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AMOR AND PSYCHE

IN a certain city there once lived a king and queen. They had three daughters very fair to view. But whereas it was thought that the charms of the two eldest, great as they were, could yet be worthily celebrated by mortal praise, the youngest daughter was so strangely and wonderfully fair that human speech was all too poor to describe her beauty, or even to tell of its praise. Many of the citizens and multitudes of strangers were drawn to the town in eager crowds by the fame of so marvelous a sight and were struck dumb at the sight of such unapproachable loveliness, so that, raising their right hands to their lips, with thumb erect and the first finger laid to its base, they worshiped her with prayers of adoration as though she were the goddess Venus herself. And now the fame had gone abroad, through all the neighboring towns and all the country round about, that the goddess, who sprang from the blue deep of the sea and was born from the spray of the foaming waves, had deigned to manifest her godhead to all the world and was dwelling among earthly folk; or, if that was not so, it was certain, they said, that heaven had rained fresh procreative dew, and earth, not sea, had brought forth as a flower a second Venus in all the glory of her maidenhood.

This new belief increased each day, until it knew no bounds. The fame thereof had already spread abroad to the nearest islands and had traversed many a province and a great portion of the earth. And now many a mor-

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tal journeyed from far and sailed over the great deeps of ocean, flocking to see the wonder and glory of the age. Now no man sailed to Paphos or Cnidos, or even to Cythera, that they might behold the goddess Venus; her rites were put aside, her temples fell to ruin, her sacred couches were disregarded, her ceremonies neglected, her images uncrowned, her altars desolate and foul with fireless ashes. It was to a girl men prayed, and it was in the worship of mortal beauty that they sought to appease the power of the great goddess. When the maid went forth at morning, men propitiated the name of Venus with feast and sacrifice, though Venus was not there; and as the maid moved through the streets, multitudes prayed to her and offered flowers woven in garlands or scattered loose at will.

But the true Venus was exceedingly angry that divine honors should be transferred thus extravagantly to the worship of a mortal maid. She could bear her fury no longer, her head shook, a deep groan burst from her lips, and thus she spoke with herself: "Behold, I the first parent of created things, the primal source of all the elements; behold, I Venus, the kindly mother of all the world, must share my majesty and honor with a mortal maid, and my name that dwells in the heavens is dragged through the earthly muck. Shall I endure the doubt cast by this vicarious adoration, this worship of my godhead that is shared with her? Shall a girl that is doomed to die parade in my likeness? It was in vain the shepherd, on whose impartial justice Jove set the seal of his approval, preferred me over such mighty goddesses for my surpassing beauty. But this girl, whoever she be,

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that has usurped my honors shall have no joy thereof. I will make her repent of her beauty, even her unlawful loveliness."

Straightway she summoned her winged headstrong boy, that wicked boy, scorner of law and order, who, armed with arrows and torch aflame, speeds through others' homes by night, saps the ties of wedlock, and all unpunished commits hideous crime and uses all his power for ill. Him then, though wantonness and lust are his by birth, she fired still further by her words, and leading him to that city showed him Psyche—for so the maid was called—face to face. Then, groaning at the far-flown renown of her fair rival, her utterance broken with indignation, she cried: "I implore you by all the bonds of love that bind you to her that bore you, by the sweet wounds your arrows deal and by the honeyed smart of your fires, avenge your mother, yes, avenge her to the full and sternly punish this rebellious beauty. But this, this only, this beyond all else I would have you do and do with a will. Cause the maid to be consumed with passion for the vilest of men, for one whom Fortune has condemned to have neither health, nor wealth, nor honor, one so broken that through all the world his misery has no peer."

So spoke she, and with parted lips kissed her son long and fervently. Then she returned to the shore hard by, where the sea ebbs and flows, and treading with rosy feet the topmost foam of the quivering waves, plunged down to the deep's dry floor. The sea gods tarried not to do her service. It was as though she had long since commanded their presence, though in truth she had but just

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formed the wish. The daughters of Nereus came singing in harmony, Neptune, also called Portunus, came with bristling beard of azure, his wife Salacia with fish-teeming womb, and their babe Palaemon, rider of the dolphin. Now far and wide hosts of Tritons came plunging through the seas; one blew a soft blast from his echoing shell, another with a silken awning shaded her head from the fierce heat of the sun, a third held up a mirror before his mistress's eyes, while others swam yoked beneath her car. Such was the host that escorted Venus, as she went on her way to the halls of ocean.

Meanwhile Psyche, for all her manifest beauty, had no joy of her loveliness. All men gazed upon her, yet never a king nor prince nor even a lover from the common folk came forward desirous to claim her hand in marriage. Men marveled at her divine loveliness, but as men marvel at a statue fairly wrought. Long since, her elder sisters, whose beauty was but ordinary and had never been praised through all the world, had been betrothed to kings who came to woo, and they had become happy brides. But Psyche sat at home an unwedded maid and, sick of body and broken in spirit, bewailed her loneliness and solitude, loathing in her heart the loveliness that had charmed so many nations. Wherefore the father of the hapless girl was seized with great grief; suspecting the anger of heaven and fearing the wrath of the gods, he inquired of the most ancient oracle of the Milesian god, and with prayer and burnt offering besought the mighty deity to send a husband to wed the maid whom none had wooed.

