

Cupid and Psyche
A dramatic imagining
By Madeleine Waters

DRAMATIS PERSONAE

PSYCHE—a young woman, no older than her early twenties

KING—her father, late fifties or sixties

QUEEN—Psyche's mother, in her fifties. Nonspeaking

ELDEST—Psyche's eldest sister, in her mid to late thirties

ELDER—Psyche's middle sister, in her early thirties

VENUS—a woman, any age

CUPID—her daughter, in her mid twenties

Writer's Notes:

The myth of Cupid and Psyche was first recorded as a Roman story-within-a-story about gods and their lovers, has been translated through the history of Western classical studies, and is adapted now by queer women for performance onstage. This is not a story bound by form, let alone time or place. Accordingly, I envision the design for this show to be simple and minimalist. In particular the set and costumes should not speak to a particular era or people so that the audience, whoever they are, may see themselves in these characters.

The fourth wall, where it is present at all, should be hazy. Any wall constructed between fiction and reality, art and audience, past and present, us and them, is always placed at least somewhat arbitrarily in the blurry no-mans-land where categorization is less than clear. The audience should feel like active listeners or even participants, not mere observers to this performance. The set and players may reflect awareness that this is a performance by leaving unused props or parts of backstage visible, turning apostrophe into a direct address of the audience, utilizing space in the house as well as on stage, and so on.

In a similar vein, the scene transitions should be blurred. Scenes are demarcated in the script for convenience and clarity, but the events and emotions of each "scene" are not necessarily chronological or discrete in any way. The performance is a single panoramic experience, a compilation of atemporal moments that bleed into each other.

Lastly, take it on yourselves to interpret these directions however you wish. No story exists or is experienced in a vacuum; there is always an element of interpretation, whether the actors', audience's, critics', or my own. I embrace this personalized mutability; without it this piece would not exist at all.

I. Prologue

[*PSYCHE is alone. She might be in her childhood bedroom or on the top of a mountain with only the wind whistling around her or the antechamber of a grand master suite, a lover awaiting her in the next room. There is an unlit sacrificial brazier in the foreground. She prepares for bed, unselfconsciously removing day clothes and donning a robe over her underthings, braiding back her hair, washing her face, etc. When she is done, she sits as if in prayer.*

[*KING and QUEEN enter. KING and each subsequent player to enter say their line to the audience, then move around the stage, vaguely circling PSYCHE and repeating their bracketed line sotto voce as PSYCHE continues speaking. QUEEN follows KING without speaking.*]

PSYCHE: Erant in quadam civitate rex et regina.

KING: {In a certain city, there was a king and a queen.}

[*ELDEST and ELDER enter.*]

PSYCHE: Hi tres numero filias forma conspicuas habuere sed maiores quidem natu quamvis gratissima specie idonee tamen celebrari posse laudibus humanis credebantur at vero puellae iunioris tam praecipua tam praeclara pulchritude nec exprimi ac ne sufficienter quidem laudari sermonis humani penuria poeterat.

ELDEST: {Their daughters were three by number, beautiful by nature.} However, the appearance of the elders was believed to be possible to be celebrated through human praise.

ELDER: But indeed {the beauty of the younger girl in particular was so great} it was neither able to be expressed nor sufficiently praised by words of men.

[*VENUS enters.*]

PSYCHE: Multi denique civium et advenae copiose quos eximii spectaculi rumor studiosa celebritate congregabat inaccessae formositatis admiration stupidi et admoventes oribus suis dexteram primore digito in erectum pollicem residente ut ipsam prorsus deam Venerem venerentur religionis adorationibus.

VENUS: Rumor of such a wondrous sight gathered a multitude of citizens and foreigners, eager to see such inaccessible beauty with their own eyes; stupefied, falling forward, {they honored her with religious adoration like the goddess Venus herself.}

[*VENUS beckons offstage before joining KING, QUEEN, ELDER, and ELDEST in moving around the stage, repeating their line.*

[*CUPID enters and watches the activity from the sidelines, but PSYCHE does not see any of them.*]

PSYCHE: Nomen puellae Psyche est.

