

CONRAD CUMMINGS

EROS AND PSYCHE

Opera in Three Acts

Libretto by the Composer

Freely Adapted from Apuleius

A sesquicentennial commission of
Oberlin College

ROLES

Principals:

Psyche.....lyric soprano
Venus.....coloratura soprano
Eros.....tenor
Zephyr.....high baritone

Secondary Roles:

Psyche's Mother.....mezzo soprano
Apollo.....baritone
The King, Psyche's Father.....baritone
Daphne and Isabel, Psyche's Two Sisters.....soprano and mezzo soprano

Minor Roles:

Priest at Delphi.....baritone
Head Ant.....tenor
River Reed.....tenor
Tower.....tenor
Cerberus.....male trio in one costume: tenor, baritone, bass baritone
Zeus.....baritone

Spoken Roles (one line):

Charon.....low male voice
Lost Soul.....male voice

Silent Roles:

The Oracle of Delphi.....disheveled young woman
Juno.....formidable and threatening woman

Chorus (ca. 24 voices):

Psyche's Suitors; Psyche's Court; Invisible Servants; Ants; Lost Souls;
Council of the Gods

ACT I SCENE 1

(Psyche, Psyche's Mother, Chorus of Suitors, Venus, Eros)

(Psyche's palace. Enter Psyche followed by her mother.)

PSYCHE

(spoken)

Mother, why do they stare at me with those adorning looks, why must I sit day after day
for their endless compliments?

MOTHER

(spoken)

You must be gracious my daughter, you must accept their gifts and praise.

(aria)

And when they say you are more beautiful than Venus

You must nod and bow, be gracious and be serious.

For none can deny that their words speak only the truth.

What mother could have greater pleasure

Than to have her own, her youngest daughter

Compared in beauty to the goddess of love herself.

(da capo)

(recit.)

Here they are now, prepare yourself.

(Enter quartet of suitors)

This is Phaedrus from Athens, and this is Heraclitus from Thessaly, this is the king of Thrace, and this is the prince of Thermopylae.

CHORUS OF SUITORS

(First a quartet, then gradually expanding
as more enter to the whole male chorus.)

It's true—my god—unearthly beauty—a marvel—it fills me with wonder and admiration! She *is*—she *is* the goddess descended, Venus on earth! It takes my breath away, she dazes my sight, she stuns my senses.

(full male chorus on by now)

Venus, more beautiful than Venus, love-goddess, living beauty, divine beauty, Psyche, we worship thee!

(Flash powder explosion, blackout. Venus and Eros appear on a platform high up above the downstage edge of the stage. Venus reclining on a divan, Eros kneeling at her feet, bow in hand, both looking down at stage. Eros is a strapping young man.)

VENUS

(spoken, looking down)

I won't have it! They worship her instead of me! Have they no gratitude? Are they so fickle to forget the goddess they love, who all know to be the most beautiful

(Eros looks up at Venus, but does not smile)

and worship a little mortal twit?

(Venus gets up from couch)

(recit.)

This affront is more than I can bear.

A stupid mortal, plain and silly,

They want to put her in my place!

(aria)

She who spites Venus, by love shall spited be.

Over beauty I have dominion, none shall question my supremacy.

Though she thinks she's now so pretty,

Flouncing, mincing, pouting, sniveling

I will show her the force of love.

She'll be humiliated for all to see.

(da capo)

(recit.)

Eros, my son, you who always obey me, go with your arrows and your bow, and with the power of your mighty darts—wait, wait for the right moment—wait until the vilest brute is in her sight, a person hated by his equals, scorned by his superiors, ugly, foul, loathsome and degenerate, feeble and smelly and with slimy awful skin, hideous and laughable, impossible to stand—

(arioso)

And with your arrows pierce her heart and make her fall

Totally, blissfully, dotingly, gladly in love with this horrible beast.

(repeated)

(recit.)

Go now, find her. Her name is Psyche.

(Eros looks up at Venus again)

And execute this plan of mine.

(Eros stands up and starts to leave; Venus calls him back.)

—no, you'll get distracted on the way. We'll go together and I'll point out who she is.

And then I'll have the pleasure and the satisfaction of seeing her, and her family, and her suitors, and those countless fickle mortals who worship her, all humiliated.

(aria)

(As Venus begins the aria Eros sits down on the foot of the divan and waits patiently, perhaps propping his chin on his bow.)

I'll see them cringe,

I'll see them wince,

I'll see them hide their heads and groan and rue the day

That ever Psyche was said to be more beautiful than me,

That's an affront that Venus never shall bear!

They'll be aghast,

They'll be embarrassed,

She'll hug and kiss this foul and slimy oafish thing,

And they will feel

Their stomachs turn

As to this lowly beast their goddess they bring.

(da capo)

(Exit Venus followed by Eros)

SCENE 2

(Psyche, Psyche's Two Sisters and their Two Suitors, Venus, Eros)

(A garden in Psyche's palace. A fountain. Psyche alone.)

PSYCHE

(spoken)

Why do they only stare, these men who come from everywhere? Why do they look wide eyed and mouth agape, then catch themselves and recite orations and lay flowers at my feet—and leave stunned? Who can talk with a stunned man?

(recit.)

They all admire me from a distance, but none comes near, none talks to me, none will sit beside me, none walks with me in the cool of the evening in this beautiful garden, none whispers in my ear, none is tender, none holds me in his arms. All I want is a fine true man to be my lover and husband.

(aria)

None comes, none comes, none comes.

They admire me but pass me by.

(Psyche's two sisters pass, each with a suitor on her arm)

My sisters have tender attention

From kings and princes

(Sisters and suitors bow reverentially to Psyche, then continue their stroll and exit.)

But none dares come near me, do I scare them?

Am I so frightful?

I may well be the most beautiful woman

In all the world,

But must I also be the single most lonely?

Then what is this beauty worth?

None comes, none comes, none comes.

(Enter Venus quietly during the final notes of the aria)

VENUS

(spoken, aside, genuinely taken aback by Psyche's beauty,
forgetting for a moment her anger)

Oh, she really *is* beautiful—

(but then instantly remembering—recit.)

Damned mortal!—Come here Eros!

(Enter Eros. Psyche has turned away so that her face is not visible to Eros. During the entire scene it must be clear that Venus and Eros are completely invisible and inaudible to Psyche. While Venus sings the following Eros carefully and seriously strings his bow, kneels, takes an arrow from his quiver, and draws it in his bow preparing to loose it on Psyche. The bow should be real and stiff; Eros's strength and mastery in drawing it should be evident.)

There she is. Do your deed, make Psyche fall in love with an ugly thing!

(At this moment Psyche turns to look up at the sky and Eros sees her face for the first time. He is transfixed at the sight of Psyche. He lowers the bow until the arrow points diagonally down to the floor and gradually releases the bow's tension.)

EROS

(recit.)

Psyche, Psyche, my heart, my love...

VENUS

(recit)

(Venus is completely unaware that Eros has been smitten by Psyche.)

I'll go now. I need a sea cruise with Neptune. This whole affair has tired my spirits and sapped my beauty.

(Exit Venus)

PSYCHE

(recit.)

What use this beauty when none comes near?

EROS

(recit.)

Psyche! This feeling, what is this feeling?

(Eros grasps the arrow with his right hand, looks at it)

Has my own arrow,

(looks at bow)

loosed from my own bow,

(He slowly moves the arrow in a wide arc away from his body and back again till the arrowhead touches his breast.)

turned in mid-air and come back to pierce my own heart?

PSYCHE

(recit.)

Love, come to me, such loneliness no mortal heart should bear.

EROS

(recit.)

(Eros continues to hold the arrow through the rest of the scene.)