Apollo, though an Ionian and a Greek, in order not to

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embarrass the author of this Milesian tale delivered his oracle in Latin as follows:

*On some high crag, O king, set forth the maid,
In all the pomp of funeral robes arrayed.
Hope for no bridegroom born of mortal seed,
But fierce and wild and of the dragon breed.
He swoops all-conquering, borne on airy wing,
With fire and sword he makes his harvesting;
Trembles before him Jove, whom gods do dread,
And quakes the darksome river of the dead.*

The king, once so happy, on hearing the pronouncement of the sacred oracle returned home in sorrow and distress and set forth to his wife the things ordained in that ill-starred oracle. They mourned and wept and lamented for many days. But at last the time drew near for the loathsome performance of that cruel ordinance. The unhappy maid was arrayed for her ghastly bridal, the torches' flame burned low, clogged with dark soot and ash, the strains of the flute of wedlock were changed to the melancholy Lydian mode, the glad chant of the hymeneal hymn ended in mournful wailing, and the girl on the eve of marriage wiped away her tears even with her bridal veil. The whole city also joined in weeping the sad fate of the stricken house, and the public grief found expression in an edict suspending all business.

But the commands of heaven must be obeyed, and the unhappy Psyche must go to meet her doom. And so when all the rites of this ghastly bridal had been performed amid deepest grief, the funeral train of the living dead was led forth escorted by all the people. It

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was not her marriage procession that Psyche followed dissolved in tears, but her own obsequies. Bowed in grief and overwhelmed by their sore calamity, her parents still shrank to perform the hateful deed. But their daughter herself addressed them thus:

“Why torment your hapless age with this long weeping? Why with ceaseless wailing weary the life within you, life more near and dear to me than to yourselves? Why with vain tears deform those features that I so revere? Why lacerate your eyes? Your eyes are mine! Why beat your bosoms and the breasts that suckled me? Lo! what rich recompense you have for my glorious beauty! Too late you perceive that the mortal blow that strikes you down is dealt by wicked Envy. When nations and peoples gave me divine honor, when with one voice they hailed me as a new Venus, then was the time for you to grieve, to weep and mourn me as one dead. Now I perceive, now my eyes are opened. It is the name of Venus and that alone which has brought me to my death. Lead me on and set me on the crag that fate has appointed. I hasten to meet that blest union, I hasten to behold the noble husband that awaits me. Why do I put off and shun his coming? Was he not born to destroy all the world?”

So spoke the maid and then was silent, and with step unwavering mingled in the crowd of folk that followed to do her honor. They climbed a lofty mountain and came to the appointed crag. There they placed the maiden on the topmost peak and all departed from her. The marriage torches, with which they had lit the way before her, were all extinguished by their tears. They

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left them and with downcast heads prepared to return home. As for her hapless parents, crushed by the weight of their calamity, they shut themselves within their house of gloom and gave themselves over to perpetual night. Psyche meanwhile sat trembling and afraid upon the very summit of the crag and wept, when suddenly a soft air from the breathing West made her raiment wave and blew out the tunic of her bosom, then gradually raised her and, bearing her slowly on its quiet breath down the slopes of that high cliff, let her fall gently down and laid her on the flowery sward in the bosom of a deep vale.



Psyche lay sweetly reclined in that soft grassy place on a couch of herbage fresh with dew. Her wild anguish of spirit was assuaged and she fell softly asleep. When she had slumbered enough and was refreshed, she rose to her feet. The tempest had passed from her soul. She beheld a grove of huge and lofty trees, she beheld a transparent fountain of glassy water. In the very heart of the grove beside the gliding stream there stood a palace, built by no human hands but by the cunning of a god. You will perceive, as soon as I have taken you within, that it is the pleasant and luxurious dwelling of some deity that I present to your gaze. For the fretted roof on high was curiously carved of sandalwood and ivory, and the columns that upheld it were of gold. All the walls were covered with wild beasts and creatures of the field, wrought in chased silver, and confronting the gaze of those who entered. Truly it must be some demi-

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god, or rather in very truth a god, that had power by the subtlety of his matchless skill to put such wild life into silver. The pavement was of precious stones cut small and patterned with images of many kinds. Most surely, yes, again and yet again I say it, blessed are those whose feet tread upon gems and jewels. The rest of the house through all its length and breadth was precious beyond price. All the walls were built of solid ingots of gold and shone with peculiar splendor, making a daylight of their own within the house, even though the sun should withhold his beams. Such were the lightnings flashed from bedchamber and colonnade and from the very doors themselves. Nor were the riches in the rest of the house unworthy of such splendor. It seemed a heavenly palace built by great Jove that he might dwell with mortal men.

