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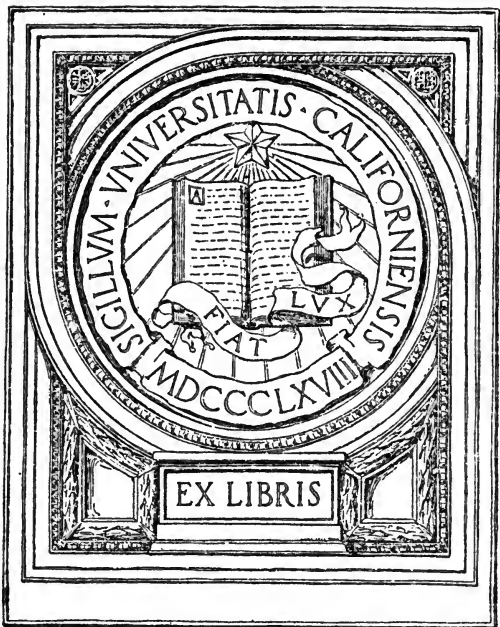


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# PSYCHE

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# PSYCHE

BY  
FRANCIS COUTTS



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**PSYCHE**

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# PSYCHE

ONCE from the suppliant throng, in vast array  
Assembled in the audience hall of Heaven,  
A soul came forth and stood before the Light,  
Crying, " O Father, clothe me with fair flesh,  
That I may suffer ; for I well perceive  
That greater suffering comes to greater bliss."

No sooner urged than granted was the prayer,  
As every prayer is granted in that place,  
Whither all worlds, in less and less ellipse  
Converging, move, and every creature turns

From farthest range : for some have even endured  
To traverse hell, that they might feel the flame,  
And, being purified, though pure before,  
Yet by experience perfected, might win  
A little nearer to eternal joy.

So Love was summoned, once in Hellas called  
Eros, the god of Love, and by his might  
That spirit was endowed with mortal shape,  
Born the first babe of villagers, and named  
Psyche, the Soul, or, emblem of the Soul,  
The Butterfly ; for in that word are joined  
Seen and unseen. But he who told the tale  
In Roman days has mingled alien myths,  
More ancient, not belonging to the South,

Of royal parentage and cruel sisters ;  
False ornaments, like gaudy vestments thrown  
About a moonlit statue of Diana :  
For us remains the vision unadorned.

Now who shall say what secret fountains feed  
The hearts of children nurtured in a home  
Secluded from the world, that such glad streams  
Of fondness and affection through them course ?  
So fond, affectionate, and full of gladness  
Was Psyche, when she came to womanhood ;  
Still childlike, though mature in wit and will ;  
Whose beauty, like the fragrance of a flower,  
Seemed from a self within herself exhaled ;  
And all her grace with goodness harmonized.

But Eros, though a god, was not immune  
From passions men call mortal ; though in truth  
There is no mortal nor immortal, all  
Having but one beginning and one end ;  
And like that Grecian sculptor, when he saw  
His maiden stepping from the Parian base,  
Marble no longer, but suffused with life,  
So Eros gazed on Psyche, as she passed  
To tribulation, radiantly brave,  
Intent on human knowledge and its pain,  
And loved her, then ; but more he loved her now  
Become a creature that of all the souls  
Whom he had robed with perishable shape  
Seemed worthiest of destiny divine.



So then began a wonder in the house  
Where Psyche dwelt ; sweet melodies were heard  
At twilight in her chamber, now of lutes,  
Soft as the summer rain on rustling leaves,  
Now of a voice, soft as the summer wind  
That scarcely flaws the shadow on the lake ;  
And Psyche's parents wondered, nor refrained  
From gossip tales of sign and warning given  
Of early death, fearing to see her fade .  
When the moon changed ; but she, like Undine,  
    laughed,  
Like Undine, when the Water-Spirit raved  
In rain and river round the woodman's hut.  
  
What message brought those minstrel visitants,

When pensive-featured Evening touched the sky

With her prophetic prospect of the morn,

Best read by those who see the morning break ?

“ Thou art the loved one of Eros ; of Eros, O child,

The Giver of Love and its pleasure and pain—

The body fulfilled and the soul undefiled,

The spirit led forth and enlarged in the boundless  
domain

Of the goodness and gladness of Earth, of its

terror and struggle and stain.