What new sensation is this? She fills me with sweet wonder and enchantment, but I cannot, I must not touch her.

(aria)

(During the aria Psyche curls up on the edge of the fountain and sleeps.)

Psyche this arrow was meant for thee,

But the fates and my love have turned it on me.

Now, I'm sure, no mortal love will find you;

Now, for me, somehow my bride I'll bind you.

Beautiful emotion, this feeling new to me

No longer will I laugh at my victims' folly.

Eros loves, and Psyche, till we meet,

In love with love, faith with Eros shall keep.

(da capo)

(Exit Eros at a full run)

(Running music interlude leads to scene 3.)

SCENE 3

(Apollo, Eros)

(Toward the end of the Running Music Interlude, Apollo is revealed on a platform high above the downstage edge of the stage, perhaps off to one side, perhaps the same as used by Venus in Ii, except this time there must be a stairway or ladder connecting it to stage level. Apollo is half reclining on a small raised platform, playing the lyre. The pose and the small platform are very much Greek sculpture style, although Apollo could be a little overweight and need not have Apollonian features. During the last measures of the Interlude Eros enters from the far side of the stage at a full run, climbs the stairs or ladder at full speed, and arrives on the platform with the final notes of the Interlude. He is still holding the arrow from the previous scene.)

EROS

(spoken, breathless, immediately on the close of the Interlude
and his arrival on the platform)

Apollo, you have to help me out!

APOLLO

(spoken)

Oh, it's you. *You need my help?* Seems to me you're always able to do your work without any one else's help—and all the good it does!

(Eros makes a gesture of apology or dismay, or shrugs, but in any case this results in the arrow in his right hand coming dangerously close to Apollo.)

Hey! Be careful with your arrows—the last time you struck me I had to turn the poor girl into a tree. You're the one who's always inflicting love on us and always laughing at its effects.

(Apollo gets up from platform)

But it's been awhile since I've seen you.

(looks Eros up and down)

—you're growing—

(rubs Eros's chin, Eros turns slightly away)

—getting a beard—Say, maybe you won't be laughing at all of us so much any more...

Well, what can I do?

EROS

(spoken)

There's this girl—

APOLLO

Oh?

EROS

—and—

APOLLO

Ah!

EROS

She's a mortal, and—

APOLLO

Even better!

EROS

—and—and—

(headlong, blurting it out)

my mother hates her and I love her and I want to marry her and you've got to help me out!

APOLLO

(recit.)

Aha! Eros in love!

(arioso)

Now he knows how it feels to be pricked by the arrow of that burning passion's dart.

(repeated)

(aria)

It shouldn't surprise me—it's only natural—

It shouldn't surprise me at all—it's entirely natural—

That here in Olympus even the child gods grow up.

It shouldn't surprise me—it's totally natural—

It's entirely probable and it's even quite unavoidable—

That here in Olympus, even Olympus, land of immortals, timeless realm,

Even here, even here, even here in the land where no one ever grows old,

The kids grow up.

There's no way to stop them.

It may take a thousand years, but still they grow up.

Think of Athena, she's really exceptional,

She may have been born full-blown from the forehead of Zeus,

But don't think for a moment she had nothing to learn.

I'll tell you a secret if you promise never to tell

All she knows about love I taught her and I taught it well.

(da capo, and then coda)

(coda)

(underlined words are spoken over music)

You may not expect it—still they grow up.

You're tired of waiting—still they grow up.

It may take a thousand years—so who's counting?—still they grow up.

Just when you thought they never would—still they grow up—and before you know it,
they're gone...

It may take a thousand years, but still they grow up.

(spoken)

But who is she? What's her name?

EROS

(spoken)

Psyche!

APOLLO

(spoken)

Psyche...

(recit.)

You know her father's coming to my oracle today. They all worship her but no one dares
come near her and she grows sadder by the day.

EROS

(recit.)

Yes I know! Come let me tell you my plan—and how you can help me.

(Exit Eros and Apollo)

SCENE 4

(Apollo, Priest, Oracle, King, Psyche's Mother, Psyche's Two Sisters and their Suitors, Psyche, the Court (full chorus))

(The oracle of Delphi. During the Prelude the scene is gradually revealed: a mighty rocky peak to one side, on its slope a crevice issuing steaming fumes. Seated on a three-legged stool astride the crevice a fierce and disheveled young woman, the Oracle. Below her at stage level, the Priest, seen briefly conferring with Apollo. The Priest nods in assent and Apollo hurries off as the first members of the Court arrive. Then enter King and Mother with Psyche between them, Psyche's two Sisters and their Suitors following behind, and in procession behind them the entire Court.)

KING

(recit.)

Oh Oracle! Oh Delphic maiden! We come to ask the reason for our daughter's sadness,
and what we can do to remedy it.

CHORUS

Psyche, poor Psyche, so lovely, so beautiful

But why is she lonely, and why does she mourn?

Does her beauty condemn her, is she proud, is she obstinate?

Apollo, speak through your oracle of truth,

And show us the path to her happiness!

PRIEST

(recit.)

Oh oracle, what has Psyche done, and what can we do to help her?

ORACLE

(A single loudspeaker sits immediately behind the Oracle and is invisible to the audience. The Oracle's mouth opens in an exaggerated but soundless scream. A

shrieking, howling, athletic and supernatural vocalise comes from the loudspeaker—it is a computer-synthesized singing voice.)

PRIEST

(recit.)

She says—

ORACLE

(more shrieks and howls)

PRIEST

—that Psyche has inspired the wrath of Venus—

ORACLE

(same)

PRIEST

—and that she will never find love from a mortal—

ORACLE

(Furious, howling, shrieking vocalise continues through the following recit.)

PRIEST

—and that she must today be placed on yonder rock and left as for a marriage—but a fearful serpent, the terror even of Zeus, will take her for his bride. Apollo has spoken!

CHORUS

Oh gods! No! No! This must not be!

Our Psyche, left to a monstrous beast!

KING

No! My daughter! Condemned to death!

PRIEST

The Oracle has spoken!

(Exit Priest and Oracle with a frightening and overpowering piece of magic that quells the King's and the Court's defiance.)

WOMEN'S CHORUS

This wonder is too much for sight,

It robs us of our will to fight,

In darkest cloth we clothe thee, Psyche,

In deepest grief we send thee to thy fate.

Too beautiful for mortal eyes,

A monster's bride instead she'll be.

In darkest cloth we clothe thee, Psyche,

In deepest grief we send thee to thy fate.

The serpent is her bridegroom,

But this wedding is her funeral.

In darkest cloth we clothe thee, Psyche,

In deepest grief we send thee to thy fate.

KING

(recit.)

Psyche, my daughter, how can I lose you? They tear you from me. What grief awaits you! What a horrible day is this!

MOTHER

(recit.)

Psyche, my dearest, how will we live without you? Tearful our last days will be—and we had such happiness until this moment!

PSYCHE

(recit.)

No! No! Not happiness for me but for you only! Your grief is ill-timed. This is not the moment to mourn me.

(aria)

I welcome the Oracle's voice
She brings me hope and liberation
Death is better, or a monster's love,
Than my lonely, dismal, empty, pointless life.

No, the day you should have mourned me
Was the day three years ago
That you smiled when the king of Persia
Declared me Venus on earth.

I welcome the Oracle's voice
She brings me hope and liberation
She brings me hope once more.

You whose age should give you wisdom
Failed to heed the grievous danger.
The moment they bowed in reverence to me
Began my sadness and solitude.

PSYCHE

I welcome the Oracle's voice
She brings me hope and liberation.
Death is better, or a monster's love,
Than my lonely, dismal, empty, pointless life.

