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## Valentine's Day

Cupid was the Roman god of love. His Greek name is Eros. Cupid was the son of Venus (Aphrodite), goddess of love. Cupid made people (and gods) fall in love by pricking them with one of his magic golden arrows. In this popular myth, he accidentally pricks himself and falls in love with a mortal girl named Psyche.



### **The Myth of Cupid and Psyche (Part 1)**

There once lived a king and queen who were blessed with three daughters. All three were very lovely; but the youngest, Psyche, was the most beautiful of all. So great was her beauty that word spread throughout the neighboring land that she was actually Venus, the goddess of beauty herself, living among mortals. Soon, people were traveling from far and wide to offer her their gifts and prayers.

In spite of this attention, Psyche was unhappy. Her two sisters had long since married, each to a king. But no king, prince, or even lowly pauper dared ask for Psyche's hand. She remained alone, admired by all but loved by none.

So famous was Psyche's beauty that Venus's temple was deserted and her statues stood ignored. The goddess was furious that her beauty should be challenged by that of a mere mortal. She called for her son, Cupid, the handsome and mischievous god of love. His golden arrows were feared even by the gods, for their lightest touch inspired love at first sight.

"You must avenge this insult to me," Venus commanded. "Use your arrows to make that worthless girl fall madly in love with the most frightening creature in the world."

Cupid, always eager for a chance to create mischief, made himself invisible and hastened to Psyche's chamber, where he found her fast asleep. As he was fitting an arrow to his bow, Psyche opened her eyes, and seemed to look directly at him. Startled, Cupid nicked himself with his own arrow and instantly fell in love. Unable to keep his promise to Venus, he fled.

That morning, Psyche journeyed to Delphi to ask the oracle of Apollo whether it was her fate to remain alone.

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You will wed," the oracle replied, "but to a creature feared by the gods themselves. You must go to the top of the nearest Mountain. There you will meet your fate.

Psyche returned home and bid good-bye to her grieving family. "Surely," she said, "this creature cannot worse than a life of loneliness." Then, accompanied by the mournful sounds of funeral songs and her family's tears, Psyche climbed to the summit. In spite of all her brave words, she stood trembling as she awaited the arrival of her monstrous husband.

Quickly, a fog swirled around Psyche, and she felt the warm breath of Zephyrus, the gentle west wind. He lifted her down the mountain and over its treacherous rocks and laid her safe[y on a bed of flowers in a distant valley.

Before her she saw a palace more beautiful and elegant than any she had ever seen. Stepping cautiously through the doorway, she found a room filled with every imaginable luxury. No need had been overlooked, no detail forgotten.

A gentle voice whispered, "The house and all it contains are yours. Do as you wish. Dinner awaits you when it pleases you to eat." Psyche turned to see who had spoken, but there was no one in the room.

That evening, refreshed and rested, Psyche entered the grand banquet hall where a long table was laid with exquisite delicacies. She dined alone, attended by invisible servants and soothed by the sweet songs of an unseen musician.

Suddenly, the torches sputtered, and the room was plunged into darkness. Psyche was paralyzed with fear. She knew that the creature foretold by the oracle had finally arrived.

But the voice that greeted her was kind. "Do not be afraid, dearest Psyche," he whispered gently. "I mean you no harm." As they talked, her unseen companion calmed her fears, and soon she began to smile, then to laugh, until finally she quite forgot her terror.

And so Psyche began her new life. She passed her days doing as she pleased, and in the evening, her unseen companion devised new pastimes and adventures for her enjoyment. He denied her only one thing: the chance to see him. Psyche teased and

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begged, but nothing she could do or say would persuade him otherwise. "I would rather you love me for what I am," he said, "not for what I appear to be."

As Psyche grew accustomed to her new life, she thought often of her family, knowing that they wept for her as lost. She asked if her sisters might be brought to visit her. Although reluctant at first, her host was moved by her pleas and consented. But he warned, "You must tell them nothing of me, or all we have here will be lost."

The next morning, Psyche called for Zephyrus to fetch her sisters. Upon being reunited, all three wept for joy. But her sisters' joy quickly turned to envy as Psyche proudly showed off her new home. They thought it unjust that she, the youngest, should be blessed with both beauty and wealth. Hoping to find some unhappiness in Psyche's new life, they questioned her about their absent host.

"Where is he?" demanded one sister.

"Why can we not meet him?" complained the other.

As her sisters persisted, Psyche first told them that their host was sick and could not rise from his bed to greet them. Later, when her sisters questioned her further, Psyche said that he was away on important business. But still her sisters would not cease their questioning, until finally, on the day they were to return to their husbands, Psyche confessed that while her host was generous and kind in all other things, she was forbidden to see him.

"He is the creature the oracle promised!" the sisters cried. "Tonight, when he is asleep, you must look at him. If he is a hideous beast, you must kill him, before he can kill you!"

That night, Psyche did her best to ignore her sisters' advice, but their talk of the oracle had brought back all her fears. When she was sure her host was asleep, she lit a lamp and slipped into his chamber with a knife. As the lamplight flickered across the face of her sleeping host, Psyche was astonished to find not a monster but Cupid, the beautiful god of love himself. Curious, she reached out to touch one of the arrows that lay in a quiver at his feet and quite accidentally pricked herself. And turning back to look at Cupid, she fell in love.

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As she leaned forward to kiss his cheek, a drop of hot oil spilled from her lamp, burning his shoulder. With a cry, he awoke and saw the knife that she still held in her hand. Sadly he told Psyche, "Go back to your sisters. Love cannot live without trust" And with those words he vanished.

*To be continued . . .*

1. Did you guess that Psyche's invisible host was really Cupid and not a horrible monster?

When did you figure it out?

2. Why did the oracle say that Psyche's husband would be a creature feared even by the gods themselves?

3. Why doesn't Cupid want Psyche to see him?

4. Do you think this was fair of Cupid to expect Psyche to trust him when he didn't trust her enough to let her know who he really was? Explain.

5. If you had been Psyche do you think you would have tried to get a look at Cupid? Explain.