“ Thou art called to this crown, the most regal of all

that are known,

In spite of the carping of men who know less

Than the beasts of the field, and to thee shall be

shown

The freedom and fetters of Love, the delight and

distress,

The blessing that yet is a curse and the curse

that has magic to bless.

“ He stoops to thy beauty, O Psyche, to make himself

one

With thy body and soul, and with that very

Thee

That shall blossom as a flower enthralled by the sun

And drawn to look upward, and yet shall fly free

As a swallow pursuing the summer far over the

rim of the sea.

“Thou wilt suffer, O Psyche; yet yield! Be not  
doubtful to dare;

For the love of the god is a love ever young,  
And thou shalt be quit of the woman's despair  
When the love-gifts are offered no more nor the  
love-songs are sung  
And the once stooping stars of desire aloof from  
her passion are hung.

“For the love of the god is eternal; through terror  
and tears

At last will he bring thee to endless delight,  
Deliverance from death and exemption from years,  
With their gnawing of beauty and numbing of  
mind and of might,

And by his embraces renew thee, as a rose is  
renewed by the night.

“Then follow the music, O Psyche, that guiding thy  
feet

Will lead to thy lover, and be not afraid ;

He loves not in vain ; he is waiting to greet

And set thee beside him for ever ; and not  
disobeyed

Must he be who from all the immortals and  
mortals has chosen his maid.”

Such songs did Psyche hear ; as all may hear

Who can themselves keep silent ; songs that died

Into alluring distances and drew

Her steps as surely as Apollo's lyre  
Calls forth the bleating flocks, the birds and flowers,  
When from beyond an Orient hill he strikes  
The glittering, golden chords with golden quill.

The sun had scarcely set, the moon not risen,  
When Psyche from her father's cottage stole  
Across the bridge, where swiftly ran the river  
Between invisible banks, a glimmering flood,  
And through the thicket, up the turfy hill,  
By paths unlighted, but familiar, followed  
The voice persuasive and aerial harps ;  
Till, guided over unknown ground, she stood  
Before a marble entrance, where a lamp,  
Like a bronze shell, threw faint and flickering rays

Upon the darkness of an open door,  
Set deep within the wall. The escorting sound  
Ceased ; she was left, as in a dream, alone,  
Beneath that cavernous archway, dimly lit.

Now would upon my shoulders might descend  
The mantle of Apelles ! For what skill  
Of words could paint this portrait ? O red lips,  
What expectation parts you ? O wide eyes,  
Is blue the colour of love's confidence ?  
O amber tresses, Eros' hands alone  
Are thy fit playmates ! O white forehead, clear  
Of guilt or guile ! O attitude of grace,  
Changeless a moment, now about to change !

Almost her brave heart failed her and the fear  
Of night, of loneliness, of love itself  
O'ermastered her. Was there no woman within ?  
Almost she fled. Ah, no ! the hour was come  
Desired and unavoidable. The breeze  
Blew fitfully from the sea ; a nightingale  
Challenged his rival, who afar replied  
Across the valley, and the great stars trembled.  
Undaunted by the darkness, on she moved,  
Paused once again and then the threshold crossed.

At the same moment were the doors flung wide,  
And a broad beam of light, as oft, aslant  
Through storied windows in cathedral aisles,  
When the sun westers on an autumn eve,



Tints the pale effigies of warrior saints,  
Touched her with many colours : therewith came  
A hundred maidens, like a vestal throng  
That celebrates some glad event, who cast  
About her shoulders bridal robes and led her  
Into a banquet hall, aflame with roses,  
Not yet by pampering culture reft of scent,  
Poor dumb perfumeless flowers, but such as grow  
Along warm walls of fruit-trees, with clove pinks,  
Sweet William, marjoram, and mignonette.

There they enthroned her mistress of the feast,  
Too humbly proud of loving and of love  
To be abashed ; young faces, favouring eyes,  
And smiles she found, and music well discoursed,

With sequent harmonies in measured mode  
And passages of large deliberate glee,  
Calming and yet encouraging. But soon,  
Or soon it seemed, a nuptial song was heard,  
And all arose ; then seven chief damsels, making  
A white procession, brought her, like a queen,  
Into her chamber, lit by seven clear lamps  
On white pilasters ; such a place of rest  
As even the guiltiest conscience might assuage  
With sleep undreaming. There was she disrobed,  
Laved in the lustral pool, whose porphyry lips  
Low in a tessellated alcove shone,  
And thence conducted to her bridal couch ;  
Yet all was done with ceremonious mirth,  
As seemly as the rites of death are done

With sadness ; and, departing, each one kissed her,  
And each one bore away an unquenched lamp ;  
For this, they told her, was the will of Eros.