CHORUS

Poor Psyche, poor Psyche
Lament thy fate.

PSYCHE

(recit.)

Now go, all of you. Leave me to this fate that awaits me. I welcome it.

CHORUS

Oh grief, we mourn thee Psyche.

(Psyche daringly begins to climb the rock, impetuously and forcefully.)

How can we live without her beauty?

Our days will be gray and sad when she's gone.

KING

Psyche, say goodbye to your grieving, dying parents.

MOTHER

My daughter, how can we live without you?

(Psyche runs back down the rock, takes them both in her arms.)

PSYCHE

Dearest mother, sweetest father, do not mourn me now.

Your bitter tears give me pain, try to be happy,

Try to live and thrive.

KING AND MOTHER

Daughter, goodbye, this will be our last farewell

At our age such bitter blows we cannot long survive.

CHORUS

(During the following chorus all except Psyche exit slowly while Psyche begins to climb the rock. At the end of the chorus Psyche is left alone, part way up the rock. The skies darken, clouds gather, a storm is coming.)

Psyche, poor Psyche, so lovely, so beautiful

How can we live without your beauty?

Sadness darkens our hearts.

Too beautiful for mortals, too beautiful for all of us.

Psyche, farewell! Farewell all our joy and our happiness.

PSYCHE

(During the remainder of the scene Psyche bit by bit, hesitatingly, and with effort climbs to the top of the rock, which should be as high above stage level as possible.)

(arioso)

A serpent, fearful, his jaws could devour me.

Caught in his lair and his scaley coils surrounding me—

Do I have the strength to face this?

Shall I throw myself from this rock and end all now?

Oh help me gods! Pity me! Oh pity me!

No! Courage!

Whatever fate the gods have for me I'll face it squarely.

They called me a goddess—no goddess I—

Only a living, breathing, mortal woman.

But the serpent could devour me! No! No! I'll face it!

Come fate, work your will on Psyche, her soul awaits you!

(Psyche, open-armed, invites the serpent. Curtain.)

(End of ACT I)

ACT II SCENE 1

(Psyche, Zephyr, Chorus of Invisible Servants, On-stage Classical Ensemble, Eros)

(The back-side of the rock of the previous scene. A forest is below, beyond is a palace. A clear blue sunny sky. Psyche sits alone on the rock.)

PSYCHE

(spoken)

Three days now. No serpent. No monster. No death. Not much life either. I'm tired of waiting. I'm hungry too...

(recit.)

Serpent, monster, volcano, avalanche, earthquake, tidal wave, meteorite shower, hurricane, thunderbolt—any of these—I'm ready for them. I just wish something would happen—

(looking suddenly offstage)

Who's this?

(Enter Zephyr)

ZEPHYR

(spoken)

Hello.

PSYCHE

(spoken, a little alarmed)

Hello. Who are you?

ZEPHYR

(spoken)

(very straightforward and simply)

Well, I'm no tidal wave, and I'm no meteorite shower, but I *am* the West Wind.

(arioso, during which Psyche's color begins to come back)

Zephyr they call me, the one who blows sweet

Straight off the ocean, salt and wind and heat.

Lovers specially respond to my touch.

Only good things come from my gentle warm puff.

Now if you'll allow me I'll carry you away

To my master's realm, I'll admit of no delay.

(Zephyr picks up Psyche and graciously begins to carry her down off the rock.
Her skirts should billow out and flutter in the wind as he carries her.)

(duet—Psyche and Zephyr—while Zephyr carries Psyche down from the rock)

PSYCHE

But who is your master and what is his domain?

ZEPHYR

Ah that, my dear lady, a secret must remain.

PSYCHE

And will you stay with me in this place you cannot tell?

ZEPHYR

No, no, but others like me will tend you gently and well.

(they reach stage level)

PSYCHE

Then farewell—

ZEPHYR

Farewell—

ZEPHYR and PSYCHE

Farewell, farewell, etc.

(Exit Zephyr, enter Chorus, Classical Ensemble is revealed)

CHORUS OF INVISIBLE SERVANTS

(The chorus members are perfectly visible to the audience, but must clearly be invisible to Psyche. Emblematic costuming—white clothes, white gloves for example—may help to clarify this, particularly when chorus members wait on Psyche. Their faces however need not be obscured.)

(The chorus is accompanied by an on-stage ensemble of Classical period instruments: forte-piano, gut-string violin and cello, wooden Classical flute. These musicians, like the chorus, are perfectly visible to the audience but enchanted and invisible to Psyche. Similar costuming to the chorus may be used, although obviously no gloves. The Classical ensemble is tuned at Classical pitch, adjusted slightly to be exactly one quarter-tone lower than the modern pitch of the pit orchestra. Throughout the remainder of the scene, onstage Classical ensemble and pit orchestra alternate, the singers adjusting their pitch accordingly. The result is a sequence of “enchanted” quarter-tone modulations.)

Come gentle maiden and rest yourself.

Enter our kingdom and ease your aching fears.

PSYCHE

These voices that I cannot see—

Invisible, how can this be?

CHORUS

Now rest yourself, leave fear behind.

Our care for you, no better you’ll find.

PSYCHE

These voices assure me, I feel a growing ease.

CHORUS

We'll serve you and help you and do all as you please.

(variously, solos from the chorus, quasi recit.)

Now bathe yourself in this sweet spring.

Let us anoint you and gown you in silver.

Your dinner is here,

Now rest and call us as your wish commands.

PSYCHE

(recit.)

What pleasure I feel run through my veins.

These voices truly prepare my wedding night.

These foods and drink are ambrosial fine,

A sweet anticipation fills my newly happy soul.

(An enchanted marriage bed appears. The chorus leads Psyche to it and prepares it for her.)

CHORUS

Now hie thee to thy bed, Psyche

Await thy lover's kiss

A beautiful awakening

His touch will bring you bliss.

(Exeunt Chorus)

PSYCHE

(During the following Psyche gets into the bed. Lights fade to dim moonlight.
Eros enters behind Psyche, unseen by her.)

Who could this master of mine be?

I feel no dread of his company.

Who will he be? How can this be?

In this sweet fate no courage do I need.

EROS

Psyche!

PSYCHE

He says my name, and how tender a voice!

EROS

(Eros, from behind Psyche, places his hand on her shoulder.)

Psyche!

PSYCHE

His caress!

EROS

My love!

PSYCHE

—my fear leaves me.

EROS

My love!

PSYCHE

Love! I love—

EROS

Love!

EROS and PSYCHE

(duet)

Love!

(During the above duet, lights down to complete darkness, stars appearing in the sky. A short musical interlude in complete darkness and starlight follows the duet.)

PSYCHE

Who are you?

EROS

You must not seek to know.

PSYCHE

Strange...but still I know you, my inmost soul to you is true.

(Short interlude, at the end of which lights begin to come up, a faint light before dawn. Ensemble and Chorus have discreetly exited.)

EROS

'Tis daybreak, I must leave you.

Rest and pleasure to you till tonight.

When darkness descends, again you'll feel me

Beside you in the cool dark night.

(Slow sunrise. Psyche sleeps. In the first light of dawn Eros is seen slipping away.)

SCENE 2

(Daphne, Isabel, Psyche, Zephyr)

(The same. Brilliant sunny morning. Psyche sleeps in the bed. Enter Daphne and Isabel onto the top of the rock.)

DAPHNE and ISABEL

(recit.)

Psyche our beloved sister, there is no sign of her, she's been gobbled up by the serpent!

Horrors! We've lost her forever.

ISABEL

She's gone, and we're done for.

DAPHNE

She'll never know the grief that came to us on the heels of that horrible oracle,

ISABEL

how quickly we were married off—

DAPHNE

speedy weddings to soothe our parents' grief.