Allured by the charm and beauty of the place, Psyche drew near and, as her confidence increased, crossed the threshold. Soon the delight of gazing on such loveliness drew her on to explore each glory, until at last on the farther side of the house she beheld a lofty chamber piled high with countless treasure. Nothing may be found in all the world that was not there. But wondrous as was the sight of such vast wealth, yet more marvelous was it that there was no chain nor bar nor sentinel to guard the treasure of all the world. Deep joy filled her at the sight, when suddenly a bodiless voice spoke to her: "Why, lady," it said, "are you overwhelmed at the sight of so great wealth? All is yours. Go now to your chamber, refresh your weariness upon your couch, and bathe when it pleases you so to do. We whose voices

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you hear are your servants who will wait upon you diligently and, when you have refreshed your body, will straightway serve you with a royal banquet.”

When she heard these disembodied voices Psyche perceived that their instructions and all the treasure of the palace must be the gift of some god that watched over her. First for a while she slept, then, waking, bathed to refresh her weariness. This done, she beheld hard by a couch shaped like a half-moon, and, deeming from the dinner service spread beside it that it was meant for her refreshment, gladly lay down. Forthwith she was served with wine like nectar and many a delicious dish. Still no one waited on her, but all things seemed wafted to her as it were by some wind. Neither could she see any person, she only heard words that fell from the air, and none save voices were her servants. After she had feasted thus daintily, one whom she could not see entered and sang to her, while another struck the lyre, though never a lyre was to be seen. Then the harmony of a multitude of musicians was borne to her ears, so that she knew that a choir was there, though no one was visible. These delights over, Psyche went to her bed, for the hour was late.

Now when night was well advanced a soft sound came to her ears. She trembled for her honor, seeing that she was all alone; she shook for terror, and her fear of the unknown surpassed by far the fear of any peril that ever she had conceived. At length her unknown husband came and climbed the couch, made Psyche his bride, and departed in haste before the dawn. And forthwith the voices came to her chamber and served all her needs. So for a long time her life passed by,

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till at length, as nature ordains, what seemed strange at first by force of continued habit became a delight, and the sound of the voices cheered her loneliness and perplexity.

Meanwhile her parents grew old and feeble by reason of the tireless torment of their grief. The news of it was noised abroad and the elder sisters learned all that had befallen. Then grief and mourning straightway fell upon them, they left their homes and vied with one another in their haste to have sight and speech of their parents once again.

Now that very night Psyche's husband thus addressed her—for though she saw not her unknown spouse, her hands had felt him, and her ears could hear him:

“Sweet Psyche, my beloved wife, Fortune is turned cruel and threatens you with deadly peril. Watch, be most cautious and beware. Your sisters believe you dead and are distraught with grief. They will seek you and visit yonder crag. But if you should chance to hear their lamentations, answer them not, do not even look forth from the house, or you will drive me to bitter woe and yourself to utter destruction.”

Psyche assented and promised she would do as her husband willed. But when he left her with the passing of night, the poor girl burst into weeping and consumed the whole day in tears and lamentation, crying that now in truth she was utterly undone; for she was kept a close captive within the walls of her luxurious prison and deprived of all human conversation. She might not even bring consolation to her sisters, who mourned her loss, nor even so much as set eyes on them. She would take

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no refreshment, she neither bathed nor ate but, weeping floods of tears, retired to sleep. After a little her husband came to her side somewhat earlier than his wont, caught her still weeping to his arms, and thus upbraided her:

“Was this your promise, my sweet Psyche? What can I, your husband, now hope or expect of you? Night and day you cease not from your anguish, not even when your husband clasps you to his heart. Come, now, be it as you will! Obey your heart, though its craving bring you nothing but harm. Only remember, when later you repent, that I warned you in good earnest.”

But Psyche, when she heard these words, broke into entreaties, then threatened that she would slay herself, and at last prevailed upon her husband to grant her desire, that she might see her sisters, soothe their sorrows, and have speech with them. He yielded to the prayers of his new-wed bride, and further gave her leave to present her sisters with what she would of gold or jewels. But he warned her again and again, with words that struck terror to the soul, never to let her sisters persuade her by their ill counsels to inquire what her husband was like; if she yielded to the impious promptings of curiosity, she would exile herself forever from his embraces and from all the profusion of wealth that now was hers. She thanked her husband, and her soul was somewhat cheered. Then said she: “Sooner would I die a hundred deaths than be robbed of your sweet love. For whoever you are, I love you and adore you passionately. I love you as I love life itself. Compared with you, Cupid’s own self would be as nothing. But grant this boon also, I beseech you, and bid your

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servant, the wind of the West, to bring my sisters hither even as he bore me."

Then she rained on him beguiling kisses and endearing words and embraces that should constrain him to her will, and beside these allurements called him "husband sweet as honey, Psyche's life and love." Her husband yielded to the power and spell of her passionate murmurs, yielded against his will, and promised to do all; and then, as dawn drew near, he vanished from his wife's arms.