The bridegroom tarries : hush,

Ye breezes, and sleep !

No more murmur, thou river, by reed or rush ;

Imperious deep,

Couch all thy billows ; Night, with calm hand

Soothe into slumber the sun-weary land.

The bride awaits him : hark,

A rustle of wings !

Is he drawing down glory out of the dark ?

Her spirit springs

Upward to meet him : Love, grant her grace  
To see thee most bright when thou hidest thy face.

The morning broke ; and who has seen unmoved  
That solemn sight, save those for whom the day's  
Long toil begins with sunrise all the year,  
Shepherds and mariners and husbandmen,  
Grown as familiar with that holy hour  
As other men with sunset ? Psyche gazed  
From the white-balustraded marble steps  
Over the cypresses and ilex-trees,  
Watching the distant ocean, by faint hues  
Of morning flushed, in swift gradation changed ;  
Beyond were snow-crowned mountains ; to the  
South

A white-towered city, many a league away,  
Signalled of man's endeavour ; near her flowered  
The purple iris and reed-gladiale,  
And alabaster basins overflowed  
With plashing fountains ; while the ring-dove  
cooed  
In the great plane-tree that o'erhung the terrace ;  
But yet she heard not, for her eyes alone  
Were sensible, as if with them she heard  
The far-off murmur of the summer surge ;  
For one gift wanting made all others void,  
Nor could a thousandfold of those delights  
That now were present to her eye and ear,  
Or still more gracious forms that haunt the mind,  
Outweigh the dead-weight of that one denial.

Although, according to the unwritten rites  
Of Love himself, profaned not by the thought  
Of other consecration, she had slept  
In Eros' arms, and knew him beautiful,  
Yet not by sight, but by that sense she knew  
Which women use unconsciously as birds  
Who cross the ocean with unerring aim :  
For ere the dawn he woke her, whispering  
    " Psyche,  
The sun will soon be risen and I must leave  
    thee."

" Leave me so soon ? So soon ! " she answered,  
    weeping,  
" I looked that we should spend long days together,

That I, who have no knowledge, might become,  
Learning of thee, more worthy of thy love."

"Worthy thou art; as worthy to be taught  
As willing," he replied; "thou shalt not lack  
The realm of wonder where thy mind may roam,  
To reap new harvests or to sow new fields;  
But be content; so long as I am hidden  
From thy dear bodily eyes, our love is safe;  
Herein shall be the wisdom of our love,  
To suffer separation, save when Night  
Throws from my world to thine her star-roofed  
bridge.

Behold the eternal law—that beauty slurred  
In image or reflection is not loved

As beauty that is never seen is loved ;  
For so have all religions been at fault  
That have interpreted by visible sign  
Invisible divinity."

" Stay, stay,"

Cried Psyche ; " leave me not alone, with these  
Mysterious warnings ; they will haunt my heart ;"  
And Eros answered gravely, " Be it so ;  
Strict is the law, and ancient as the hills.  
Seek not to break the barrier ; if thou seek,  
In the same hour thou seest me, no more  
Thou seest me. Farewell, until again  
The zephyr-footed Evening whisper ' Come '  
And lead me willing to my shrine, thy breast."



So saying, he kissed her tenderly and vanished  
She knew not whither. Then she pondered long  
The import of his words, until, like doves  
Assembling to their cote, her maidens came,  
With greeting best belonging to a bride ;  
But when she was attired she went alone  
Forth to the terrace and there stood alone,  
Gazing far seaward, as a while ago  
I sought to picture her, with wanting words.

Long time she stood ; then, with her comrades' aid,  
By sedulous care in small employment strove  
To empty out her heaviness of thought ;  
But slowly waned the day, till, weary of light,  
Because it brought not love, she loosed the cord

That looped the curtain of her lattices,  
Glad of the gloom, ere yet the sun's wide wings  
Had grown vermilion ; but in vain she spread  
Her lure of darkness to entice her lord ;  
Not till vociferous frogs in chorus croaked,  
And bats, that squeak as shrill as grasshoppers,  
Chased the white moths around her palace walls  
Like swallows of the night, would Eros come.