ISABEL

And not those handsome suitors, the ones she must have thought would be our husbands,

DAPHNE

but two decrepit invalids,

ISABEL

not too demanding about dowry,

DAPHNE

and with titles of nobility.

(aria)

Ancient husbands, dismal rites;
Misers and invalids, cranky and sore,
Moth-eaten palaces, lives we abhor.
And oh, the horror and misery and fright
Of that ghastly wedding night!

Now I ask you, who suits the oracle more?
Was it us or her that the monster was for?
Psyche is lucky, death is her mate;
Endless life awaits us before death's gate.

(da capo)

ISABEL

(spoken)

Well, there's nothing to do but go back to our palaces, dank and musty holes that they
are.

DAPHNE

(spoken)

You're right, and count the days till an early death—ours or our husbands'—brings relief
to our unhappiness.

(Psyche has been waking up, joyfully and languorously stretching in the morning
sun. Now she gets up and walks out into the open to greet a beautiful morning.)

ISABEL

(spoken)

But look, down there, do you see? There's someone walking.

PSYCHE

(recit., to herself)

How wonderful he is!

ISABEL

(spoken)

It's her! It's Psyche!

DAPHNE and ISABEL

(recit.)

Psyche, it's us! It's your sisters!

PSYCHE

(recit.)

Oh Daphne, oh Isabel, it's you, it's you!

DAPHNE and ISABEL

How do we get down there? It's so steep, a fearful precipice!

PSYCHE

Wait! Wait! You'll be killed if you try it yourself.

Only in the arms of the gentle West Wind

Can you hope to descend to this magical realm.

We must call to him.

(trio—Psyche, Daphne, Isabel)

Zephyr, oh Zephyr,
Blow us together.

Reunite our family,
Bring joy to these sisters three.

(da capo)

(Enter Zephyr, unseen by Psyche and Sisters, during the da capo.)

ZEPHYR

(recit.)

(aside, to the audience)

What can I do? Dreadful things will come from this, but I must obey her wishes, it was my master's command. Should I warn her of what's to happen? What good can come from tampering with fate? Still, I must try.

(turning to Psyche)

Psyche, don't seek to see them.

(aria con pertinaci)

Families are wonderful and I have a big one.

Earth, air, wind, water—every one's a relative.

Yes, you love your sisters, but I have to warn you

Those two will bring you nothing but grief.

DAPHNE and ISABEL

Zephyr, bring us down to her!

ZEPHYR

All the gentle beasts and all the plants and animals
These are my cousins, they always help me out.
Yes, you love your sisters, but I have to warn you
Those two will bring you nothing but grief.

PSYCHE

Zephyr, you're wrong!
Please bring them down to me.
Zephyr, please do!

DAPHNE and ISABEL

Oh, Zephyr, help us!
Don't keep us waiting any more!

ZEPHYR

Reeds that grow by rivers, ants that work hard day and night,
Even the brick and stones in mighty walls and towers,
All are parts of my big family,
But those two will bring you nothing but grief.

PSYCHE

Zephyr hurry please!
Please help us Zephyr, bring them here!
No Zephyr no, you're wrong,
They're wonderful and sweet and kind
So Zephyr won't you please, please help!

DAPHNE and ISABEL

Come get us! Psyche, why does he delay?

We're frightened, help us please come down to you we beg!

ZEPHYR

It's true my brother the north wind quarrels with me,

But he would never really try to do me harm.

Yes, you love your sisters, but I have to warn you

Those two will bring you no- (-thing but grief.)

PSYCHE

Zephyr! Zephyr! Bring them down before they go away!

DAPHNE and ISABEL

Psyche, make him come, why keep us waiting here,

We can't wait all day!

Psyche, bring us down, we can't wait forever!

PSYCHE

(Interrupting in the middle of Zephyr's word, "nothing.")

(recit.)

Zephyr, bring them to me!

(Zephyr looks first at Psyche, then the Sisters, then the audience. He makes a dispirited, half-apologetic shrug of acceptance to the audience.)

(Interlude music, during which Zephyr runs up the rock, puts an arm around each sister's waist, and runs them down to stage level. They shriek with excitement, then smooth down their dresses and bow politely to Zephyr with ingratiating grins. Zephyr looks distrustingly at them. They rush to Psyche and embrace her.)

PSYCHE

(arioso)

My sisters, what joy I feel to see you. Come rest yourselves in my palace, my servants will bathe you while I myself prepare a wondrous feast.

(Exit Psyche, followed by Zephyr in dismay)

SCENE 3

(Daphne, Isabel, Invisible Servants (non-singing), Psyche)

(The same. Enter Invisible Servants, who begin to assemble items for the Sisters' bath. Their actions are not yet observed by the Sisters, who are busy looking at the beautiful realm and the palace. Bath items include towels, a large pitcher with water, a basin into which it can be poured, and two high-backed sit-up style bathtubs.)

(The following spoken over music—the Ii Servants' music, combining pit and Classical ensembles at a quarter tone, playing together.)

DAPHNE

What splendor!

ISABEL

It's so beautiful!

DAPHNE

So luxurious, so richly appointed.

(All other preparations for the bath being completed, an Invisible Servant pours water from the large pitcher into the basin. The sound catches the Sisters' attention; they are amazed to see the pitcher, to their eyes if not the audience's, pouring itself.)

ISABEL

This palace is enchanted!

DAPHNE

Pitcher, water, and towels, moving as if by their own accord!

ISABEL

(recit.)

There is only one explanation:

DAPHNE and ISABEL

(recit.)

This is the palace of a god!

DAPHNE

And did you see the glow in he face?

ISABEL

The languor of her movements?

DAPHNE

It proves beyond doubt she now knows love!

ISABEL

I can't stand it! She gets everything, we get nothing!

DAPHNE

You're right, we must do something to correct this injustice!

(During the following duet the Invisible Servants discreetly undress the Sisters, shielded from the audience's view by large towels, help them into the two bathtubs, bathe them, then dress them in luxurious, flowing gowns.)

DAPHNE and ISABEL

(duet)

We missed out on life's sweet pleasures,

We'll see that she has none in turn.

We'll scare her, we'll make her turn on her lover,

She's stupid, she'll believe what we say.

We'll get her, we'll put her back in her place,

It's not fair, she has everything we lack.

We'll get even, for this cruel injustice,

This will end it, all her gloating and luxury!

(da capo)

(At the close of the da capo the Sisters have finished their baths and step forward beautifully gowned and ready for the feast.)

DAPHNE

(recit.)

But how will we do it?

ISABEL

Just watch, and leave that to me.

(Enter Psyche followed by Invisible Servants carrying a richly laden table, including a roast, a pointed dagger-like carving knife, and an oil lamp.)

PSYCHE

(recit.)

My sisters, welcome to my table. You are my first and most welcome guests; my palace and my wealth, they are yours to share.

ISABEL

Sister, thank you, but before we begin I must ask a question. You surely do not live here alone, with whom do you share this abode? Who is he? Who is your husband?

PSYCHE

He's...tender...and gentle...and whispers sweet things in my ear...

DAPHNE

But who is he? What does he look like?

PSYCHE

In truth I do not know.

(arioso)

He comes to me at night.

His touch is alive with passion burning bright.

In his strong arms I feel love's fiery glow,

But when I ask, Who are you? He says, You must not know,

You cannot know, You must never know.

ISABEL

(recit., aside)

This will be easier than I thought.

(to Psyche)

Psyche, listen to me! Your words frighten me. You must not doubt the Oracle, she was right, your tender lover is the monstrous serpent in disguise.

(aria)

Be cautious, be cautious, be cautious!

Such horrible dangers lurk here tonight!