Meanwhile her sisters had made inquiry as to the situation of the crag where Psyche had been left, and they hastened to the spot. And when they were there, they began to beat their breasts and weep their eyes blind, until all the rocks and cliffs made answer, echoing to their ceaseless cries of grief. And now they began to call on their unhappy sister by name, till the piercing sound of their lamentable crying descended into the valley, and Psyche ran forth from the house in an ecstasy of trembling joy. "Why do you torment yourselves with these vain cries of woe?" she cried. "I whom you mourn am here. Cease your mournful cries and dry those cheeks that so long have streamed with tears, for even now you may embrace her whom you bewailed." Then, calling the West Wind, she told him of her husband's command, and he did at once as he was bidden and bore them down into the valley safe and sound on the wings of his soft breath. There the sisters embraced with eager kisses and took delight of one another, till the tears that they had dried welled forth again for very joy.

Then said Psyche: "Come now, enter with joy the

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house that is my house and refresh your afflicted hearts with the presence of your own Psyche." So saying, she showed them all the riches of the golden house and made known to their ears the great household of voices that waited on her. Then she refreshed their weariness in the fairest of baths and with all the rich dainties of that celestial table till, their senses sated with the affluence of her heavenly wealth, they began to foster envy deep in their inmost hearts. At length one of them began to question her without ceasing, very closely and curiously, as to who was the lord of these celestial marvels, and who or of what sort was her husband. Nevertheless, Psyche would in no wise transgress her husband's ordinance or banish it from the secret places of her soul, but on the spur of the moment feigned that he was young and fair to view, his cheeks just shadowed with a beard of down, and that he was for the most part occupied with hunting among the mountains or along the countryside. Then, for fear that as their talk went on she might make some slip and betray her secret, she loaded them with gifts of wrought gold and jeweled necklaces and, calling the West Wind, committed them to his charge, to be carried back to the place from whence they came.

This done, those good sisters of hers returned home, and the gall of rising envy burned fierce within them, and they began to talk with one another often and loud and angrily. At last one of them spoke as follows: "Oh! cruel and unkind, unprofitable Fortune! Was this thy will that we, born of the same parents as Psyche, should endure so different a lot? Are we, the elder, who have

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been given to alien kings to be their handmaidens and banished from our home and country, to dwell like exiles far from our parents? And is she, the youngest, the last offspring of our mother's weary womb, to be the mistress of such treasure and have a god for husband? Why, she has not even the wit to know how to use such overflowing fortune rightly. Did you see, sister, how many and how rich are the jewels that lie in her house, what shining raiment and what glistening gems are there, and how wherever one goes one walks on gold, abundant gold? Why, if she has a husband as fair as she told us, there lives no happier woman in all the world. Woman, did I say? It may be that as his love increases, and his passion gathers its full force, the god whom she has wedded will make her also a goddess. In good truth she is a goddess already; such was her carriage, such her mien. The woman who has voices for handmaids, and can command even the winds, is aiming high and breathes a goddess's pride even now. Whereas I, poor wretch, have got a husband older than my father, balder than a pumpkin, and feebler than any child, and he keeps the whole house under lock and key."

The other took up the strain: "I am afflicted by a husband so doubled and bent with rheumatism that he never gives a thought to love. I have to rub his gnarled and stony fingers till my soft hands are blistered with his dirty bandages, and stinking lotion, and filthy plasters. I am more than an attentive wife, I am a hard-worked sick-nurse. You may bear your misfortunes with patience, or rather—for I will speak my mind plainly—with servility. As for me, I cannot any longer endure

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that such wealth and fortune should have fallen to one so unworthy. Remember with what pride and arrogance she dealt with us, with what boastful and extravagant ostentation she revealed her haughty temper! How scanty were the gifts she gave us from the vastness of her store, and how grudgingly she gave! And then, when she was tired of our presence, she had us bundled off and blown away upon a whistling breeze. If I am a woman and have a spark of life in me, I'll oust her from her fortune. And if, as I should suppose, our outrageous treatment rankles in your heart as it does in mine, let us both take resolute action. Let us not reveal our wrong to our parents or any other human being; let us not even seem to know anything of how she fares. It is enough that we have seen what we would gladly not have seen, without our declaring such glad news of her to our parents and all mankind. Those are not truly rich whose wealth is known to no man. She shall learn that we are her elder sisters and not her handmaids. But now let us go to our husbands and revisit our homes, which, even if they are poor, are at least respectable. Then, when we have taken earnest thought and formed our plans, let us return in our might to crush her pride."

This counsel of evil, where good should have been, pleased these wicked women. They hid all the precious gifts they had received and began with feigned grief to weep once more, rending their hair and tearing their faces, as indeed they deserved to be torn. Then, after hastily deterring their parents from further search by rekindling the burning anguish of their grief, they went swollen with mad rage to their own homes, there to

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contrive their wicked schemes against their innocent sister, yes, even to devise her death.

