

Psyche and Cupid



So beautiful was Psyche that all who saw her compared her to Venus, the goddess of love. People threw flowers in Psyche's path and worshipped her as if she were a goddess.

Venus was angry to have her beauty compared to that of a mortal. She ordered her son, Cupid, to give Psyche a potion that would cause her to fall in love with a terrible monster.

That night Cupid carried a cup of sorrow and love to the palace where Psyche slept. As he washed her face with the potion, he saw her brow wrinkle with pain. "I cannot destroy anyone this beautiful," he said.

In his haste to wash away the sorrow, one of Cupid's arrows of love tumbled out of its quiver and pierced his foot. In that instant, he fell in love with Psyche. When Psyche awoke, Cupid told her, "My mother must not know about my love for you." And he flew away.

The next day, Venus saw that Psyche was still as happy as before. The angry goddess sent all the misfortunes that mortals can suffer to afflict Psyche.

Psyche's parents consulted an oracle to see what could be done for their daughter. They were told that Psyche would become the bride of a creature who was not mortal—that she would marry a monster.

One day while Psyche was climbing a high hill, Venus placed a slippery rock in her path. When Psyche stepped on the rock, she fell and tumbled down the steep slope. Cupid called to the wind to save his beloved Psyche. The wind caught her and laid her gently on a flowering meadow where she fell asleep.

When Psyche awoke, she saw a beautiful palace. She went inside and was given all she wished to have. She talked to voices, but never saw the servants who waited on her.

That night, when the palace was dark, Psyche heard another voice. The man's voice told her how much he loved her. She felt great joy when she heard the voice. Every night the voice returned.

After months had passed, Psyche agreed to marry the mysterious visitor. At his request, she promised she would never try to look at his face. Her new husband came each night and disappeared before dawn.

Psyche's husband was kind. They laughed and sang together. He told her stories about the gods.

After a year had passed, Psyche said, "Please let my family visit. I'm lonely when you're away."

"They will bring you nothing but sorrow," he said.

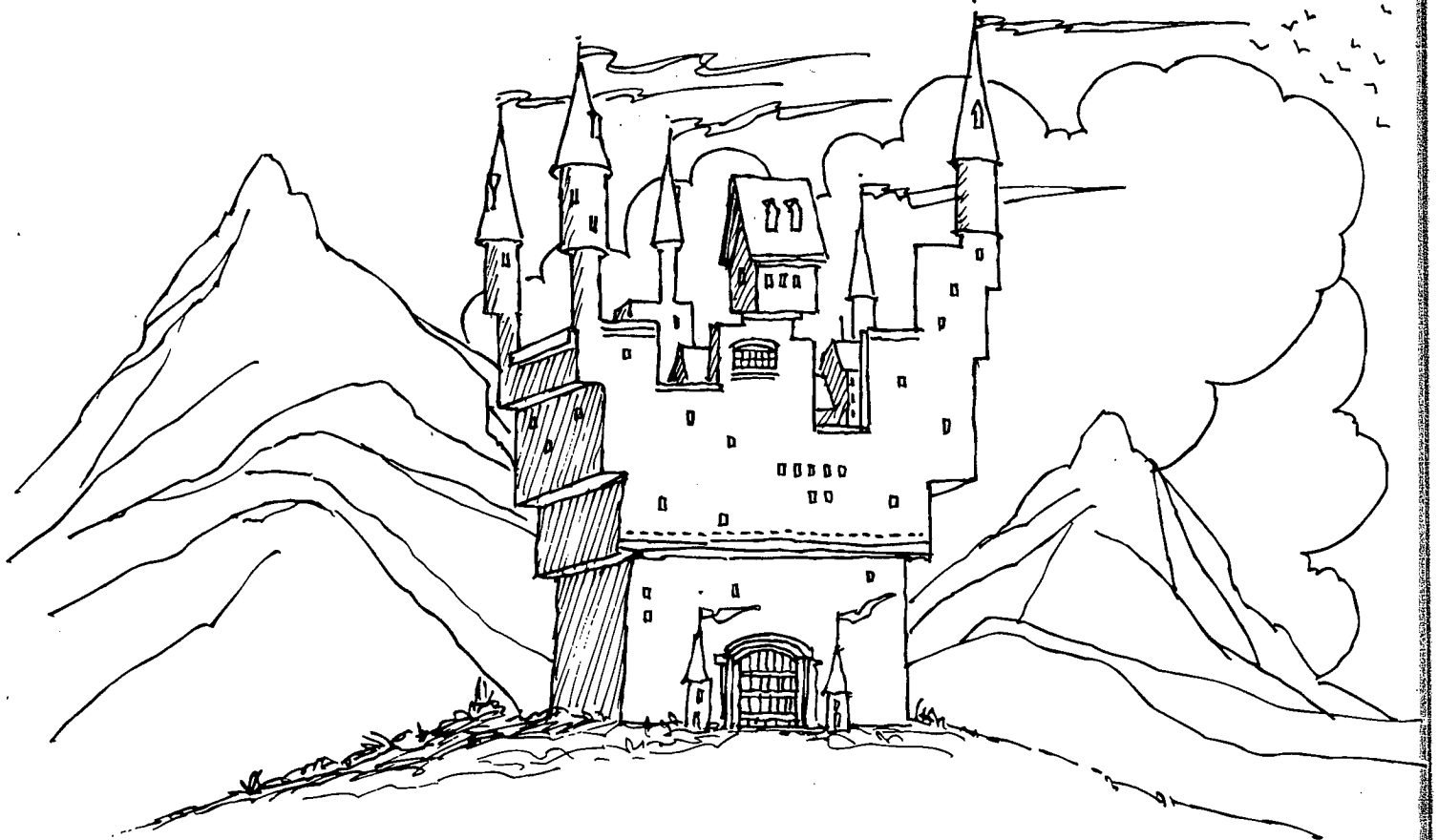
Psyche persisted. Each night she begged to see her family. Her husband finally agreed. He asked the wind to bring her two sisters.