[*PSYCHE stands, slowly, and repeats this final line along with the others. All save CUPID continue repeating their line, growing louder until they are fighting to be heard over each other. The movements of VENUS, KING, QUEEN, ELDER, and ELDEST pick up pace as their volume grows but PSYCHE stands firm. At the peak of the crescendo, PSYCHE shouts her own name one last time.*

[*The silence is immediate. All are still. PSYCHE collapses to the ground, asleep.*

[*Beat.*]

CUPID: The name of the girl was Psyche.

[*KING, QUEEN, ELDER, and ELDEST exit.*]

II. Asleep

[*PSYCHE is on the ground. VENUS watches CUPID watching PSYCHE.*]

VENUS: Cupid, attend me.

CUPID: Yes, Mother.

VENUS: Tell me. What is it you see before us?

CUPID: I—the girl.

VENUS: (*dangerous*) Are you sure?

CUPID: Nothing else is there.

VENUS: Nothing else? Are you quite sure? [*gesturing to audience*] All these people come to pay worship, and nothing left to ornament our altars but a girl? Surely not.

CUPID: Sorry, Mother.

VENUS: Surely the crowds do not come for her. We are goddesses, after all—I an Olympian, the Queen of Beauty and Love—Love! Love which drives men mad, breeds war and jealousy and civilization itself—surely I would never be forgotten.

And yet. No jewels please my eyes, nor roast lamb my tongue. My altar stands empty but for this girl, this Psyche—the indignity cannot be borne.

CUPID: They are foolish.

VENUS: Mortals always are. We must act ourselves.

VENUS con't: Strike the girl with your arrow while she sleeps tonight, and place an ass before her when she wakes. She will make mockery of herself, falling in love with a beast, and remind her sorry admirers who the real goddess is.

CUPID: She doesn't ask for their adoration.

VENUS: It doesn't matter. The mortals would raise her up to our heights, dragging us down to their depths like there is no difference between us at all. If we allow them to believe that...

You don't have the perspective, my child. But have you never wondered why Jove leads the gods, though he falls prey to love and lust same as any man? I am the eldest, our domain inescapable for man or god enduring even beyond death—

But they name him king. And so he is.

[*VENUS caresses CUPID's cheek and draws an arrow from CUPID's quiver, handing it to her. CUPID bows her head.*]

VENUS: We must be perfect, peerless. Divine. And they can never forget it.

CUPID: Yes, Mother.

[*VENUS exits.*

[*CUPID goes to PSYCHE, kneeling beside her close enough to touch. She reaches out but hesitates at the last moment, stunned.*]

CUPID: Psyche.

I'm sorry—I didn't think this would all go the way it does. I want—I have always wanted—to see you. To know you. I—fuck's sake I'm doing this badly. We're only at the beginning.

[*CUPID pauses, remembering the audience.*]

CUPID: When other people tell the story, they blame you. You're too prideful, too curious, too naïve. Too foolish. Too beautiful.

And me... they call me a monster, I suppose. A misunderstanding, but deliberate one, one that leaves me desperate to flee. To hide in soft clouds, wrap myself in sunsets, beautiful and unseen.

I don't want this to be a story of fear, or blame. I just want to be safe, I want you to be safe, I want—

When has it ever mattered what I want?

CUPID con't: But I need you to know, Psyche—the trials set before you are not your fault. Not even if you refuse every suitor put to you, run away, come to doubt me, scorn my mother, not if you finally reach your breaking point in all the shit you've gone through.

You do not deserve the pain caused you, and you might choose it anyway. Choose me anyway.

It's not fair to ask such bravery of you. But you are so brave.

I think—or hope, or fear—when you reach the end of the story, you'll know it to be true.

[*A long moment of silence. Suddenly, CUPID looks over her shoulder—someone is coming. She kisses PSYCHE's forehead and picks her up to carry her offstage.*]

CUPID: Winds, lend me your strength.

