

The story of Cupid and Psyche comes from Apuleius' novel *Metamorphoses* (aka *The Golden Ass*) written in the mid second century AD. It is the only Latin novel that has survived in its entirety. It relates the ludicrous adventures of one Lucius, who experiments with magic and is accidentally turned into a donkey.



## *Cupid and Psyche*

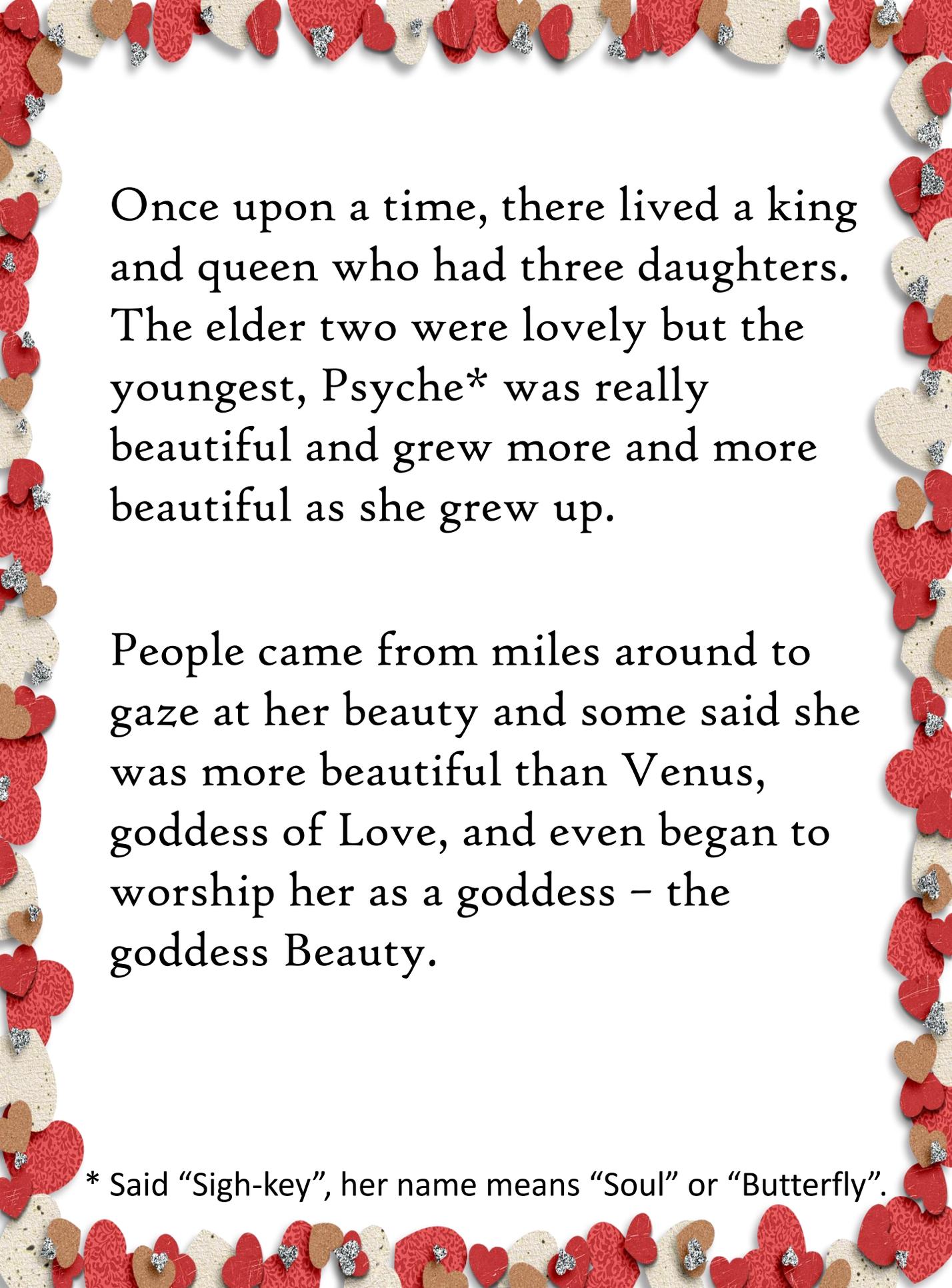


Apuleius was born in Madaurus (now M'Daourouch) in Algeria in c.125AD. He studied Platonist philosophy in Athens and rhetoric in Rome, travelling extensively in Asia Minor and Egypt before settling in Alexandria. In 158AD he was accused of using magic to gain the attention and fortune of the rich widow he married. He was tried before the proconsul and a court of magistrates in Sabratha, near Tripoli, Libya, where he delivered – and then published – a witty defence speech.