The two sisters were amazed when they saw the palace. "Your husband," asked the younger one, "is he as handsome as he is kind and generous?"

Psyche tried to ignore the questions, but her sisters continued to ask what her husband looked like.

Finally Psyche said, "I cannot tell you what he is like because he only comes at night and will not show his face."

"Then he must be a horrible monster, just as the oracle predicted," said the younger sister. "Otherwise he would let you see him."



The older of the two sisters said, "When he returns, take a candle and a knife. Look at his face while he is sleeping. If he is a monster, you must destroy him before he kills you."

Psyche agreed and told the wind to carry her sisters home.

That night, while her husband slept, Psyche took a knife and a lighted candle to his bed. She stared down at her husband's handsome face and his wings. He wasn't mortal or a monster. He was the god Cupid! A drop of hot wax fell on Cupid's shoulder, waking him. Seeing the knife, he flew off.



Suddenly a fierce wind rocked the palace, and it disappeared. Psyche then began to wander the Earth looking for Cupid. She asked the goddess Ceres for help. Ceres told her to go to Venus and ask her forgiveness.

The goddess was not easily swayed. She stared at Psyche sternly and said, "Cupid is ill because you betrayed him. He sleeps and doesn't talk to anyone. If you wish to help him, you must complete the tasks I give you."

Psyche agreed to do Venus's bidding. Her first task was to sort the grains in the goddess's storehouse by evening. Psyche looked at the barley, wheat, and millet scattered on the floor. She couldn't finish in time. An ant, seeing her sorrow, brought all his friends to help. The grains were separated before the sun set.

For each of the impossible tasks that Venus gave Psyche, Ceres sent the creatures of the Earth to help Psyche.

All her tasks completed, Psyche searched until she found Cupid's room. She told him about the tasks Venus had given her and begged him to forgive her.

Cupid went to the great god Jupiter and asked for his help. Jupiter convinced Venus that the love Cupid and Psyche shared was too great to be destroyed. At Jupiter's insistence, Venus promised to let Psyche and Cupid live in peace.