[*Exeunt. Blackout.*]

III. Cleaving

[*CUPID and PSYCHE speak their lines in the blackout.*]

CUPID: I do not trust your sisters, my love.

PSYCHE: They're my family, my flesh and blood.

CUPID: Is that enough?

PSYCHE: I live with the woman I love, surrounded by unimaginable delights, while for all they know I am dead or enslaved to a beast. How could I keep this from them? Just a brief visit, enough to hug them and ease their worries... I won't ask you to see them. Just to trust me.

CUPID: I will not refuse you. But I don't like it.

PSYCHE: You don't have to. They're my sisters.

[Lights up on PSYCHE waiting onstage, seated on a chaise with a table of small refreshments at her side. ELDER and ELDEST enter, and PSYCHE runs to hug them.]

PSYCHE: How good to see you, for you to be here! Come, sit, share in my love's generosity.

[They sit.]

ELDEST: Your love? But—

ELDER: The oracle said you were to marry a monster!

PSYCHE: Then the oracle is a false one. My love is—the kindest, most caring woman I've ever known.

ELDEST: Psyche, dear. If your lover says he's a woman, it's he who is false. What true woman would want to lie with another, beautiful as you are?

PSYCHE: I am not deceived on this point.

ELDER: Then you're confused, young as you are.

PSYCHE: My feelings are quite clear.

ELDEST: Your feelings, perhaps, but what of the facts?

ELDER: If your lover is a woman, why have you said nothing of lustrous locks, delicate features, soft curves?

ELDEST: He is not a man, perhaps, but still a monster?

PSYCHE: I haven't ever—that is not what love takes.

ELDER: Ah, ah. You haven't what?

[PSYCHE freezes at her slip.]

ELDEST: Come, dear, tell us. We only want to make sure you're taken care of.

PSYCHE: You have my word on that matter.

ELDER: But what reason have we to trust it? After you run away, leaving our parents bereft, only to spend all your time carousing in splendor—

PSYCHE: I have not seen her, in the light, so I cannot speak to her beauty.

ELDER: You've never seen him, and you're so confident of what he is? Foolish girl.

PSYCHE: I don't need sight to know her!

ELDEST: Psyche, no need to carry on so.

PSYCHE: You can't tell me what I feel!

ELDEST: Your sister only means to point out that we are elder, more experienced, and have never felt feelings like you claim. You can see why we're concerned.

PSYCHE: Why should you be concerned that I love and am loved? I pity you if you say you've never felt such a thing.

ELDER: You always did have to be the special one, didn't you? Beautiful Psyche, too good for any suitor put forth to her, though her sisters go meekly to men who made good alliances.

You know, the whole land carries on about you, your sacrifice, while I—I sit by my husband at the head of our table each night, though he is so old the soup dribbles from his mouth. I water his wine to prevent heartburn keeping him up at night. We go to bed and still I—make love to him. Because it is my duty. And I do it without claiming to be a martyr—you dare look down on me?

PSYCHE: I don't—

ELDEST: I bear a burden too—I sit by my husband while he stays up long into the night, taking notes for each council and meeting he holds though he—doesn't speak to me or touch me. He is a man busy with matters of state, plans of war. There's no room for—frivolous passion. Still the words of his decrees and speeches flow through my pen. I know my part. I play it well. Do not presume to judge what you don't know.

PSYCHE: That's not—

ELDER: But you—too good for your family, too grand, too flighty for anything so mundane as loyalty to kin or kingdom. Enabled by Venus to run away, blind with passion, and you land in the arms of a lying monster and lie with him anyway.

ELDEST: Silly girl. So naïve. Your lover is a man, could only be a man—he calls himself a woman only to humor you.

ELDER: Why else would he keep you in the dark?

ELDEST: What kind of love could you have, without ever even seeing his face?

ELDER: You know what you really are. You know what you deserve.

BOTH: We only wish to protect you from your own delusions. Light a candle tonight and tell us we are wrong.

[PSYCHE sits frozen a second longer. She kisses each sister on her cheek. ELDER and ELDEST exit.]

