



Eros and Psyche



The term *psyche* is Greek for “soul.” Born to a family of three beautiful sisters, Psyche’s beauty was almost as legendary as that of Helen. An oracle predicted that she would marry a “monster,” and jealous Aphrodite insisted that Eros carry out this prediction. But Eros intervened, falling in love with Psyche and hiding her in a palace. He visited Psyche only at night, forbidding her to look on him. Psyche eventually became discontent with never seeing her husband during his nocturnal visits, and she lit a lamp to peek at his sleeping form. A drop of oil fell on him, he woke up, and quickly departed, leaving Psyche alone. Psyche wandered the world searching for him until the gods took pity on her. According to Ernest Crawley (*The Mystic Rose*, New York: Meridian Books, 1960, p. 42), the story probably arose from the custom in ancient Sparta of young husbands only visiting their wives at night. In the familiar Latin version, Venus is the jealous goddess, inadvertently sending her son Cupid to Psyche’s side.

Presentation Suggestions

Eros and Psyche can sit on stools in the center of the stage. The narrators and sisters can stand on one side of the stage. Father, the Oracle, and Aphrodite can stand on the other side of the stage.

Props

Psyche and Eros can be dressed in simple, elegant clothing. Eros can have a bow and arrows nearby. Father can be dressed like royalty. The oracle should be in simple clothing. Aphrodite should be in a long, flowing gown. The sisters should wear dresses.

Delivery Suggestions

Eros should sound kind and persuasive. Psyche should sound somewhat evasive when describing her unusual marital arrangement to her sisters and desperate when she loses Eros. The sisters should sound skeptical about Psyche's trust in her husband.

Characters

- ☐ Narrator 1
- ☐ Father
- ☐ Oracle
- ☐ Narrator 2
- ☐ Aphrodite
- ☐ Eros
- ☐ Psyche
- ☐ Sister 1
- ☐ Sister 2



Eros and Psyche

Narrator 1: Once there was a king who had three beautiful daughters. People came from distant lands just to gaze upon these three exquisite creatures, especially the one called Psyche. Soon Psyche's sisters were married, but Psyche's beauty was so stunning that she intimidated all who dared even to think of marrying her. Her father was unsure of how he should direct her future and consulted an oracle.

Father: I have come here seeking your wisdom about my daughter.

Oracle: Tell me about her.

Father: She is an exquisite young woman, but she is so beautiful that men are afraid of her. It's time that she marry, but men take one look at her and fear they could never win her heart.

Oracle: Your daughter is indeed beautiful, and she will marry. But she will marry a horrible monster.

Father: How can this be? She is a delicate young woman who has done no harm to man or beast. Surely this fate is unworthy and cruel.

Oracle: You came to me to learn what to do, and you know that you can't escape what the Fates have prophesied.

Father: What must I do?

Oracle: Dress her to be married and take her to the summit of the mountain. There she will be claimed.

Narrator 2: Psyche's distraught father returned home, wondering how he would find the words to explain to his wife and daughter what lay ahead. Soon, with heavy hearts, Psyche's parents dressed her in wedding clothes and led her to the mountain, where they explained her fate to their daughter and tearfully bade her good-bye.

Narrator 1: In truth, as often happens when a mortal attracts the attention of the gods, Psyche faced this fate because she had become the victim of jealousy. Resenting the attention Psyche received, Aphrodite had called upon her son Eros to exact her revenge.

Aphrodite: Eros, I want you to do something about this Psyche. In keeping with the directives of the oracle, her parents have dressed her for marriage and abandoned her on a mountaintop. Go there and make sure that she falls in love with the most horrible, despicable monster you can find.

Eros: Do you have someone in mind, Mother?

Aphrodite: No, son. I am just so weary of hearing about her beauty, and I want her out of my sight. Just do this for me in whatever fashion you wish.

Narrator 2: Eros descended to the mountain summit where he found Psyche, sleeping soundly. Just like mortals, he was struck by her beauty and took pity on her. He decided he couldn't give her to anyone repulsive but must have her for himself. He quickly devised a plan that would keep his treachery secret but would allow him to have her all to himself. With the help of Zephyrus, Psyche was transported to a magnificent palace. She woke in the darkness to his quiet voice.

Eros: Psyche, wake up. You have nothing to fear, my dear.

Psyche: Where am I?