He pampers you, he fattens you, he tenderly caresses,

But sweet delight and luxury are but a skillful ploy:

When you least expect it, then he will pounce.

Poisonous fangs he'll sink into your tender juicy flesh,

Jaws will close upon your neck, you'll feel your backbone breaking,

Too late you'll understand the meaning of our warning words
Unless you act and save yourself!

(da capo)

PSYCHE

(recit.)

(breathless, in shock, quietly)

No, this cannot be.

ISABEL

(quietly and conspiratorially)

Yes it's the truth, you must take our advice.

(She takes the carving knife and lamp from the table.)

(aria)

Take this dagger, take this lamp.

Hold them tightly in the night's cold damp.

Take these weapons, the deed must be done.

Await your moment, then stab and kill and run!

When he deep in sleep beside you lies tonight

With this lamp behold his form.

Then find the spot to plunge this dagger

In his horrible cold green scaly neck.

(da capo)

PSYCHE

I can't!

ISABEL

You must!

PSYCHE

I love him!

ISABEL

Then die!

PSYCHE

Oh gods!

(trio—Psyche, Daphne, Isabel)

PSYCHE

This cannot be.

I cannot kill him.

I will not kill him, never, no!

ISABEL

It is the truth.

It is the only way to save yourself from death.

You must do everything just as we have described.

Listen to us!

DAPHNE

Take our advice.

Take yourself in hand Psyche, you're no longer a little girl.

Listen to us.

ISABEL

Then we leave you.

(Sisters begin to climb back up the rock.)

PSYCHE

Go! Leave me in peace.

DAPHNE and ISABEL

Heed to our warning.

PSYCHE

No! Wretched advice.

(Psyche turns her back on them)

DAPHNE and ISABEL

When he sinks his fangs in your neck

Remember what your sisters said.

(Sisters run hurriedly to the top of the rock, hurl a defiant gesture at Psyche, and quickly exit from the top of the rock. Psyche is alone on the stage for a moment, suddenly her body stiffens, slowly her gaze turns until it fixes on the lamp and knife, left prominently on the table. She stares transfixed and motionless for a long moment, then runs headlong to the table, grabs lamp and knife and runs frantically and desperately from the stage.)

SCENE 4

(Psyche, Eros, Venus, Zephyr)

(The same. Nighttime. No stars, no moon. Just enough light to make out Psyche lying beside a sleeping Eros in the marriage bed. She slips out of the bed, takes the knife out of its hiding place beside or under the bed, braces herself, then in one motion pulls the already lit lamp out and holds it above Eros, the knife in her other hand, ready to stab. A golden light suffuses Eros—so radiant his body seems to emanate a golden light itself. He is gracefully, vulnerably, tenderly asleep on the bed. Psyche's hand with the knife falls to her side, the knife falls to the ground.)

PSYCHE

(recit.)

It's love! It's love! It is the very face of love I see.

His beauty! It overwhelms me!

How could I have doubted him?

Oh shame! How could I have believed for a moment my sisters' words? Such gentleness in his features. I must look again. My eyes feast on the sight of him. Drink eyes, drink his beauty, drink his love, drink love, oh!

(Psyche has spilled a drop of oil from the lamp onto Eros's shoulder, burning him. He awakens.)

EROS

Psyche!

(Eros leaps from the bed and exits suddenly as if vanishing (behind the bed, for example). Bed, palace, and forest vanish. Thunder clap and/or on-stage explosion and/or simply the noise of the stage changes. In their place a vast desolate desert with several isolated rocks, from behind one of which Zephyr will later appear.)

PSYCHE

(recit.)

(stunned)

Am I dreaming? Where is he? He's gone. Where am I? Gone, my light! Gone, my happiness!

(Eros reappears on the opposite side of the stage from Psyche.)

EROS

(recit.)

Oh Psyche, how could I have warned you of the consequences of your rash deed? How could I have protected you from the viciousness of your sisters? Now all is lost!

(aria)

Before you stands Eros, your love-god husband,

But evermore from you, Psyche, far I'll be.

In secrecy our union had to be made,

Forces above seek to pull us asunder.

Why did you have to know who I was?

Tenderness and luxury you had to your fill.

Immortal gods can touch and love you mortals here below,

But mortal eyes should never force their way into our godly secrets.

PSYCHE

Eros, no, I entreat you, do not draw away in anger.

I never meant to hurt you, your secret I will honor.

I beg you by all that you hold most sacred
Pity me, and do not fly away from your love.

EROS

There is no free choice in this, the die is cast.
Once you've looked you can no longer pretend not to know.
Psyche, of Psyche, darkness was enough for me,
Why did you have to shine the bright light of day on our love?

(trio—Psyche, Eros, and Venus)

PSYCHE

Do not turn away in anger.
I never meant to do you harm.
I beg you by all you hold sacred,
Do not fly away from our love.

EROS

There is no free choice, the die is cast.
You have looked, you can't pretend not to know.
Tender darkness was enough for me,
The bright light of day destroyed our love.

VENUS

(Appears on her platform of Ii, unheard and unseen by Eros and Psyche)

It all worked out just as I planned,
I didn't have to raise a finger.
Those spiteful sisters did my work,

Now no more in her arms he'll linger.

Those sisters really did the job.

Now he'll have to tow the line,

He really thought he could deceive me!

EROS

I go now, it's hopeless, there is no going back.

You have looked, you have seen, by your gaze all hope is ended.

I'll fly to Olympus to ease my pain.

Psyche, your love, it was my first, it will be my last.

EROS

Tender darkness was enough for me.

The bright light of day destroyed our love.

PSYCHE

I beg you by all you hold sacred

Please from our love do not fly away.

VENUS

It's settled now, no longer will he scheme against me.

He thought I didn't know every motion that he made.

He will learn to follow orders of the goddess who rules over love!

PSYCHE

I go now, I go, but I won't say it's hopeless.

There is no going back, but that means I'll go ahead.

If my actions have lost you at least I will prove

That my strength and perseverance are worthy of your love.

Through the world I will travel, no rest will be for me.

You are my first and only love, somehow I know I'll win you back.

VENUS

It's settled now...(etc.)

EROS

I will fly to Olympus.

Your love was my first, it will be my last.

PSYCHE

Through the world I will travel,

No rest will be for me.

Somehow I know I'll win you back

And show by strength and perseverance

I'm worthy of your love.

ZEPHYR

(Comes out from behind a rock. He is invisible and inaudible to Venus, Eros, and Psyche, but has heard and seen everything.)

She, she is so innocent, her trusting heart was foiled.

He, he is so delicate, harsh light his secret spoiled.

I, though not a god at all, will help them with my power

To blow sweet wind and rouse the forces of nature.

Venus take warning!

Zephyr who stands before you,

Of your power is not afraid!

(Venus has not heard Zephyr)

VENUS

It all worked out just as I planned,

I didn't have to raise a finger,

Spiteful sisters did my work,

Now no more in her arms he'll linger!

ZEPHYR

Now Venus don't you be so sure,

We have our ways of getting by,

Love finds its way helped out by Nature,

These are things you can't defy!

EROS

I go to Olympus.

PSYCHE

Through the world I will travel.

VENUS

The whole thing is settled.

ZEPHYR

Venus, don't be so sure!

VENUS

(triumphant, self-satisfied)

I go!

EROS

(defeated)

I go.

(A pause. All wait. Zephyr watches. The next move is Psyche's, but she's momentarily transfixed.)

ZEPHYR

(shouted)

Psyche, let's go!

PSYCHE

(Suddenly brought alive by Zephyr's shout, but unaware of his presence, thinking it's spontaneous on her part, full of hope and fortitude:)

I go!