[PSYCHE picks up a box of matches and goes to the brazier but does not light it. CUPID enters, carrying a lit candle. She embraces PSYCHE from behind.]

IV. Losing

[PSYCHE turns and kisses CUPID; together they set down the candle and sink onto the chaise, still in each other's arms. PSYCHE draws back and touches CUPID's lips or some other such easy gesture.]

PSYCHE: Your eyes are reflecting the light.

CUPID: Are they?

PSYCHE: Mm. I've always loved your eyes. No matter what's happened, you look at me just the same way.

CUPID: With light?

PSYCHE: If that's what you want to call it.

[*A lull. They kiss.*]

PSYCHE: Do you think... I mean, d'you ever...

CUPID: Do I ever?

PSYCHE: Regret's not the right word, but...

CUPID: What do I have to regret?

PSYCHE: Don't say that. You can't mean it.

CUPID: I'm a goddess, love. I've lived so many lives, taken so long to learn too much—about myself, about the world...

PSYCHE: Mourn, then. Do you mourn the past?

CUPID: I'm—here now.

PSYCHE: But what about all you've lost?

CUPID: I don't know if lost is the right word, either.

PSYCHE: It's not?

CUPID: I don't thing... the things I no longer have, my mother—they're not irretrievable. They're not lost.

PSYCHE: What your mother said—

CUPID: That's not what—

PSYCHE: You know you don't deserve that, right? Tell me you know.

CUPID: I know. I've learned.

PSYCHE: Good.

CUPID: It's more than that... I know I could have foreseen my mother's anger. And even now, after all that's played out, even still I could—throw myself upon that brazier. Call upon her and prostrate myself, grovel at her feet in hope of placating her.

PSYCHE: Oh, my love.

CUPID: But I refuse to, you see? There is no pleasing her—she's not lost. I've left her behind.

PSYCHE: I see.

CUPID: I can't—won't give her the apology she's not owed.

[*beat*]

PSYCHE: I'm sorry.

CUPID: For what?

PSYCHE: It just seems so—sad. So hard—she's still your mother. If you chose, you could still be her daughter. You could make that—impossible choice.

CUPID: Whose choice was it for her to throw out her only child?

[*pause*]

CUPID: What is this about, love?

PSYCHE: I don't know.

CUPID: What did—you lose?

PSYCHE: (*bitterly*) Oh, my—anger?

CUPID: Did you?

PSYCHE: Hush. No. I don't know. It's—my family. My sisters, I should be angry at them. I know they—the things they said—they couldn't see what I had, what I needed—

CUPID: No, they wouldn't.

PSYCHE: And my parents who left me—

CUPID: You didn't deserve it.

PSYCHE: I know. But they're still lost and I'm still—sad.

[*They take comfort in each other and the silence.*]

CUPID: Do you love them?

PSYCHE: I adored them.

CUPID: Yeah?

PSYCHE: Especially my sisters. I'm sure they thought I was a nuisance, always running after them on their adventures and immediately falling behind... but when I cried, they always came back.

CUPID: Yeah.

PSYCHE: Even now—they just—

CUPID: Wouldn't listen?

PSYCHE: Couldn't fix the problem by—sneaking me sugar cubes or holding my hands to swing me between them.

CUPID: I'm glad you had that once.

PSYCHE: Yeah.

CUPID: And you don't...regret leaving it behind?

PSYCHE: Well. I'm far too tall for them to swing me now.

CUPID: You're a giant, love. The mountains tremble before you.

PSYCHE: Oh, I like that. Let them tremble.

[They kiss. CUPID reaches over to extinguish the candle, and they fall into an embrace.]

[VENUS enters, seeing the lovers. She snaps and the brazier flares to life.]

[CUPID jumps back from PSYCHE, crying out. In her haste to get away, she knocks into the brazier, burning herself. CUPID exits.]

[PSYCHE reaches after her but is unable to move. VENUS snaps again and PSYCHE falls to the floor.]

V. Voicing

[A long moment of stillness.]