But when he came, what happiness was hers,  
What converse, what caresses, none can tell  
Save women comforted like her, who sleep  
As dreamlessly as tired children sleep,  
But wake, perchance, an hour before the dawn  
And breathe again fond words, till twittering sparrows

Chatter their interruption ; signal rude  
To Psyche's ear as trumpets that from home  
Summon the soldier, who with close embrace  
And whispered solace bids his wife farewell ;  
For so that hour called Eros ; who, unseen,  
Was well imagined, for his very voice  
Was full of intimation to her heart  
Of all that women wish their kings to be.

The seasons circled ; not with freezing fog  
And scorching heat, but temperate changes, marked  
By flowers or fruit, by buds or falling leaves ;  
But not to Psyche brought the seasons change,  
Whose days were as the night, the nights as day ;  
Save that wise men approached her, skilled to rouse

The mind, that like the princess in a trance  
Awaits the one particular lover's kiss.  
Then first she learnt the wonder of the world :  
The heavens, that make sad men remember peace,  
But yet themselves are full of furious heat  
And rushings round and round and on and on ;  
The rocks, whose record, in themselves contained,  
Tells the long tale of fierce demonic force ;  
The flowers, like living crystals, that to soil  
And climate mould themselves and serve their  
    need  
By ministering insects ; last, the life  
That broke the briny dungeon of the deep  
And crawling into Earth's Cyclopean hands  
Was shaped into the Man ; too like an Ape

To justify the slow stupendous forge  
That beat him into being, unless the hammer  
Of the ages can still smite him to some mode  
Less burdened by the faulty, transient flesh,  
Less falsely free, with one hand building up  
Structures that with the other he casts down.

Then first she heard the laughter and the wail  
Of human life in poetry revealed,  
With music, sweet controller of the will,  
Not caught, as fable tells, from whispering reed,  
Warble of mating bird, or clang of anvil,  
But born in men themselves, whose gesture, voice,  
And rhythmic speech in passionate moments prove  
Art is not artificial ; following these,

In dignity not less, though less in rank,  
Sculpture and painting brought their brave array  
Of sensuous matter by a soul informed.

How happy then was Psyche ! Not despising  
The due observance and the seemly care  
Of household and apparel, but not vexed  
By emulous vanity of ornament,  
Nor mocked by menials nor enslaved by slaves,  
She of no homely practice was ashamed,  
And like her damsels clothed herself and fared,  
Now bathing with them in the tumbling water,  
That fell into a shadowed pool and coiled  
Beside the garden ; playing now at ball,  
Like the King's daughter, of the blameless folk,

Who unashamed the naked Wanderer brought  
Home to her father ; now with chord and cadence  
Of lute and voice, subduing restless thought ;  
By Thespian interlude persuading hearts  
To wholesome laughter ; or with tragic mask  
Purging the passion of the soul with pity :  
But always when the fingers of the Sun  
Gathered the dew, or Earth with gentler hands  
Had drawn it down again to cool her bosom,  
The maidens chanted antiphons of praise  
To Him who is and was and is to be ;  
And oft would Psyche bid them sing the song  
That she was wont to hear in former days,  
When young and old were sitting in the dusk,  
After the evening meal, and all the stars,

Like seraphs burning with clear ardour, watched,  
Each from his station on the walls of heaven :

“ The vines are heavy with grapes and the olives are  
laden,

The vast sea moves in voluminous vagrance,  
On high floats the orb of the Huntress eternally  
maiden,

The warm dew falls on the flowers and Earth is  
refreshed with their fragrance.

“ Now the whisperers stoop from the sky and rise  
from the ocean ;

’Tis the hour of the pause, for regret and re-  
membrance,



When like dancing of gnats o'er the brook seems all  
human commotion,

Like a phantom the face that we love and the  
world but a shadow or semblance.

“ Is darkness or light the more ancient and which  
is the stronger ?

Soon life burns low and is quenched in few lustres ;  
When morning arises, the tale of past life will be  
longer,

And again when the moon is re-throned amid  
bright constellations and clusters ;

“ Yet soon as the Sun, with his snow-tinting radiance  
upsurges,

And the birds offer up their glad song of thanks-  
giving,

Again shall we welcome the life and the love that he  
urges,

Forgetting the labourless night in the passion of  
loving and living.”

