She told him her husband's command. Zephyr, promptly obedient, soon brought her sisters across the mountain down to their sister's valley. The three hugged and cried with happiness.

Psyche: Come, enter with me my house and refresh yourselves with whatever you would like.

Narrator 2: Taking their hands, she led them into her golden palace. She gave them over to the care of her many servant voices. After a sumptuous meal, she began to show them all her treasures. Seeing these heavenly delights caused her sisters to feel envy at seeing their young sister enjoying such splendor, which was far beyond their own.

Antonia: Where is your husband, Psyche?

Julia: What is he like? What sort of person is he?

Psyche: He is a beautiful young man who often spent the daytime hunting upon the mountains. We are very much in love.

Antonia: And what does he look like? How old is he?

Julia: Is he very handsome?

Psyche: I must confess, sisters, that I have never seen him.

Antonia and Julia: WHAT?

Psyche: I have never seen him. He comes to me only in darkness and leaves before the morning light.

Antonia: Remember, Psyche, the oracle said that you are destined to marry a monster. Your husband must be a terrible and monstrous serpent, if he won't let you see his face. Perhaps he feeds you tasty treats so that he may by and by devour you!

Julia: Take our advice. Get yourself a lamp and a sharp knife. Hide them so that your husband may not find them. Then when he is sound asleep, slip out of bed, bring forth your lamp, and see for yourself if what we say is true or not. If it is, do not hesitate to cut off the monster's head. Then you will be free.

Psyche: No, sisters, it cannot be true! My husband is a kind and gentle man. I will not let you speak of this again!

Narrator 1: Psyche tried to forget these words as well as she could, but they did not fail to have their effect on her mind. When her sisters were gone, their words and her own curiosity were too strong for her to resist.

Narrator 2: So she prepared her lamp and a sharp knife and hid them out of sight of her husband. One night after he had fallen asleep, she silently rose and let the lamplight fall on her sleeping husband's form.

Psyche: (whispering) You are not a hideous monster! I knew it could not be so! You are beautiful, my husband. But I see that you are not a man – your golden curly hair and the feathery white wings on your shoulders tell me that you are one of the gods.

Narrator 1: As she leaned the lamp over to have a better view of his face, some of the burning oil fell on his shoulder. Struggling awake, Cupid opened his eyes and fixed them upon her. Then, without saying a word, he spread his white wings and flew out of the window.

Narrator 2: Psyche tried to follow him and fell from the window to the ground. Cupid, looking back, saw her as she lay in the dust. He called to her.

Cupid: Oh, foolish Psyche, is this the way you repay my love? After I disobeyed my mother's commands and made you my wife, will you think me a monster and cut off my head? Now you must go; return to your sisters, whose advice you seem to value over mine. I inflict no other punishment on you than to leave you forever. Love cannot live with suspicion.

Psyche: (upset) I'm so sorry! Please come back to me!

Narrator 2: But Cupid flew away, leaving Psyche crying on the ground.

Narrator 1: Psyche looked around her. The palace and gardens had vanished. Psyche wandered, heartbroken, day and night, without food or sleep, in search of her husband. One day she saw in the distance a magnificent temple.

Psyche: (sighing) Perhaps my love, my husband, lives there.

Narrator 2: Psyche entered the temple and saw heaps of corn, some in loose ears and some gathered in sheaves, with mingled ears of barley. Scattered about were sickles and rakes and all the instruments of harvest. It was as if they had been thrown carelessly out of the weary reapers' hands in the sultry hours of the day.

Psyche: This disorder is so unseemly in such a beautiful place! I will sort it out and put everything into its proper place.

Ceres: Look at this place! You have put everything in order again! Thank you, Psyche.

Psyche: You know me?

Ceres: Oh, yes, I know who you are. I know that you have married Cupid, and I know that Venus is very angry with you. Oh, Psyche, you are worthy of my pity. I am only the goddess of farming. I cannot shield you from Venus and her anger, but I can teach you how best to calm her. Go to her. Give up yourself to her and try by modesty and obedience to win her forgiveness. Perhaps her favor will restore to you the husband you have lost.

Narrator 2: Psyche obeyed the words of Ceres and went to the temple of Venus. She tried to think about what she should say and how best to win the favor of the angry goddess. Psyche was afraid that trying to win Venus's favor was doubtful. It might even be fatal!

Venus: (angrily) Have you finally come to honor me at last? Or are you looking for your sick husband, laid up of the wound you have given him with burning oil? No matter; you must work to earn our favor.

Narrator 1: Venus gave Psyche a series of tasks to perform. First, she ordered Psyche to be led to the storehouse of her temple. There was a great quantity of wheat, barley, millet, vetches, beans, and lentils.

Venus: Take and separate all these grains, putting all of the same kind in a parcel by themselves. See that you get it done before evening.

Narrator 1: Psyche despaired. Completing the task seemed impossible. But Cupid knew that Psyche had come looking for him. He knew what his mother had done. Cupid sent ants to help Psyche. The ants approached the heap, and with the utmost diligence, they separated the pile grain by grain, sorting each kind to its parcel. When it was all done, they vanished out of sight in a moment.