(Exeunt all in separate directions. Curtain.)

(End of ACT II)

ACT III SCENE 1

(Psyche, Venus, Servants, Head Ant, Ants)

(In front of Venus's house in Olympus. The house includes a stone tower. A river to one side, beyond a meadow and forest. Late afternoon.)

PSYCHE

(spoken)

This is a desperate course I am on, I know, but what choice remains? Ceres, Artemis, Juno, Apollo all have listened tenderly to my story, but not one will dare to argue my case before Venus, and mortal kings and queens shudder with terror at the very thought of it. This is a goddess one does not cross lightly. And now I stand before her very house.

(recit.)

Let her heart soften in compassion...or let her throw me from this mountain and dash me in a thousand pieces on the rocks below—I put the choice in her hands!

(aria)

Happy in love, or crushed in despair:

Venus above decides between this pair.

Peaceful and calm, or wracked with remorse:

The Queen of Love will chart the course.

All you who wonder if love will succeed,

Think of me and then proceed.

Better to love and in love recline

Then to take the cautious course and love decline.

(da capo)

(recit., calling to Venus)

Venus, immortal goddess, most graceful and divine ruler over our unhappy fates, come hear the plea of an unfairly wronged mortal.

(Venus is revealed within her house, reclining on her couch, looking at herself in a hand mirror.)

VENUS

(recit.)

Who is this who disturbs my professional activity?

(Venus rises, steps out of the house, sees Psyche.)

(aside)

Oh gods, it's her!

(to Psyche)

What do you want here?

PSYCHE

(recit.)

Most noble and generous goddess, I've come to beg your mercy. I didn't ask to be beautiful, I never wanted the worship that rightly should be (yours.)

VENUS

(recit., interrupting Psyche in mid-sentence)

Enough! You want my son but you won't have him. He's safe in my house, and if you think I would ever let him back with a shameless woman who mortally wounded him with burning oil and expects his mother to leave him in the clutches of a murderess—!

(aside)

—now calm yourself—

PSYCHE

(recit., aside)

This is hopeless.

VENUS

(aside, looking at Psyche)

And she's still so beautiful...

(A pause. Venus gets an idea.)

But Psyche, in truth I take pity on you. You have good intentions, but you're so stupid and so ugly nothing ever works out right for you. Still, I think I can help you.

(duet—Venus and Psyche)

VENUS

Aren't I the exquisite teacher of wisdom?

Let me show you all that I know.

(over Psyche's head, to audience)

All that I'll show her will lead to her ruin,

But what a delight to see how far she'll go.

PSYCHE

Goddess if your wish is to take me as your student,

Careful and diligent my studies shall be.

(aside, to the audience)

For her kindness I know that I should be grateful,

But something suspicious in her motives I see.

VENUS

With my instructions you'll soon land a husband,

But hard you must work if it's beauty you want.

(aside)

Labor and drudgery will wreck her beauty;

Broken and miserable, she'll grow pale and gaunt.

PSYCHE

Goddess work I will do just to win your blessing:

You name the task and I'll dig right in.

(aside)

I don't trust her for a moment but what other choice is left me?

I must prove myself worthy her blessings to win.

VENUS

Then servants come forward, the first task we'll set her,

A simple matter, an easy night's work.

(Enter Servants)

(aside)

When my son sees her next, it will cure him of his folly;

He will run from her in horror, no more in this spot she'll lurk.

PSYCHE

I must prove myself worthy in diligent toil.

VENUS

When my son sees her next, from her sight he'll recoil.

(recit., to Servants)

Go, bring sacks of flour, rice, and millet. Bring them here and mix them all together.

(Exit Servants)

(to Psyche)

You see, a small thing, it should cause you no trouble.

Just have them all sorted out into separate piles by morning.

PSYCHE

I'll do as you command.

(Exit Venus as Servants enter with huge sacks of grain which they empty before Psyche in a huge heap on the ground and mix all together. Psyche is aghast at the quantity.)

'Tis no mortal task!

(Exit Servants, beginning of nightfall)

But I will try! Whatever she asks, I must do it.

To win her true and heartfelt blessing is my only hope.

So now to work!

(Working Music. Psyche sets to work. The following is spoken during pauses in the music.)

It's night already...I must keep on!

My fingers hurt...

(Matter-of-factly, looking at fingers)

Blood...I mustn't stop!

(A nightingale is heard—a Baroque flute)

The night wears on...

(recit.)

Ah night! If you were of a thousand hours then perhaps I could complete this task. It is impossible. It can't be done. I've lost him. Gods and mortals be my witnesses, I have done all a poor mortal can do. Eros, you are lost to me. I can no more. May death come peacefully to me.

(The Ants are heard faintly from offstage. Each is wearing a small electronic bleeper which plays a pre-programmed sequence of tones. These are rather like the hourly chimes of digital watches, and if the audience thinks at first that it's an inconsiderate neighbor's watch they're hearing, so much the better.)

May death come peacefully to me.

(Psyche curls up asleep. Enter Head Ant)

HEAD ANT

(spoken)

Now how can this be? A lovely girl—a formidable task—and no one has the nerve to help her out? Gods, goddesses, mortals, all afraid. Well we're not afraid, and we're going to help her!

(recit.)

Come on ants! We can't just leave her. Come on and help! We can't just sit by. Just because all the gods are scared to help and all the humans run away doesn't mean we shouldn't do our part.

(Ants begin to assemble, entering singly or in pairs from various directions, looking at Psyche and the pile of grains, surveying the situation, trying to decide how to proceed.)

(shouted as the last Ants arrive)

That's it! Come on! We can do it!

(During the Head Ant's aria the Ants set to work. Early on they are seen to realize they can't do it by hand. One Ant exits, returns with a six-foot diameter hoop-shaped sieve. Ants start to work sifting. By the end of the aria a good portion of

the pile should be separated. Bleepers continue during aria, become intermittent and drop out following its conclusion. Sifting noise, bleepers, and general purposeful commotion are the background to the aria. Psyche sleeps through it all.)

(aria)

We may be small but we're persistent and courageous in our way,
We are unmoved by godly anger, don't pay heed to what they say.
As brave Apollo, fearless Ares quake before her lordly might
We are to Venus quite inconsequential and therefore we can fight.
Do you think sometimes that you're too small to ever have effect
As gods and goddesses do battle and our atmosphere infect?
Well in our small ways we can help to shift the path a better way;
If you and I aren't going to do it then who else will save the day?

(da capo)

(recit.)

Lady wake up. It's not as bad as you thought. Your problem here—we've got it all sorted out.

(Psyche awakens, is mightily confused and perplexed by what she sees.)

PSYCHE

(spoken)

What's this?

HEAD ANT

(recit)

Now don't ask questions—just know a good thing when you see it. These are my men and they do good work. Your job here—it's practically done already.

PSYCHE

(recit.)

Alright good sir, I won't ask questions, and I thank you for your help.

HEAD ANT

(bowing chivalrously to Psyche)

You are most welcome.

(Head Ant checks to see that all the work is completed.)

Farewell!

(Exit Head Ant and Ants. Sunrise.)

SCENE 2

(Venus, Psyche, River Reed, Tower, Charon, Lost Soul, Cerberus 1, 2, and 3)

(The same. Morning)

(Enter Venus)

VENUS

(recit., yawning)

Well, let's see what this poor girl has been able to accomplish in a night.

(seeing separated piles)

What! Impossible! How did you do this?

(aside)

This is too much!

(to Psyche)

Prideful mortal silly woman! You've managed my first trial too well. But the next one I dare you to manage so smoothly. Go now to yonder river and gather the golden wool of the sheep that graze there, and be forewarned—these sheep devour mortals—if you approach them you're as good as dead. Now try your skill on that!