In spiritual stature Psyche grew,  
Till she who keeps the record of the nations,  
Their great endeavour and vicissitude,  
Their low beginning and luxurious end,  
Seeking disciples, wandered through the world,  
And, as a searcher of the storm-piled shingle  
Beside the encroaching sea, whose hissing waves  
Are driven in winter far across the marshes,

Descries a red carnelian, onyx agate,  
Or piece of amber, in the slanting light  
Faintly translucent, so the joyful Clio  
Discerned the mind of Psyche, crystalline  
Among dull pebbles, worthy of her care,  
And took her by the hand and touched her eyes  
To see the panorama of the past,  
The mountains and the seas where Freedom dwells,  
The plains of battle and the vales of peace,  
The long and patient progress of mankind,  
The generations, that, like forest leaves,  
Fall but to feed the life from which they fall.

Wherefore to Psyche and her lord there came  
Another bridal, far more intimate

Than were their first embraces ; she attained  
The knowledge hidden since the world began  
(Save to the few initiate) that the soul,  
And not the blood alone, for marriage cries ;  
Wherefore unless the mingling of the blood  
Be sacramental, it is poured in vain ;  
The dogs of this world's care shall lap it up :  
For often half the night he held her charmed  
In converse, following her winding thought ;  
Skilled in all knowledge and to use it well,  
Ungrudgingly he gave, nor stinted aught,  
Save what may lie beyond the power of speech.

Most happy then was Psyche ; though, like Eve,  
One thing she might not have and that she wished ;

Yet how much more than Eve to be forgiven !  
Who, knowing only good, save discontent,  
Desired to know more evil ; but the other  
Craved for more knowledge of her greatest good :  
The Sun that warmed her, yet denied his light,  
Nor could entreaty, reason, tears avail  
To uneclipse him ; still would he reply,  
“ So faithless, Psyche ? If thou disbelieve  
The spiritual truth that truth divine  
Is not expressed by symbol, but obscured,  
Immortal union never shall be ours ;  
For bodily eyes can only see a sign  
Of what I am ; myself they cannot see.”

To whom she answered, “ Eros, that my eyes

Persist in longing for thy face and form  
Cannot be ill, since seeing is their good ;  
Nor do I deem thou seekest to conceal  
A hideous aspect, such as men have worn  
Whose mothers by some monster were dismayed ;  
Why, then, wilt thou this obstinate curtain draw  
Between thyself and me ? Of me thou hast  
Full sight, though how I know not ; yet I know."

As, when a child some riddling question lisps  
Of human life, unwitting what it asks,  
The grandame knits in silence, taking thought,  
With brow more wrinkled than by tears or time,  
How warily, yet wisely, to reply,  
Irreverent nor of childhood nor of truth,

So Eros paused and pondered how to tell  
The everlasting war between the Worlds  
Whose boundaries are the mountains of our dreams.

At last he spoke : " Although on Earth I sought thee  
And took upon myself the dignity  
And the indignity of Man, to woo thee,  
We wander not in murk material maze ;  
We two have built ourselves a bower of bliss,  
Deep in a leafy garden, where no storm  
Of devastating desert sand can drift ;  
There, as I am thou seest me ; no fault,  
Such as pertains to all expressive shape,  
Dims my perfection, and no beam oblique  
Nor error of thine eyesight can distort me ;

Thee too I know by virtue of that place,  
Where are no warders of the gates of sense,  
Demanding this or that assurance ; freely  
We mingle there, by passion not compelled,  
But in obedience to a blither law.  
Why, then, dear Psyche, wouldst thou banish me  
Into the visible world ? ”

A little space

Psyche was silent ; soon, with clinging arms  
About his neck, she cried, “Thou sayest the truth ;  
But yet thy native land is mountain land ;  
An hour I breathe its air and then I falter :  
The blue smoke calls me and the russet roofs,  
Where in the valley mothers nurse their babes.”



So Psyche, shedding tears ; but Eros said,  
“ Weep not nor wonder ; larger is this law  
Even than the law of Love ; for God is seen,  
And shall be, only in the heart of Man,  
Though oft reported to dwell here and there,  
In temples or in shrines ; but when Religion  
Raises her lamp to see him, he is fled.  
But now farewell ; the freshness of the dawn  
Is wafted o'er the sea : how false the fable  
That evil things love darkness and foul woes  
Fly with the flying shadow round the world !  
The worst woes haunt the day. But ah ! forget  
not  
To keep secure our garden. Set a watch  
To compass it about ; admitting none,

Howe'er commissioned or imperative ;

Footsteps the most divine would there profane."