Eros: Don't worry about that, you're safe. When daylight comes, you'll see that you are living in a beautiful, comfortable palace. You'll want for nothing.

Psyche: But who are you? Let me light the lamp so I can see you.

Eros: No, my dear. You need to trust me. Understand that I can only visit you at night and that you can't ever look upon my face. Will you agree?

Psyche: Are you so terrible that I can't look upon you without revulsion?

Eros: Of course not, Psyche, but it is better that you trust me.

Narrator 1: The young couple talked through the night, and Psyche gradually came to trust Eros's kind, loving manner. During the day, Psyche wandered the grounds of the palace, enjoying the pleasant rooms and lush gardens. Each night, her affection for Eros grew, and she was by and large content with her fate. Her days were long, however, and she became lonely. Finally she entreated Eros to let her see her sisters.

Psyche: Dear, I have a favor to ask of you.

Eros: You know I would grant almost anything to you, Psyche. Has something made you unhappy?

Psyche: The time I spend with you is wonderful, but my days are long. I miss my family and wondered if I could see my sisters.

Eros: I don't think that would be wise, Psyche. You know you can't leave the palace.

Psyche: I know, but what is to stop them from coming here for a visit? It needn't be long, and even a brief visit would sustain me for a long time. I do miss them so.

Eros: Well, I suppose if they came here it would be all right. But it can only be a short visit.

Psyche: Of course, dear. I promise that it will be just the briefest of visits.

Narrator 2: When her sisters arrived, Psyche's luxurious home and way of life impressed them.

Sister 1: Psyche, it appears that we were worried unnecessarily. This is a magnificent palace.

Psyche: Yes, it is lovely, isn't it? And my husband is really charming.

Sister 2: But I don't understand. It was foretold that you would be married to a monster. What is he like? How can the prophecy be so wrong?

Psyche: He's not a monster but is kind and loving. I couldn't be happier than when he is with me.

Sister 1: What do you mean by that? Doesn't he live with you?

Psyche: Of course he does.

Sister 2: Then let's meet him. We're so eager to meet him and see what he looks like.

Psyche: I'm afraid that's impossible.

Sister 1: I don't understand.

Psyche: I've never seen him.

Sister 2: Psyche, you're talking in riddles. You seem to be in love with him, but you've never seen him? This doesn't make sense.

Psyche: It's an unusual arrangement, I admit. You see, he only comes at night, and he won't allow me to light a lamp. So I've never really seen him.

Sister 1: Then he *must* be a monster as the oracle foretold.

Psyche: No! I don't believe he is. He has been nothing but loving and charming. I know in my heart that he's a wonderful man.

Sister 2: He is deceiving you, Psyche, and it's time you found out who he truly is.

Psyche: But he's forbidden me to look at him. Although I am curious, of course. . . .

Sister 1: Forget that. You *must* look at him. Just light a lamp one night when he's asleep and take a quick peek. He'll never know, and you'll have your curiosity satisfied.

Psyche: I'll think about it, but let's talk of other things now.

Narrator 1: Their visit soon came to a close. That night, Psyche thought about all they had discussed and decided she couldn't resist one quick look at her beloved husband. She quickly lit her lamp and looked down at the sleeping form of a truly splendid young man. Psyche gasped with joy and leaned closer, spilling a drop of oil on his sleeping form.

Narrator 2: Eros woke up and faced her, shaking with anger.

Eros: How could you disobey me, Psyche? You've ruined everything! Why couldn't you believe in me? What happened to the love I showed you? Couldn't you trust me? Good-bye, Psyche, for this is the end for us.

Narrator 1: With those final words of reproach, both Eros and the palace disappeared, leaving Psyche bereft and frantic with despair.

Psyche: What have I done? Why did I listen to my sisters?

Narrator 2: Psyche began to wander the world, praying to the gods for help in finding her beloved. Aphrodite pursued her, putting her through a variety of terrible ordeals. Eros, watching from afar, became increasingly convinced that Psyche indeed loved him. After her journeys led her to a brief visit to the Underworld, Eros took pity on her and went to Zeus to ask him to intervene.

Narrator 1: Zeus agreed that Psyche had shown incredible devotion and strength of character. He declared that she would be immortal. He gave permission for Eros to marry Psyche, and all of Olympus celebrated their marriage. Even Aphrodite abandoned her jealousy and rejoiced with the gods and goddesses.