[PSYCHE picks up a small ornate package from the base of the brazier and staggers to her feet as VENUS watches. PSYCHE walks as she speaks, unable to see VENUS, not sure where to address her words, and thus deciding to direct them everywhere.]

PSYCHE: What wrongs have I done you, O goddess, that you curse me so? The earthly trials you have forced on me—is it all because men call me by your name?

I did not ask for this. To be gazed upon, lauded and never loved.

[A beat.]

Did you?

My sisters were sold to their husbands young, leaving only me to be put on display, another—piece of my father's treasure. I was a marvel, a promise of the gods' favor. Something to be watched, enviously. Not heard. Coveted. Whatever else, has happened, lady, I owe you thanks for shattering that. The illusions that surrounded me and the magnifying glasses they kept me under.

In some ways, it is freeing not to be seen at all. To be left alone at the top of a mountain, awaiting an unknown fate with only the winds for company.

(suddenly loud) But will you not listen to me when I call upon you?

I will not be made to disappear.

Do you find my speech disrespectful? I speak without respect because you have earned none from me. You call yourself the Patroness of Love yet punish ours. Grant us peace only when we are hidden from you. Send me across the earth and into hell below to bring you boxed up beauty from the Queen of Death *(gestures with the package)* while you keep my love locked up.

All to prove my love when you must be able to see the truth of my feelings in my heart and on my face because I cannot help but overflow with it. How many barley-grains must I collect to buy your permission to exist? As a mortal? As a woman?

And what will happen to you when I realize—there is and never has been a debt to be paid? What happens when I reclaim love for myself?

I am not beholden to you. I do not do this for you.

[PSYCHE opens the package and makes as if to dump it out, but once it is open, she sways at the sight of it and then falls into a deep sleep. VENUS laughs.]

VENUS: My thanks to the Queen of Death. How does your beauty serve you now, girl?

[Venus exits through the audience without looking back.]

[Blackout.]

VI. Dark

[CUPID's voice speaks in the blackout.]

CUPID: Psyche. I would like, first, to welcome you. This is your home as long as—um. I hope I am not too forward.

As long as you are here—as long as you want—

While you are in my home, you will have the rights and privileges of its mistress, whatever servants or treasures you want—it is my wish you are comfortable here. My duties keep me busy during much of the day so I'm afraid I'll make a poor hostess. I'm sorry.

I—would still like to visit you, in the evenings. If you'd like. To keep you company and, um. Come to know you better. If that is... not objectionable to you.

Yes. Very well then.

I ask of you only one thing—when we are together, shine no lamp. Light no candle. Do not look upon me. As long as I—we—are not revealed, I can keep you here, keep you safe. As long as we're in the dark.

VII. Voicing (reprise)

[Lights up. The brazier is lit.]

[CUPID sits on the chaise, cradling her arm. PSYCHE lies unconscious in the same spot, out of CUPID's sight. CUPID's eyes are on the brazier.]

[VENUS enters.]

CUPID: Where have you been?

VENUS: About my business.

CUPID: What business?

VENUS: Your strength must be returning, to greet your mother with such forceful questions.

CUPID: I feel... stronger, at least.

VENUS: It is well you are recovering.

CUPID: I didn't say that.

[VENUS plumps a pillow or some other small ministrations. CUPID remains staring into the brazier. VENUS looks between her and the audience.]

VENUS: You know, I... there was—a man. Once. He was a mortal—a beautiful, mortal man. I remember still, his face—every morning as Apollo dashed across the sky he would raise it to the sun and smile, like the most exquisite flower.

I was—well, infatuated, frankly. And I made no secret of it then.

But even as Goddess of Love, I was not immune to its dangers. Like any other I was blinded, vulnerable to petty rivals and jealousies... Proserpina tore him from me half the year, my plea to Jove in vain. Even when he was mine, Diana filled him with lust to hunt, and Mars—jealous Mars—I could do nothing.

They took him from us all. My beloved Adonis.

[pause]

I was weak, in love, do you see? Not a goddess, merely a lover. So I do. I understand your pain, my child.