Like two young angels, by celestial love

Transfigured, in each other's arms they lay ;

But even as Psyche kissed him, he was gone,

Although a while, she thought, he lingered near her,

While thus the aerial choir his praise declared :

" Eros, creator of life, thyself the first creature  
created,

Thou didst bestow upon life, from its birth and  
beginning,

Love, with a dower of grace and the power of  
sinning,

Love, the giver of joy, and Love the fatal and  
fated.

“Life by thy absolute word into bridegroom and  
bride was divided,

Whence love was by children enlarged, and the  
waves of the leaven

Spread in irradiate rings to the confines of  
heaven,

Encompassed in vain by the dullness of darkness and  
vainly derided.

“The choir of the Earth and the Sea and the Air  
in loud harmony raises

Thanksgiving to thee who didst brood o'er the  
unteeming waters,

Conceiving the husband and wife, and their sons  
and their daughters ;

And the mates and the babes of all creatures to thee  
chant the psalm of their praises.

“ Hadst thou endowed them with life, nothing more,  
in what revel of ravage,

In what violent contention and strife had their  
habitants squandered

The days and the nights of their sojourn and  
homelessly wandered !

But thou didst redeem them by love from the life  
that is loveless and savage.

“ Hail to the great god of love ! Still wider and  
wider are flowing

His aureole waves, that expanding grow stronger  
and stronger,

Till the nations of Earth shall be separate nations  
no longer,

But all shall be subject to him, as a field is subdued  
by the sowing."

So sang the spirits attendant ; or so seemed

Their song, interpreted by mortal ears.

But Psyche was left lonely ; and, alone,

Both men and women oft contrive their woe.

Then on a day when her near sorrow hurt her

(Because no mist of misery more obscures

The sunshine from the heart than one close blur),

She called the damsel to her side, beloved  
The most of all, though all she loved, and said,  
“ Neræa, to thee I have confided much,  
And thou to me. Bright is the nesting time ;  
The cherry foams with flower, the fig is green,  
The birds are trilling, and all buds must break ;  
But yet to me no brightness is undimmed.  
The noble youth who loves thee—he who learns,  
In yonder white-towered city where he dwells,  
To labour for the common good, despite  
His frolic temper—is he not in haste  
To wed thee, pretty pigeon ? ”

“ Yes, indeed,”

Neræa answered, “ but when Eros wills ;

For always when I pray to him, I hear

A voice cry 'Wait!' Ah, wilt thou not entreat  
him?"

"Wilt thou not wait?" asked Psyche.

"Not for ever,"

The damsel answered.

"Nay, but wait his will,"

Psyche replied, "for not in vain he rules,

But both are his—to punish and reward."

"Art thou, then, happy," said Neræa, "thou

Whose flower of life upon his altar lies?"

Her mistress, gazing on her, thus pursued :

“ Suppose thyself now wedded and fulfilled

All the desired endearments ; and suppose

That thou hadst never seen thy husband’s face,

Though darkness brought thee his enfolding arms

And converse sweet : couldst thou be happy ? ”

“ No,”

Neræa cried, “ I could not bear it.”

“ This

I have to bear,” said Psyche.

And the other murmured,

“ I know, I know ; it is the law of Eros ; ”



Then, after silence, suddenly vehement,  
Stood up, and with defiant gesture, vowed  
“ I would not bear it ; I would break the rule  
And let him punish me ; if gods descend  
To marry mortals, let them mortal usage  
Observe, or marry goddesses ; this crime  
Would I commit, that I would treat my god  
As husbands should be treated. Should I look ?  
Yes, truly ; frown at him, if there were need ;  
Or bid him smile, as oft there might be need.  
Why not ? These teasing tricks are the rough edge  
Of fleecy comfort that a woman wraps  
About a man, to keep him from the cold  
Of friends’ ingratitude and friendship false  
And all the world’s disdain.”

“ How know'st thou this,”

Psyche demanded, “ thou who art so young ? ”

Neræa said, “ My father was born rich ;

He used to talk to me ; but then he spoke

Of men, not gods.”