Venus: It is finished! This is no work of yours, wicked one, but my son's, whom to your own and his misfortune you have beguiled. Tomorrow, you will go to the grove of trees that stretches along the river. There you will find sheep feeding without a shepherd, sheep with golden shining fleeces on their backs. Go and fetch me some of that precious wool gathered from their fleeces.

Narrator 2: Psyche obediently went to the riverside the next day. She was prepared to do her best to carry out Venus's commands. But the sight of the large sheep and the thought of crossing the rushing river frightened Psyche. Again, the gods came to her aid.

Reeds: Oh, princess, severely tried, tempt not the dangerous river or the fearsome rams. But when the noontime sun has driven them to the shade and they lay down to rest, you may then cross in safety. You will find the woolly gold sticking to the bushes and the trunks of the trees, and you may gather it without harm.

Narrator 1: Psyche did as the reeds had said, and she soon returned to Venus with her arms full of the golden fleece.

Venus: (angrily) I know very well it is by none of your own doings that you have succeeded in this task. I am not satisfied yet. I have another task for you. Here, take this box and go to the underworld. Give this box to Proserpine (Proh-SUR-puh-nee) and say, "My mistress Venus desires you to send her a little of your beauty, for in tending her sick son she has lost some of her own." Be not too long on your errand. You must return before evening.

Psyche: Now I am sure that my death is at hand! I cannot go to the underworld and return! I will throw myself from the top of this high tower.

Voice from the tower: Why, poor unlucky girl, do you plan to put an end to your days in so dreadful a manner? What cowardice makes you give up in the face of this last danger? Haven't you been miraculously helped in your other tasks? You may reach the underworld through a certain cave. It is near the river where you heard the voices of the reeds. Do you know it?

Psyche: Yes, I saw a cave there. But there will be more dangers! Can you help me?

Voice from the tower: Yes, I will tell you how to avoid all the dangers of the road. I will tell you how to pass by Cerberus, the three-headed dog. There are some coins by the doorway; take them to pay Charon, the ferryman, to take you across the black river Styx and bring you back again. And when Proserpine has given you the box filled with her beauty, you must remember this of all things: you must never once open or look into the box. Do not allow your curiosity to pry into the treasure of the beauty of the goddesses.

Psyche: I will obey you. Thank you for helping me.

Narrator 2: Psyche was encouraged by this advice. She obeyed it in all things and traveled safely to the kingdom of Pluto. She was admitted to the palace of Proserpine, and was offered a delicate seat at a delicious banquet. She gracefully declined all that was offered her and delivered her message from Venus. Presently the box was given to her, shut and filled with the precious goods. Then she returned the way she came, and glad was she to come out once more into the light of day.

Narrator 1: But having gotten so far successfully through her dangerous task, her curiosity caused her to look at the contents of the box.

Psyche: I, the carrier of this divine beauty, shall take just a bit to put on my cheeks to gain once more the love of my beloved husband!

Narrator 1: Psyche carefully opened the box. But she found nothing there of any beauty at all. Inside was an infernal Stygian sleep, which being set free from its prison, took possession of her. Psyche fell down in the midst of the road, sleepy and motionless.

Cupid: Mother, I have recovered from my wound. I am no longer able to bear the absence of my beloved Psyche. I must go find her.

Venus: No, you shall not! I forbid it!

Cupid: I'm sorry, Mother. I love her. I must find her.

Narrator 1: Cupid slipped out of the window of his chamber and flew to the spot where Psyche lay. He gathered up the sleep from her body closed it again in the box. Then he woke Psyche with a light touch of one of his arrows.

Cupid: Again you have almost perished by the same curiosity. But now finish the task forced on you by my mother, and I will take care of the rest.

Narrator 2: Then Cupid, as swift as lightning, flew to Jupiter, king of all the gods, with his plea.

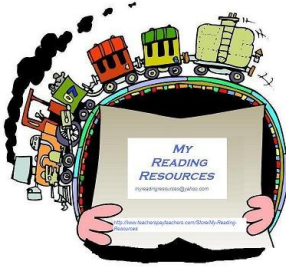
Jupiter: Yes, Cupid, I will ask Venus for her mercy on you and your young bride.

Narrator 1: Because of Jupiter's support, Venus agreed to their marriage. Then Jupiter sent Mercury, the winged messenger, to bring Psyche up to the home of the gods.

Jupiter: You have regained the favor of Venus. Drink this, Psyche, and be immortal. Then you and Cupid may be married and live together forever.

Narrator 2: Psyche drank the cup of ambrosia Jupiter gave her. She was reunited with Cupid, and in due time, they had a daughter. The story of Cupid and Psyche is the story of true love. Although his appearance has changed over the years, Cupid remains the symbol

of love. He appears every Valentine's Day with his bow and arrows on cards and candy, delivering messages of love.



Text type: Myth

Lexile 890

Flesch-Kincaid 5.1

Word count 3075

Source: Thomas Bulfinch, *The Age of Fable; or, Stories of Gods and Heroes* (1855)

<http://www.teacherspayteachers.com/Store/My-Reading-Resources>

Copyright © 2013 My Reading Resources
All rights reserved by author.