CUPID: I—never knew.

VENUS: Yes, well the world and I were young in those days. Be thankful your youthful folly caused no more lasting damage.

CUPID: *{humorless}* Yes, thank Jove for that.

VENUS: You would do better to thank me.

CUPID: Thank you, Mother.

VENUS: It is I who will be there to catch you when you fall, nurse you when you're injured. I care for you, whenever you need me.

[after a moment at arm's length, they embrace.]

[Beat. Then CUPID pulls back.]

CUPID: But you went away, just now.

VENUS: Don't be so literal. You of all people should know I have many duties demanding my attention.

[VENUS takes CUPID's face in hand]

VENUS: You are my child. My heir. You are mine.

CUPID: I—yes, Mother.

VENUS: And as such, I hold certain expectations for your behavior.

CUPID: I don't want to have this conversation.

[*VENUS releases CUPID*]

VENUS: You say you're feeling better, I say we're having it.

CUPID: I said nothing of better.

VENUS: Be quiet and listen. I understand, you are hurting. But you still disappoint me. Disobeyed me. Now. I cleaned up the mess you left behind, but I hope you learn from your mistakes. Deceive me again and my response will not be so generous.

[*Beat*]

CUPID: Yes, Mother.

VENUS: It's for your own good, love. (*caressing CUPID's hair*) Now then. With the girl out of the picture we shall—

CUPID: What do you mean?

VENUS: If you were to let me finish you would know what I—

CUPID: What do you mean, Psyche is out of the picture?

VENUS: That is none of your concern, and never should have been. Do you listen to nothing I say?

CUPID: Where is she?

VENUS: Paying for her arrogance.

CUPID: How can she, she has none!

VENUS: What have I told you about questioning my judgement?

[*CUPID stands from her sickbed.*]

CUPID: You know, I have learned something from all this.

VENUS: (*gesturing to audience*) Please, enlighten us.

CUPID: I have learned about love. I have learned—whatever you say—love is not cruel, or weak, even when it brings pain.

VENUS: Do not presume—

CUPID: I learned it from Psyche, not from my loss but my love—I love her—

VENUS: I am Love!

CUPID: This is not love! You stand there grasping for golden apples and terrified to lose anything—praise or power or people—there is fear on your face even now!

VENUS: How dare you—

CUPID: I know fear. I know fear, Mother, but I have been learning about bravery, too.

VENUS: This is not bravery, this is impudence.

CUPID: I have learned bravery—is not an absence of fear, or uncertainty, regret. I hold all these things—probably always will. Just as you do.

VENUS: You have no right to say this.

CUPID: Bravery is acting—loving—anyway.

VENUS: You know nothing!

CUPID: I love her.

VENUS: Get out. Get out of my sight, you self-righteous bitch! Out!

CUPID: Be thankful, Mother. You'll never have to be brave like this.

[CUPID walks, then runs offstage. Venus does not look after her.]

VIII. Losing (reprise)

[PSYCHE still lies on the stage, unseen. KING and QUEEN enter, ignorant of her and VENUS alike. QUEEN prepares the sacrificial brazier while KING speaks his lamentation to the audience.]

KING: Venus, queen of grace, eldest of the Olympians, that spirit of Love and Beauty who walks incarnate among we lowly mortals or else monitors us from on high—hear my cry.

[VENUS is not attentive to the KING's words—he is like the buzzing of a fly, audible but only as an annoyance.]

KING: I pray you, O goddess, return my daughter to me, she who is my pride and joy, first among my treasures—such a good girl, she was.

My darling girl, who so recently sat upon my knee in and tugged at my beard as I held court. Has she forgotten her poor father, forlorn in his advancing age, lonely, heirless? Her sisters left me young, but she stayed. Does family mean nothing anymore?

She's gone now, at your behest, taken to wed your strange inhuman child, wrested from her people to satisfy whims of gods.

Not that I dare question your judgement, lady. I bow in all things to your immortal knowledge and ability.