Meanwhile Psyche's unknown husband once more admonished her as he talked with her in the darkness of night: "Do you see," he said, "what great peril you are in? Fortune as yet but skirmishes at the outposts. Unless you are firm and cautious while she is yet far off, she will close hand to hand. Those false she-wolves are weaving some deep plot of sin against you, whose purpose is this: to persuade you to seek to know my face, which, as I have told you, if once you see, you will see no more. And so if hereafter those wicked ghouls come hither armed with their dark designs—and they will come, that I know—speak not at all with them, or if your simple, unsuspecting soul is too tender to endure that, at least neither give ear nor utterance to anything concerning your husband. For soon we shall have issue, and even now your womb, a child's as yet, bears a child like to you. If you keep my secret in silence, he shall be a god; if you divulge it, a mortal."

This news made Psyche glad; she lifted her head and rejoiced that she should be blest with a divine child. She exulted in the glory of the babe that should be, and was proud that she should be called a mother. Anxiously she counted the days as they increased and the months that passed by, and marveled as the promise grew. But now those two curses, those foul furies breathing adder's poison, hastened toward their goal and came sailing on their course with impious speed. Then her husband, who came not save for the brief space of night, warned Psyche once again: "The last day, the final peril is upon

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you; those hateful women, your kin and yet your foes, have put their armor on, have struck their camp, set the battle in array, and blown the trumpet blast; your monstrous sisters have drawn the sword and seek your life. Alas! sweetest Psyche, what calamities are upon us! Pity yourself and me, keep holy silence and save your house, your husband, yourself, and our young babe from the doom of ruin that lowers over them. Neither see nor hear those wicked women—sisters I may not call them—for they have conceived unnatural hate for you and have trodden underfoot the bonds of blood. Oh! take no heed when, like the Sirens, they stand forth upon the crag and make the cliffs echo with their fatal voices.”

Psyche replied, her voice broken with tearful sobs: “Long since, I think, you have had proof of my fidelity and discretion. Not less, even now, will I show how steadfast is my soul. Only once more bid our servant the West Wind to perform his office. You have denied me sight of your holy form, grant me at least that I may see my sisters. By your locks that hang all round your brow, sweet as scent of cinnamon, by the soft delicate cheeks so like mine, by your bosom that burns with strange heat, I implore you, by my hopes that at least I may behold your face in the face of our babe, I beseech you, grant the pious prayer of my anguished entreaty, suffer me to enjoy the embraces of my sisters, and make the soul of Psyche, your votary, take new life for joy. I seek no more to see your face; not even the dark of night can be a hindrance to my joy, for I hold you in my arms, light of my life.” With these words and soft embraces she charmed her husband to her will. Wiping

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away her tears with his own locks, he promised he would do as she desired and straightway departed before the light of dawning day.

The leagued conspirators, the two sisters, did not so much as set eyes on their parents but hastened with headlong speed to the crag. They tarried not for the coming of the wind that should bear them, but with presumptuous daring leapt forth into the abyss. But the West Wind forgot not the bidding of his king, though he had gladly done so, and caught them to the bosom of his breathing air and set them down upon the ground. They made no delay, but entered the house side by side; and there they that were Psyche's sisters only in name embraced their prey and, hiding beneath a cheerful mien the guile that was stored within their hearts as if it had been a treasure, spoke to her with these fawning words: "Psyche, you are no longer a child, no, you are even now a mother. Think what a joy to us you bear in your womb, with what delight you will make glad all our home. Ah! blessed are we who shall rejoice to nurse your golden babe, who if he match, as match he should, his parents' beauty, will be born a very Cupid."

Thus step by step with feigned love they wormed their way into their sister's heart. And straightway, when she had bidden them sit down, and had refreshed them from the weariness of their journey, and cheered them with steaming water at the bath, she feasted them royally in her banqueting hall on all those wondrous dainties and savory stews. She bade the harp sound, and its chords made melody; she bade the flute play, and its voice was heard; she bade the choir sing, and their chant pealed

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forth. The hearts of those who heard were made glad by all this ravishing music, although they saw no one. But yet not even the honeyed sweetness of those strains could allay the wicked purpose of those accursed women. They turned their speech to frame the snare that their guile had made ready, and with false words began to ask her what her husband was like, what was his family, what his rank. Then Psyche, in the utter simplicity of her heart, forgot her former tale and devised a new falsehood, and said that her husband came from the next province, had vast sums invested in business, and was middle-aged, his hair just grizzled with a few gray hairs. She spoke only for a moment on this matter and then, loading her sisters once more with costly gifts, sent them away in the chariot of the wind.

But, when the soft breath of the West had lifted them on high, and they were returning homeward, they began to speak thus one to the other: "What are we to say, sister, of so monstrous a falsehood as that which the poor fool told us? The first time her husband was a youth with manhood's first down upon his chin; now he is middle-aged in all the glory of white hairs. Who can he be whom so short a space of time has thus transformed into an old man? My sister, there are but two alternatives. Either the wretch lies, or else she does not know what her husband is like. Whichever of these explanations is true, it is our duty to cast her forth from that wealth of hers as soon as we may. But if she has never seen her husband's face, clearly she has married a god, and it is a god that she bears in her womb. Now, if she come to be called the mother of a baby god—which heaven forbid!