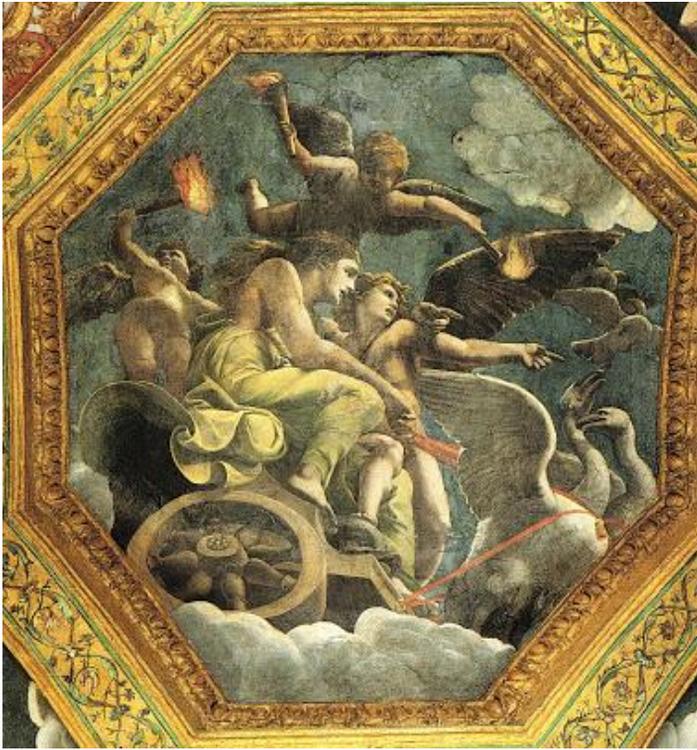
Clockwise from top left: *Psyche* (1909) by William Sergeant Kendall; *Psyche* (1892) by Adolphe William Bougereau; *Psyche Honoured by the People* (1692-1702) by Luca Giordano; *The Household Gods* (1880) by John William Waterhouse.



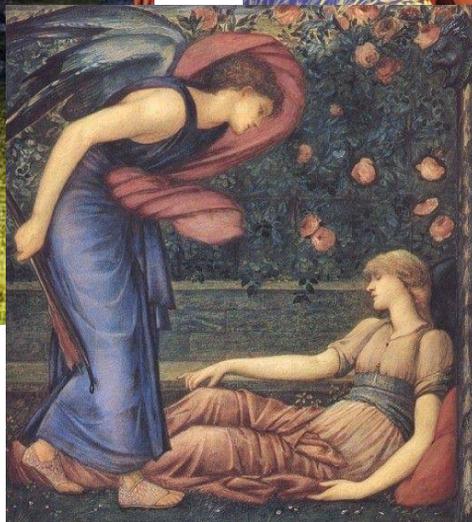
Once upon a time, there lived a king and queen who had three daughters. The elder two were lovely but the youngest, Psyche\* was really beautiful and grew more and more beautiful as she grew up.