(Exit Venus)

PSYCHE

(recit.)

This is too much! How gather wool from man-eating sheep? Yes, here's the river, and on the far slope they graze. Cross the river? They'll eat me alive! Never! Oh river, you must be my answer. Surely deep in your waters I will find a gentler death.

(lament)

Sweet ripples of this river grant me peace.

Gentle waters show me how my pain to cease.

In love I can no longer find repair;

Ease my troubles end forever my despair.

(The River Reed is a man dressed in green, holding a long tube to his lips, lying in and hidden by a thicket of similar tubes. At the close of the lament he rises from the thicket, lowering the tube from his lips. Best of all would be if he were in plain view of the audience but because of his color and his pose blending with the landscape, unnoticed by them until he moves.)

RIVER REED

(arioso)

I am a gentle river reed.

I can't ignore your desperate need.

Your sad lament was all too clear for me to hear,

Now ease your suffering, you have nothing here to fear.

PSYCHE

(Not as surprised as she was when he first got up)

Your gentle words fall sweet upon my tired ear,

And yet how can you help, it's clear my end is near.

RIVER REED

Now dearest lady, wait, and to my words pay heed,

And from your plight be sure that you will soon be freed.

(recit.)

Now listen carefully: wait until tonight. The sheep will come down here to drink of my water while you go to yonder forest. There you shall find all the golden wool Venus could wish for hanging on the trunks of the trees where they scratch themselves all day.

PSYCHE

Is it really true?

RIVER REED

Yes, I guarantee it!

PSYCHE

Then thank you good River Reed.

RIVER REED

You are most welcome, farewell!

(Exit Psyche in the direction of the river. River Reed returns to his original position, or better still, moves to a different one in which he is equally invisible to the audience, blending so completely with the landscape. Before he vanishes he can give a gesture of confirmation or encouragement in the direction that Psyche exited. Reed Music. Enter Psyche, her arms full of golden wool. She goes to Venus's house.)

PSYCHE

(recit.)

Venus, oh mighty goddess, here is what you asked for!

(Enter Venus)

VENUS

(recit.)

Gods! She drives me crazy!

Well, this next one you won't find so easy!

Go to the underworld, the dead world, the land from which mortals never return. Go there and find the palace of Persephone. Tell her I need a box full of beauty. Bring this back to me so I can put some on, and then I'll shine most beautiful at the party of the gods tonight!

(duet—Psyche and Venus)

VENUS

Go to the underworld!

PSYCHE

No mortal from there returns.

VENUS

Get me some beauty in a tightly sealed box.

PSYCHE

This is too much!

VENUS

Find the palace of Persephone.

PSYCHE

Crossing the dreaded Styx—no one from there returns!

VENUS

Get from her a box of beauty.

PSYCHE

This is hopeless!

VENUS

So I can shine as the ultimate beauty.

PSYCHE

She could use it for her soul.

Though she looks so beautiful,

What grim and awful anger

Possesses her heart!

VENUS

And all of Olympus will praise me as the ultimate beauty!

(Exit Venus)

PSYCHE

(recit.)

There's one quick, easy way to the underworld, and there's no sense drawing it out. I'll climb this tower and throw myself off of it. Let my life be dashed on the rocks below!

(lament)

(During the lament Psyche climbs the tower and prepares to jump off of it.)

Goodbye hope, goodbye Eros, goodbye love, down I go.

Venus only could ever help me, there's no use pretending, I'm through I know.

She clearly wants me out of the way;

I'll go to the underworld and there I'll stay.

A single moment of crushing pain;

She'll never have to see my face again.

Goodbye hope, goodbye Eros, goodbye love, down I go.

(Tower appears from behind the tower)

TOWER

(recit.)

Now wait a minute. Of course it looks bad, but don't do a stupid thing like this.

PSYCHE

(recit.)

But...but who's talking to me?

TOWER

(arioso)

My heart may be made of brick and stone,

But your plight, it softens me to the core.

I am the tower of this mighty house,

But never from my heights shall you death implore.

(Tower pulls a lever on the side of the tower, which causes the entire tower to begin a slow descent until its top, where Psyche stands, is flush with the stage.)

Listen closely while I tell you how to find the place

Where you'll penetrate the underworld without a trace.

My instructions if you follow them will show you how

To bring Venus back her box of beauty anyhow.

So listen carefully and then forbear

To shatter all your hopes without repair.

I may be solid, but for you I'll bend;

Your story dearest lady has not reached the end.

(The tower is now flush with the stage. Tower helps Psyche out of it onto stage.)

(recit.)

Now listen carefully:

Go to the Island of Aepytus,

And look just outside the town.

There you'll find a hole

That leads to the underworld.

But more important—do these things I advise:

Take two pennies and one piece of cake.

The pennies are for Charon who'll cross the river Styx with you,

But don't let the lost souls beg your pennies away.

The cake is for Cerberus, the dread three-headed dog.

Cerberus has a sweet tooth, and with a dainty morsel

You'll pacify his anger and he'll let you through.

Persephone will grant you all that you ask for,

But resist the temptation to stay and feast and rest.

Save the second penny—you'll need it to cross back again:

Charon is lazy and never obliges.

You need your fare both ways or you'll be trapped.

(PSYCHE)

(recit.)

Thank you, good Tower, I'll do as you advise.

TOWER

Just remember every word or you won't come back alive.

(Blackout or curtain. On the forestage Charon and his boat. Charon sleeps propped on his pushing stick. Enter Psyche. The following is spoken during pauses in the Underworld Music.)

PSYCHE

(spoken)

Charon, take me across for a penny?

(Charon wakes, looks her up and down, motions her in, they cross the stage slowly with music.)

PSYCHE

Busy day?

CHARON

(spoken)

Just like all the rest.

(A Lost Soul swims onto stage, traveling in the opposite direction to the boat. As they cross each other midstage:)

LOST SOUL

(spoken, reaching up to Psyche)

Lady, give me your penny!

(Psyche begins to hand it to him, then recoils.)

PSYCHE

(spoken)

No!

(Lost Soul hopelessly sinks back, continues swimming. Exit Psyche and Charon in boat to one side, Lost Soul swimming to other. Cerberus is revealed—three singers in one costume—guarding the door to Persephone's palace. Psyche stands bravely before them.)

CERBERUS

(trio)

Now you be off!

Off off with you!

Now you be off!

PSYCHE

(spoken, only now showing Cerberus the
cake she has been hiding behind her back)

But look what I have for all of you.

(Cerberus is suddenly all tail-wagging eagerness. Psyche tosses the cake to them,
they jump on it, growl and tear at it, Psyche blithely walks by into the palace.)

SCENE 3

(Eros, Zephyr, Psyche)

(The same. Nighttime. Eros looks out from a barred window in Venus's house. It is clear that he is being held prisoner. The window was not visible in Scenes 1 and 2; either it was shuttered or we are now seeing a different view of the house.)

EROS

(recit.)

Oh, Psyche, where is she, where is my love? What hardship, what danger has she to face alone in the world? Does she still love me? Is there still hope? If only I could go to her, guide her and help her. She was right, it can't be hopeless, we must be together, but how, but how, but how? To be immortal is a curse! I cannot find the breath to live without her!

(Enter Zephyr)

(spoken)

Zephyr!

(They clasp hands through the bars of the window.)

Where is she? Is her heart true to me? Is she safe? Is she despairing?

ZEPHYR

(spoken)

She is noble and strong, and with a little help from me and my immediate family, she's sailing through!

EROS

Oh wonderful! But help me now, Zephyr, help me out of here!

ZEPHYR

We'll try the bars on the window.