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—I will get a noose and hang myself. Meanwhile, let us return home to our parents and devise some cunning deceit such as may suit our present discourse.”

So hot with anger were they that they had scarcely a word of greeting for their parents and passed a sleepless and disturbed night. On the morrow these abandoned women hastened to the crag and swooped swiftly down as before under the protection of the wind. Then forcing a few tears from their eyes by rubbing their lids, they addressed their young sister with these crafty words: “Ah! you are happy, for you live in blessed ignorance of your evil plight and have no suspicion of your peril. But we cannot sleep for the care with which we watch over your happiness and are torn with anguish for your misfortunes. For we have learned the truth, and, since we are partners of your grief and hapless plight, we may not hide it from you. He that lies secretly by your side at night is a huge serpent with a thousand tangled coils; blood and deadly poison drip from his throat and from the cavernous horror of his gaping maw. Remember Apollo’s oracle, how it proclaimed that you should be the bride of some fierce beast. Moreover, many a farmer, many a hunter of this neighborhood, and many of those who dwell round about have seen him as he returns from devouring his prey or swims in the shallows of the river. And all affirm that you will not much longer feast on such dainties or receive such loving service, but so soon as your time has come, he will devour you with the ripe fruit of your womb. The hour has now come when you must choose whether to believe your sisters, whose sole care is for your dear safety, to flee from death and

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live with us, free from all thought of peril, or find a grave in the entrails of a cruel monster. If the musical solitude of this fair landscape, if the joys of your secret love still delight you, and you are content to lie in the embraces of a foul and venomous snake, at least we, your loving sisters, have done our duty."

Poor Psyche, for she was a simple and gentle soul, was seized with terror at this melancholy news; she was swept beyond the bounds of reason, forgot all her husband's warnings and all her own promises. Headlong she fell into the deeps of woe, her limbs trembled, her face turned pale and bloodless, and in stumbling accents she stammered forth these scarcely articulate words: "Dearest sisters," she said, "you are true to your love for me, as is fitting. And I think that those who told you these things are not lying. For never have I seen my husband's face nor known at all whence he comes. Only at night I hear soft murmured words and endure the embraces of a husband who shuns the light and whose shape I know not. You say well that he is some strange beast, and I accept your words. For ever with stern speech he terrifies me from seeking to have sight of him, and threatens great woe to me should I strive curiously to look upon his face. Now, therefore, help me, if there be any succor you may bring to your sister in her hour of peril. For you will undo all your former good deeds, if you allow indifference to usurp the place of love."

Then since they had reached their sister's inmost heart and laid it bare to view, and its portals stood open wide, those evil women abandoned the secret stealth of their dark scheming, unsheathed the swords of guile, and in-

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vaded the timorous thoughts of the simple-hearted girl. Then said one of them: "Since the ties of birth bid us disregard all peril, if only we may save you, we will make known to you the course that long thought has revealed to us, the sole path that leads to safety. Take the sharpest of razors and whet it yet sharper by rubbing it softly against the palm of your hand, then hide it on the side of your couch where you are accustomed to lie. Take too some handy lantern, filled with oil and burning with a clear light, and place it beneath the cover of some vessel. Conceal all these preparations most carefully, and then, when he enters, trailing his moving coils, and climbs to his couch as is his custom, wait till he is stretched at full length and caught in the stupor of his first sleep, and his breathing tells you that his slumber is deep; then glide from the bed and barefoot, on tiptoe, moving soft with tiny steps, free the lantern from its prison in the blind dark. Let the light teach you how best to perform your glorious deed, then raise your right hand, put forth all your strength, and with the two-edged blade hew through the joint that knits the head and neck of the deadly serpent. Our aid shall not fail you. As soon as you have won safety by his death, we will hasten eagerly to your side, join hands with yours to bear away all your treasure, find you a wedlock worthy of your prayers, and unite you to a husband as human as yourself."

With these words they enflamed their sister's burning heart—for in truth her heart was all afire—and then left her, for they feared exceedingly to remain on the spot where so great a crime was to be done. As before, they

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were borne to the crag's top by the blast of the winged breeze, sped away in hasty flight, entered their ships, and departed.



Psyche was left alone—and yet she was not at all alone, for the fierce furies that vexed her soul were ever with her. She tossed to and fro upon a tide of troubles vast as the sea. Her resolve was made and her heart fixed, yet as she strove to nerve her hands for the deed, her purpose failed her and was shaken, and she was distraught by the host of passions that were born of her anguish. Impatience, indecision, daring and terror, diffidence and anger, all strove within her, and, worst of all, in the same body she hated the beast and loved the husband. Yet as evening began to draw on to night, with precipitate haste she made all ready for her hideous crime. Now night was come and with it her husband; he caught her in his arms, kissed her, and sank into a deep sleep.