[KING falls to his knees]

But I beg—I prostrate myself on the floor as if to kiss your feet—as I pray you, reconsider. Bring me back my precious daughter from whence your wild child led her. Let not my lamentations go unheard. Let me feel her sweet kiss upon my cheek again, and take mercy on this wretched king, O goddess.

[QUEEN lights the brazier, and the smoke gets VENUS's attention like none of KING's words, seeming to restore her. QUEEN goes to KING and they huddle together, unhearing, as VENUS speaks.]

VENUS: You dare cast the blame afield? It is your daughter with the arrogance, the malice, to scorn me and toy with mine? I do not forgive the wrongs done me so quickly, no, nor forget.

Do you need a reminder of my power? After all the trials I have and will put your daughter through? I demanded her sacrifice, instructed the oracle to tell of her marriage to a monster, since your priests and people could not shut up about how no man would be worthy of her. And now you think to question me?

You call me cruel, but I have reason. She cannot presume to be a goddess, to be my equal, to be my—daughter's equal. I will not condone it.

Yet you question my judgement in these matters, as though you could understand, as though you have a say, that it matters what you say, as though you matter, you silly little cockroach man.

I should smite you where you stand.

There is a reason, I suppose, I have always been so drawn to the vicious god of war. What leads people farther astray than love? What incites brighter rage or stronger hate?

It's not always love. But people do horrible things in my name.

I have been hurt too. I once lost a – and now a daughter. What kind of goddess would choose a mortal girl over her own birthright? I couldn't say, and yet my own daughter makes mockery of our place and power. We sit on Olympus high to overlook the petty chaos of mortals and she invites this—girl to join us without a thought to how weak we are when we fall prey to our own passions. This pathetic, vapid, mortal girl—a weakness.

But she is less than a shadow of my shadow, doomed to disappear in the light of my divine fury.

[The brazier goes out

[Exeunt.]

IX. Cleaving (reprise)

[CUPID rushes onstage, arm bandaged.]

CUPID: Psyche!

[CUPID falls to her knees next to PSYCHE.]

CUPID: By the gods—to see you like this. So still. My love, come back, I beg you.

[CUPID touches the fingers of her injured arm to PSYCHE's lips. PSYCHE stirs.]

PSYCHE: Cupid?

[At the sound of PSYCHE's voice, CUPID draws her into a close embrace. As they pull apart, PSYCHE notices CUPID's injury.]

PSYCHE: You're hurt.

CUPID: I'm here.

PSYCHE: You're mother—

CUPID: Let's not talk about it now.

PSYCHE: What do you want to talk about?

CUPID: Are you alright? The sleep enchantment, it should be gading.

PSYCHE: I'm fine, I would say if I—

CUPID: Would you?

[beat]

CUPID: Nevermind. Sorry.

PSYCHE: I would if you actually asked.

CUPID: I didn't know there was anything to ask. I thought—we were happy, just us, hidden—

PSYCHE: We were trapped—

CUPID: We were safe. And that's—

PSYCHE: So what?

CUPID: So I was trying to protect us!

PSYCHE: That's not protection! It's—suffocation.

CUPID: Look what happened when we got discovered. Look—what she put you through—

PSYCHE: Are we talking about your mother now?

CUPID: Love—

PSYCHE: Maybe it was worth it! Maybe—it was worth it. To have you here again.

CUPID: Just—I'm not... maybe you're right.

PSYCHE: I—a cage is a cage. Whether the bars are glass or fear or steel.

CUPID: I understand.

PSYCHE: Do you? You understand what it's like to live your life at the whim of—your father, your kingdom, your gods—all the while knowing they don't give a damn that it's *you*—your life and your body and—

[beat]

PSYCHE: I shouldn't have yelled.

CUPID: Maybe I don't understand how it is, for you. But I—I know what it's like to be trapped.

PSYCHE: What did your mother say to you?

CUPID: Sometimes I worry—what if I'm the goddess of Hate? The uglier sister side to passion—seems about right.

PSYCHE: How could it?