“ But gods need comfort too,”

Psyche replied, “ or why should they wed women ? ”

The cushats cooed around them, seeking mates,

And they, like cushats, to each other cooed,

Planning a deed, though guileless as the doves,

More dangerous to perform than building nests.

Ah, why should vernal mist the prospect veil,  
When in our youth we sow our favourite flowers  
And the unforgetting sun falls on our plot,  
To fertilise the seed ? Too soon we dream  
Of fairer plants that grow beyond the cloud ;  
Into its cold and clammy arms we plunge  
And down a precipice are dashed to death,  
Or choked in a fierce cataract ; or stagger  
Into black gorges and are seen no more :  
And even if high and arduous ways attaining  
We reach the uttermost neck, the windy ridge,  
Another country full of vapour waits  
To clasp us with chill clutch, or some bleak height  
Emerging, like a monster on a throne,  
Commands us to his emptiness and silence.

Again a summer night : the crescent moon  
Looked like a cradle in a cameo, poised  
Westward beneath the placid-shining planet,  
The throne of Aphrodite ; round the horizon  
Thunderless lightning quivered ; the world was  
hushed.

Eros beside his lady sighed in sleep,  
When softly she arose and trembling stood  
In the thick darkness, with dilated eyes  
Watching ; and presently a line of light  
One instant gleamed ; thither with noiseless feet  
She crept, and like a nurse with noiseless hands  
Tending the sick, drew back the chamber door,  
And found Neræa, with a lighted lamp  
Darkened beneath a fold of her dark robe,

Which Psyche took. Neræa, motionless,  
Watched her as she re-entered.

Ponderously

The moments pass, when swings the heavy soul  
Through the alternate arcs of hope and fear,  
Marking at each extreme Time's labouring lapse.  
So to the listening maid the moments passed,  
In darkness and in silence, till she heard  
The sound of weeping, and a sadder sound  
Even than weeping, like a moaning wind  
That wails o'er mounded graves and cries "Too  
late."

So Psyche wept and so the voices wailed  
For Love departed ; though men still pursue

His spectral presence, indeterminate  
As shadows wavering under wind-blown trees ;  
But down the broadening channel of the years  
Dispersed is that sad song, until some bard,  
Great as the Florentine to whom Love talked  
As friend to friend, shall fashion it anew.

Soon as the weird and warning chant had ceased,  
A snake of tortuous lightning writhed from heaven,  
With crash of instantaneous thunder ; riven  
The palace seemed, from roof to floor, as once,  
When midday darkness on the city fell  
And dead men walked abroad, the Veil was rent.  
The women cowered, locked in each other's arms ;  
The flickering lamp their frightened faces lit ;

And up and down the awakened maidens ran,  
With cries of terror, till their mistress rose,  
Pale, but majestic, and commanded search,  
Lest that sulphureous bolt had kindled flame.

Now dawn, bare-bosomed, breathed along the sea,  
Ruffling the little waves to curl like shells,  
And like pink shells they curled, when Psyche threw  
The terrace door wide open : not the house,  
But that great plane-tree, from the topmost plume  
Down to the very tap-root, had been split,  
Splintered and hurled and scattered far and near,  
As if a giant woodman, no less crazed  
Than Ajax, when he slew the silly flocks,  
Had cloven and hewn the bole and leafy boughs,

Strewing the fragments like the flakes that fly  
Around a mason as he trims the stone.

Then fell poor Psyche passing sick and pined  
As pines a hyacinth when winds of March  
Blow bleakly through the hazel copse and dash  
The gold dust of the catkins to the ground ;  
Nor dared Neræa ask (so frail she seemed)  
What awful sight had struck her or what worse  
Bruised her than sight ; or if alone that song  
And bolt delivered from heaven, sure sign of wrath,  
Had dulled the dancing life-light of her eyes.

So passed the summer, so the winter passed ;  
Then the two sad companions wandered forth,



One sunny noon, beyond the lichened wall  
That ringed the budding lemons and the grove  
Of oranges, in flower and golden fruit  
Perpetual. To the South, tall cypress trees  
Shadowed their way ; all round them, scattered rocks  
Were overhung with clumps of sea-green spurge,  
Ablaze with yellow bracts ; and here and there,  
An arbutus with fairy pitchers decked  
Her fronds, in pink wax clusters. Soon the path  
Descending kept the border of a wood,  
Fringed with the red acacia ; like the sloe,  
In blossom ere in leaf ; and, round about,  
The myrtle spread her starry pasturage  
For humming bees and silent butterflies,  
Who, when they wearied of that sweet, could flit

To the sea-mallow, star-anemone,  
And honeyed lebourine ; to lavender  
And rosy cistus, breathing balmy scent ;  
Or that Parnassian plant, white asphodel ;  
And overhead, among the cresting boughs,  
The black-capped warbler, faithful to the home  
Where he was born, poured forth his song profuse.