Then Psyche—for though flesh and spirit were weak and trembled, yet the fierce will of destiny gave her force—summoned all her strength, drew forth the lantern, and seized the razor; a sudden courage displaced the weakness of her sex. But as soon as the lamplight revealed the secrets of the couch, she saw the kindest and sweetest of all wild beasts, Amor himself, fairest of gods and fair even in sleep, so that even the flame of the lamp, when it beheld him, burned brighter for joy, and lightnings flashed from the razor's sacrilegious blade. But Psyche at the marvel of that sight was all dismayed, her

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soul was distraught, a sickly pallor came over her, fainting and trembling she sank to her knees and sought to hide the blade in her own heart. And this she would assuredly have done, had not the steel slipped from her rash hands for terror of so ill a deed. Weary and desperate, fallen from her health of mind and body, she gazed again and again upon the beauty of that divine face and her soul drew joy and strength. She beheld the glorious hair of his golden head streaming with ambrosia, the curling locks that strayed over his snow-white neck and crimson cheeks, some caught in a comely tangle, some hanging down in front, others behind; and before the lightnings of their exceeding splendor even the light of the lamp grew weak and faint. From the shoulders of the winged god sprang dewy pinions, shining like white flowers, and the topmost feathers, so soft and delicate were they, quivered tremulously in a restless dance, though all the rest were still. His body was smooth and very lovely and such as Venus might be proud to have borne. Before the feet of the god lay bow, quiver, and arrows, the kindly weapons of the great god. Psyche gazed on them with insatiate heart and burning curiosity, took them in her hands, and marveled at her husband's armory. Then, taking an arrow from the quiver, she tried its point against her thumb. But her hand trembled and pressed too hard upon it, till the point pricked too deep and tiny blood-drops bedewed the surface of her skin. So all unwitting, yet of her own doing, Psyche fell in love with Love. Then, as her passion for passion's lord burned her ever more and more, she cast herself upon him in an ecstasy of love, heaped wanton kiss on kiss

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with thirsty hastening lips, till she feared he might awake.

But even as her swooning spirit wavered in the ecstasy of such bliss, the lamp, whether foul falseness or guilty envy moved it, or whether it longed itself to touch and kiss so fair a body, sputtered forth from the top of its flame a drop of burning oil, which fell upon the god's right shoulder. Ah! rash, overbold lamp! Love's unworthy servant, thou burnest the very lord of fire, although surely thou dost owe thy being to some lover who devised thee that even by night he might have all his desire. For the god, when he felt the burning smart, leapt from the couch and, seeing his secret thus foully betrayed, tore himself from the kisses and embraces of his unhappy bride and flew away with never a word. But poor Psyche, even as he rose, caught hold of his right leg with both her hands, clung to him as he soared on high, and would not leave him, but followed him for the last time as he swept through the clouds of air, till at last overwheeled she fell to earth.

But the god her lover left her not lying thus on earth, but flew to a cypress hard by, and from its lofty top spoke to her thus in accents of woe: "Ah! Psyche, simple-hearted, I forgot the commands of my mother Venus, who bade me fire you with passion for some miserable abject man and yoke you in wedlock to him, and myself flew to your side that I might be your lover in his place. But this I did thoughtlessly, as now I know. For I, the far-famed archer, wounded myself with my own shafts, and made you my bride to win this reward—that you should think me a wild beast, and plot to hew off my head with blade of steel, that head where dwell these

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eyes that love you so dearly. Again and again I bade you beware of all that you have done, and in my love forewarned you. But those admirable women, your counselors, shall forthwith pay the penalty for their disastrous admonitions; you I will only punish thus—by flying from you.” And with these words he spread his pinions and soared into the sky.

But Psyche, though she lay bowed to the earth, followed her husband’s flight as far as sight could reach and tormented her soul with lamentation. When the beat of his wings had borne him far, and the depth of air had snatched him from her sight, she flung herself headlong from the brink of a river that flowed hard by. But the kindly stream feared for himself, and, to do honor to the god who kindles even waters with his fire, straightway caught her in his current and laid her unhurt upon a bank deep in flowering herbage. It chanced that at that moment Pan, the god of the countryside, sat on the river’s brow with Echo, the mountain goddess, in his arms, teaching her to make melodious answer to sounds of every kind. Close by along the bank, goats wandered as they browsed and played wantonly as they plucked the river’s leafage. The goat-footed god called Psyche to him gently, for she was bruised and swooning, and he knew moreover what had befallen her; and he assuaged her pain with these gentle words:

“Fair maiden, I am but a rude rustic shepherd, but long old age and ripe experience have taught me much. If I guess rightly (though men that are wise call it no guess, but rather divination), your weak and tottering steps, your body’s exceeding pallor, your unceasing sighs,

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and still more your mournful eyes, tell me that you are faint from excess of love. Wherefore give ear to me and seek no more to slay yourself by casting yourself head-long down, nor by any manner of self-slaughter. Cease from your grief and lay aside your sorrow, and rather address Amor, the mightiest of gods, with fervent prayer and win him by tender submission, for he is an amorous and soft-hearted youth."