CUPID: I don't. I'm not good, I don't fit the mold my mother made me to fill, and I'm still her heir, but I'm—so angry, all the time. So angry, and—still, no one ever sees me. No one! Just... the blasted arrow.

PSYCHE: Who says love can't be angry?

CUPID: So maybe I don't know, exactly. But I want to learn.

[*CUPID takes PSYCHE's hand.*]

CUPID: I want to see you, and—to be seen.

PSYCHE: Hard to do that, in the dark.

CUPID: So I've learned.

[*a more comfortable silence*]

PSYCHE: Can I kiss you?

[*CUPID leans in and they kiss.*]

CUPID: I don't know what I would have done if you had—if you were—

[*CUPID embraces PSYCHE.*]

CUPID: I could not bear to see you die.

PSYCHE: Was I really—that enchantment—

CUPID: I don't know.

PSYCHE: (*introspective*) She would have killed me.

CUPID: I thought she had, it—I've never defied her like this.

PSYCHE: You defied her?

CUPID: I did, I just—she was wrong about so much—

PSYCHE: You didn't do it for me?

CUPID: (*thrown*) I, yes, I—

PSYCHE: What about when I am gone?

CUPID: Don't say that.

PSYCHE: I nearly was! This—we—I'm mortal—

CUPID: Well I'm not—

PSYCHE: We can't just hide this away.

CUPID: No, I—as long as I'm alive, you'll live on. In me, in this person I've become.
Psyche.

PSYCHE: I'm here.

CUPID: I didn't—stand up to my mother for you, but I did it because of you—I just—
didn't know, didn't care that the way she sees things, the way the world sees me—that's not the way it is.
I just didn't realize until you.

PSYCHE: Yeah?

CUPID: Until I thought I lost you. And now I'll always know.

PSYCHE: Yes, always.

[*They kiss.*]

PSYCHE: And—who cares what you're goddess of? There's so much you can do, with anger, with
love—

CUPID: With you.

PSYCHE: Believe it.

[*They kiss, tender at first but building. They rise, moving in stylized choreography towards the chaise.
As they grow closer, they shed first CUPID's bandages, then their outerwear. The lights grow dimmer as
CUPID and PSYCHE grow more heated—this is no longer the audience's moment to witness.*]

[*Blackout.*]

X. Asleep (reprise)

[*Still dark, but possible to see movement. PSYCHE sits up on the chaise and watches CUPID sleep next
to her for a long moment. Slowly she slides off the chaise and reaches down to grab a candle and
matches, hesitating before she can strike.*]

PSYCHE: My sisters say you're a monster. You, a monster, when you have been the kindest lover
and the most loving friend. And I—

I'm glad of the dark, it hides my face.

I don't believe them—I don't want to believe them, but I don't understand. Why hide? Why come to me
only in darkness, why kiss, why talk, why exist only where no one can see?

Are you ashamed of me? A mortal girl renowned only for her beauty? My fate to fade with age until I'm
bent like a grasshopper? Is that all you see in me? My—expiration?

Do you think I could ever be ashamed of you? As though I didn't choose to be here, as though I wouldn't go through hell for you if asked but you have to *ask* you can't just tell me this is the way it has to be.

It never has to be. There's always a choice.

I chose to go along with the oracle and offer myself as a sacrifice because the alternative was a sham marriage. I chose to bring my sisters here and I chose to sit there as they filled my head with venom because I love them and I wanted to see them and have them know I was alright.

Maybe they weren't good choices. But I made them.

[*A long pause.*]

PSYCHE con't: And maybe I am ashamed. Maybe I doubt. Don't you think it's worth the trials and the persecution and all the shit to be together? Just to be together, openly?

I'm...it's not your fault, that things are this way, but they are this way and we have to face it don't we? Look at me, I can't even face you—just going round and round inside my own head with a hand poised to strike the match and just hoping like some naïve idiot that you don't wake up—

Love takes sacrifice. But it takes bravery, too.

And I—I make my choice.

[*PSYCHE strikes the match. Lights flare, then*

[*Blackout.*

[*Fin.*]