Neræa heeding all and Psyche nought  
Now reached a curving bench, in marble carved,  
Where sloped the land abruptly to pale leagues  
Of olive trees, far spreading to the bend  
Of a broad river ; all beyond was haze  
Of shimmering distance and blue edges blurred.  
Here hand in hand they rested ; here at last,

As Psyche looked across the vale and saw  
The first faint gossamer mist of evening fall,  
Her tears welled up and with them welled her words :  
“ He comes no more,” she cried ; “ I saw him not,  
And yet I saw him ; scarcely can I tell  
Whether I saw him, though my eyes were filled  
With beauty ; more like music visible,  
If that may be, when the harper weaves his spell  
In mood most tender. But, ah me, too short,  
Too short the moment ! Like a gleam of sun  
That strikes the valley on a stormy day  
With loveliness unearthly, so the sight  
Passed of my lord’s dear presence, and the dark  
Of desolation gathered ; there was left  
Nothing except remembrance.”

One degree

At least the shadow of the dial had crept  
Before Neræa answered, sore distraught  
For counsel rashly given and consequence  
Inexorably cruel ; scarce she knew  
The words she uttered : “ He will come again : ”  
Her mistress answered, “ He will come no more ;  
And vainly should I plead with kindly Death,  
The silent usher who so oft has led  
Less lonely wives to their removéd lords ;  
For I was made immortal by the kiss  
Of love immortal ; wherefore I must seek  
No more for mortal pleasure, but must learn  
Immortal joy, more difficult ; that so,  
Winged with renunciation, I ascend,

Leaving this cloud of pale encumbrances  
And sensuous questioning of false and true,  
With him in equal happiness to dwell.”

Neræa, not understanding, listened, awed  
To silence, and in silence long they stayed,  
Watching, as children watch, the sun descend  
Between his ranks of gorgeous-liveried cloud,  
Till, like a token of love, the first great star  
Burst into brilliance and announced the night.

That ancient chronicler (to whom be praise  
For the sweet story in his book embalmed)  
Declared that Psyche, after trial and task  
Imposed by Venus, angry that her son

Should wed an earthly maiden, found her way  
Into the Courts of Heaven, where she achieved  
Eternal marriage with her lord long lost :  
But minds by Fancy unbemused must deem  
That still in that enchanted house she dwells,  
Expectant in despair ; because she waits  
Like one who watches the disastrous waves,  
Yet hopes the ship's return ; and there at eve  
In moving song to lute or harp complains,  
And draws down every cheek the slow, warm tears :

“ All the long day the ring-dove coos

And whoso say he grieves

Are fools or false, for his mate he woos

In a tangle of forest leaves :

She warms her nest

With her feathery breast

While he sits happily by

And utters his sweet cry.

“ From dark to dawn the nightingale,

More glad than in sunny hours,

Over the dell to the farther dale

His torrent of passion showers,

And whoso feigns

That he complains

Has never drawn so nigh

His ecstasy as I.

“ At break of day, when lambkins bleat,

Following their mothers along

The dewy mead with frisking feet,  
The lark begins his song,  
And young hearts throb  
And old men sob  
To hear those untaught notes  
Of longing that sunward floats.

“ But woe to the bird that cannot fly  
Prisoned in painted bars,  
To her native land beyond the sky,  
Green isles beyond the stars,  
Undying flowers  
And sorrowless bowers  
Of Love who needs no night  
To make his presence bright.”



Beside the winter hearth, when crackling logs  
Blaze and the wind at every casement shrieks  
His message of near snow on desolate moors,  
Oft let this tale be told, and let the sire  
Its meaning thus recite : " By that degree  
Of observation and attempt to shrine  
The Presence of the God, does he withdraw  
To farther distance. He who drew aside  
The Veil of severance from the Holy Place,  
To find the Deity, found empty space."



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