(They try to pull the bars loose, but without success.)

Strong bars on Venus's house, but she should know better, you can't keep Love captive, certainly not when I'm here to help. Come, try again.

(They set to again.)

EROS

Ah, they loosen!

(Bars break loose, Zephyr falls back, Eros leaps though the window in a single bound.)

Thank you, best and most loyal friend. But will you help me now, advise me and instruct me? I must find the way to be with Psyche again—and forever!

ZEPHYR

I'll do everything I can, and with the gladdest heart.

EROS

Oh, true friend!

ZEPHYR

But quickly now, away from here!

(Exit Eros and Zephyr. Sunrise. Enter Psyche carrying the box of beauty.)

PSYCHE

(spoken)

It worked just like the tower said! Ah, this box! I could certainly use some of what's in it if I should meet Eros today...I'm feeling worn and tired from these trials. Surely there's enough beauty in here that I could take a little and Venus wouldn't miss it.

ZEPHYR

(passing behind or above—spoken)

No! Psyche, don't do it!

PSYCHE

(spoken)

What's that I hear?...Must just be the wind.

ZEPHYR

(spoken)

Oh no!

(Exit Zephyr, running desperately)

PSYCHE

(She opens the box.)

(recit.)

There's nothing in it.

But, oh, what is this I feel?

So sleepy, so heavy, I sink, I fade.

The sleep of death is in this box,

It weighs on me, it presses me down.

Ah, Psyche, again you looked, and now you die!

Ah, Psyche, again you looked, and now you die!

(She expires. Interlude. Enter Eros. He wipes the sleep from Psyche's eyes, presses it back into the box, and closes it.)

EROS

(recit.)

Psyche, awake! Your lover is at your side.

PSYCHE

(recit.)

Whose voice do I hear? Am I dreaming?

EROS

No, it's real. My love, I am yours, and I've worked it all out. If my plan goes as I hope,
by tonight we'll be wed.

PSYCHE

Oh, heaven, oh happiness! But how?

EROS

There's no time to explain, go straight to Venus, I will meet you at her house.

(duet—Eros and Psyche)

PSYCHE

My love!

EROS

It will be soon!

PSYCHE

My love!

EROS

Hurry now!

PSYCHE

I go!

(they embrace)

EROS

I go!

PSYCHE

I go!

(they embrace again)

EROS

Hurry now!

PSYCHE

I go!

EROS

By tonight!

PSYCHE

Hurry!

(They start to leave, can't, embrace again.)

EROS and PSYCHE

By tonight we'll be wed!

PSYCHE

Hurry!

EROS

I'll hurry!

EROS and PSYCHE

By tonight we'll be wed!

(Exeunt to opposite sides)

SCENE 4

(Zephyr, Eros, Zeus, Juno, Chorus of Gods and Goddesses, Venus, Psyche)

(The Theater of the Gods on Olympus. A place of honor for Zeus and Juno.
Wide, spacious, luminous, and outdoors.)

ZEPHYR

(recit.)

Eros, I have aided you and advised you. With my help you have found the proper course.

Now you alone must act. The time has come to address the mighty Zeus as an equal.

Remember the power that is yours alone! Courage, here he comes.

(Enter Zeus)

ZEUS

(recit.)

What matter of such great importance brings you before me?

ZEPHYR

(recit.)

Zeus, I appeal to you, hear this young god's request!

EROS

(aria)

Oh Zeus, grant this wish I beg,

Make Psyche an immortal goddess.

Let her taste of that nectar that makes us divine,

And grant us the happiness of love for all time.

You, you only have the power

To defend my desire from my jealous mother.
Beside herself with anger and wrath is she—
Protect her from a fury that will only bring her harm.
For she will lose me
If she continues,
And though she reign over love,

(Eros takes an arrow from his quiver)

No lovers there will be—
Sadness and death over all the earth will lie—
Without Psyche my arrows shall not fly!

(Eros breaks the arrow and throws it to the ground.)

(da capo)

ZEUS

(recit.)

Eros, your terms are hard to argue with. And yet I ask myself, why should I do anything to help you? You, who for millennia have pricked my sides with countless arrows, and forced me to assume the most humiliating forms while consorting with mortal maidens, and with no help done to the peacefulness of my marriage. Bulls! Clouds! Falling rains of gold! Birds! Beasts! Wet-bellied swans!—and Oh, Juno!—what you have made her do to me! But still, I don't know why, I'm fond of you, and whether we like it or not, life can't go on without your arrows—So, I say yes. Bring her to me, bring Venus also, and you, Zephyr, assemble all the gods and goddesses of Olympus. Eros shall have his love. Now go—arrange the celebration.

(Exit Eros and Zephyr. Zeus alone.)

(spoken)

And one thing is for certain—with Eros settled down and married he won't be free to make so much trouble anymore—

(Enter Juno, formidable and threatening)

(recit.)

—and I can use the peace and quiet!

(Zeus offers Juno his arm, she accepts, and they proceed to their places of honor. Grand procession music. Enter all the gods and goddesses, each with a prominent identifying symbol. Last of all enters Venus.)

VENUS

(recit.)

What is this meeting about? Everyone seems to know, and no one will tell me.

ZEUS

(recit.)

We are assembled to grant the mortal woman Psyche immortality, to welcome her to Olympus, and to celebrate her marriage to your son, the love god, Eros!

(Venus is thunderstruck)

VENUS

(recit.)

This cannot be. They act against me. My son, to manhood. She, a mortal, made divine. My rival—her beauty—children!—me, a grandmother! My beauty gone! This cannot be! My son to manhood! They marry!

(shrieking)

NO!!!!!!!!!!!!!!

(shaken)

But am I not still the goddess of love? Does he not act from love? Did he not learn it at my side?

(Thoughtful musical interlude, then, less than sure of herself:)

Come, I will accept it. She is a goddess now, no more my rival. And no one can say she does not truly love my son.

(with growing conviction)

At my command she braved the underworld, for his sake, to win his love. And he chose well. I can't deny it. I am still the goddess of beauty, and she will share my light!

(Turning now to the gods and goddesses who have been watching intently)

Come Zeus, come Apollo, come Ceres, Juno, Artemis, Athena, bring me my son and his bride in the presence of the gods assembled!

(Immense relief on the part of all the gods and goddesses.)

(aria)

Over marriages celestial, Venus must preside.

For am I not the goddess who must these things decide?

CHORUS

Yes Venus we respect you.

In beauty she'll reflect you.

Her vanity is endless, but we will not deride.

Agreement is essential, her anger could divide.

CHORUS and VENUS

Over marriages celestial, Venus must preside.

ZEUS

(recit.)

Now Psyche come forward.

(Enter Psyche escorted by Zephyr)

With this cup of golden nectar,

This ambrosia of the gods,

I hereby grant you immortality,

And welcome you to our glorious family.

(Psyche drinks)

VENUS

(recit.)

And now I bid you approach me Eros.

(The gods and goddesses part to make a path for Eros who enters grandly.)

My son, I grant you freedom to marry. Take your love, take Psyche, my daughter. With this scepter I pronounce you wed.

(Zephyr hands Psyche to Eros, Venus blesses them with the scepter, Eros and Psyche embrace.)

CHORUS

Rejoice, rejoice in wondrous acclaim,

The god of love has married his flame.

PSYCHE and EROS

Happy forever,

We'll be together,
Nothing whatever
Will part us now.

VENUS and ZEPHYR

We are united
And love is requited,
Life on the earth has been assured.

VENUS, PSYCHE, EROS and ZEPHYR

Life on the earth can be assured.

CHORUS

Rejoice, rejoice, in wondrous acclaim,
The god of love has married his flame.

(Curtain)

(End of the Opera)