So spoke the shepherd god. Psyche made no answer, but worshiped the deity that had showed her the path of safety and went upon her way. When she had wandered no small way with weary feet, about close of day she came by a path she knew not to a certain town, where the husband of one of her sisters held sway. When she learned this, Psyche begged that her presence might be announced to her sister. She was led into the palace and there, when they had made an end of greeting and embracing one another, her sister asked her the reason of her coming. Psyche made answer thus: "You remember the counsel you gave me, when you urged me to take a two-edged razor and slay the wild beast that lay with me under the false name of husband, before my wretched body fell a victim to his voracious maw. But as soon as I took the lamp for my witness—for such, alas! was your counsel—and looked upon his face, I saw a wondrous, a celestial sight, the son of Venus, Amor himself, lying hushed in gentle slumber. Transported by the sight of so much joy, and distraught by my great gladness, my ecstasy was almost more than I could endure. But at that moment, by a cruel stroke of chance, the lamp spurted forth a drop of burning oil, which fell upon his

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shoulder. The pain wakened him from sleep, he saw me armed with fire and blade of steel and cried, 'In atonement for the foul crime you have purposed, begone from my couch and take with you what is yours. I will marry your sister'—and he mentioned your name—'with all due ritual.' So saying, he bade the West Wind blow me beyond the confines of the house."

Psyche had scarcely finished when her sister, goaded by the stings of mad lust and guilty envy, tricked her husband with a cunningly contrived lie, pretending that she had just received the news of her parents' death, and without more ado took ship and went to that same crag. And there, though it was no wind of the West that blew, yet, aflame with all the greed of blind hope, she cried: "Take me, Amor, a wife that is worthy of thee, and thou, wind of the West, bear up thy mistress." So saying, she hurled herself headlong in one mighty leap. But not even in death might she reach that happy place. For her limbs were tossed from rock to rock among the crags and torn asunder, and afterwards, as she deserved, she provided food for the birds and beasts who devoured her entrails. Such was the manner of her end.

Nor was the doom of Amor's second vengeance long delayed. For Psyche once more was led by her wandering feet to another city, where the other sister dwelt, as had dwelt the first. And like the first, she too was ensnared by Psyche's guile and, seeking in wicked rivalry to supplant her sister as the bride of Love, hastened to the crag, and perished by the same death.

Meanwhile, as Psyche wandered in search of Amor from people to people, he lay in his mother's chamber

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groaning for the pain of the wound that the lamp had dealt him. Then that white bird, the sea mew that swims over the surface of the waves oared by its wings, hastily plunged into the deep bosom of Ocean. There he found Venus, as she was bathing and swimming, and taking his stand by her told her that her son had been burned, that he was full of anguish at the wound's great pain and lay in peril of his life. Further he told her that the whole household of Venus had been brought into evil repute, and suffered all manner of railing, "because," said the bird, "both thou and he have retired from the world, he to revel with a harlot in the mountains, and thou, goddess, to swim the sea. And so there has been no pleasure, no joy, no merriment anywhere, but all things lie in rude unkempt neglect; wedlock and true friendship and parents' love for their children have vanished from the earth; there is one vast disorder, one hateful loathing and foul disregard of all bonds of love." Such were the words with which that garrulous and most inquisitive bird, as he chattered into Venus' ear, lacerated the reputation of her son. Venus was filled with anger and cried with a sudden cry: "And so that good son of mine has got a mistress! Come tell me, bird, my only faithful servant, what is the name of this woman who has thus distracted my son, a simple boy not yet promoted to the garb of manhood? Tell me, is it one of the Nymphs or Hours? Or is it one of the Muses' choir, or one of my own attendant Graces?"

The loquacious bird had no thought of silence. "Mistress," he replied, "I know not who she is. I think, however, if my remembrance does not play me false, that he

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was head over ears in love with a girl called Psyche.” Then Venus in her indignation cried yet louder still: “What! he loves Psyche, the supplanter of my beauty and the rival of my fame! Why, the young scamp must think me his procuress, for it was I who showed him the girl, and it was through me that he came to know her!”

Shrieking such words as these, she emerged from the sea and straightway sought her golden chamber. And finding the boy lying sick even as she had heard, she railed loudly at him as soon as she reached the door of the room: “Truly your behavior is most honorable and worthy of your birth and your own good name, first to trample your mother’s, or rather your queen’s, bidding underfoot, to refuse to torment my enemy with base desires, and then actually to take her to your own wanton embraces, mere boy as you are, so that I must endure my enemy as my daughter-in-law! Oh! you seducer, you worthless boy, you matricidal wretch! You think, no doubt, that you alone can have offspring and that I am too old to bear a child. I would have you know that I will bear a far better son than you have been. No, to give the insult a sharper sting, I will adopt one of my own young slaves, give him your feathers and your flames, your bow and arrows and all the trappings I gave you for use far other than that which you have made of them. For nothing of all that went to make up your accouterments came from your father’s estate! You have been badly trained from your babyhood till now; you have sharp talons and have often beaten your elders in the most irreverent manner, why, you have robbed your own mother, yes, you rob me daily, you unnatural

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