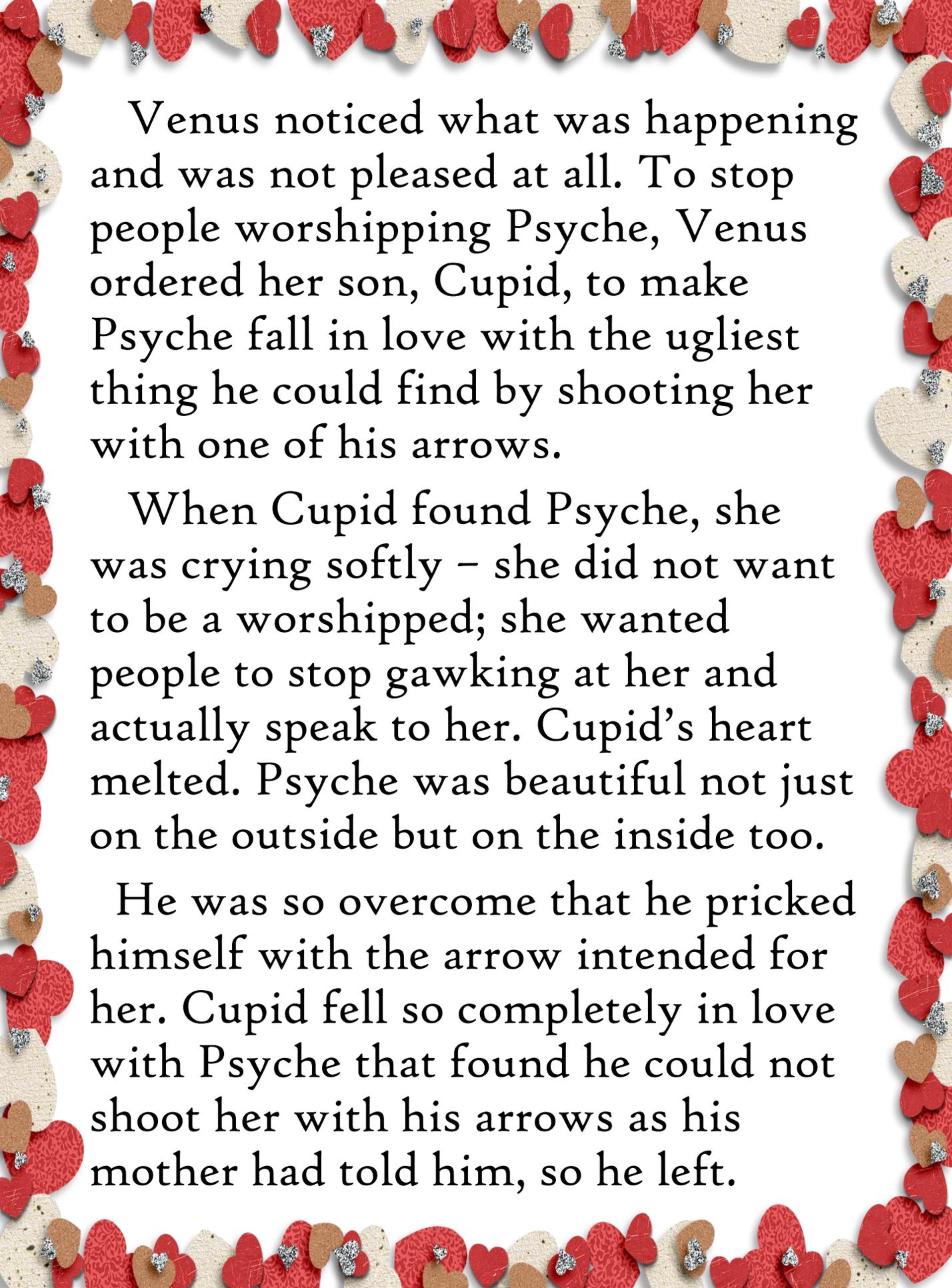
People came from miles around to gaze at her beauty and some said she was more beautiful than Venus, goddess of Love, and even began to worship her as a goddess – the goddess Beauty.

\* Said “Sigh-key”, her name means “Soul” or “Butterfly”.



Anti-clockwise from top right: Venus disapproves of the worship of Psyche in a detail from a fresco by Perin del Vaga for Pope Paul II; Venus instructs Cupid to punish Psyche in a ceiling fresco by Guilio Romano (1524-1534); Cupid approaches Psyche for the first time (detail) by John Spencer Stanhope (c. 1873); *Cupid Finding Psyche*, by Sir Edward-Burne Jones (between 1865-1887); *Cupid and Psyche* by Alicechan (2012-2014).

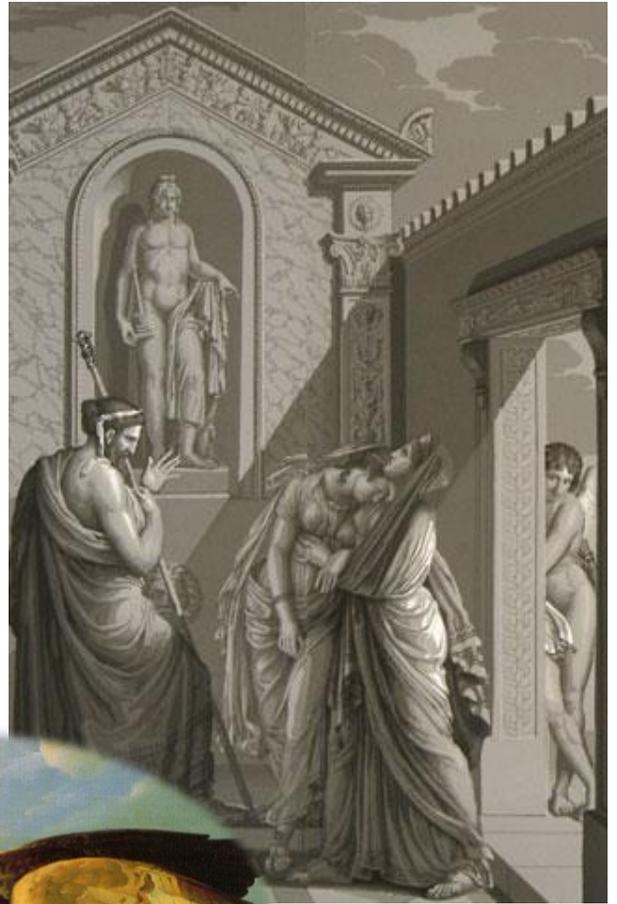




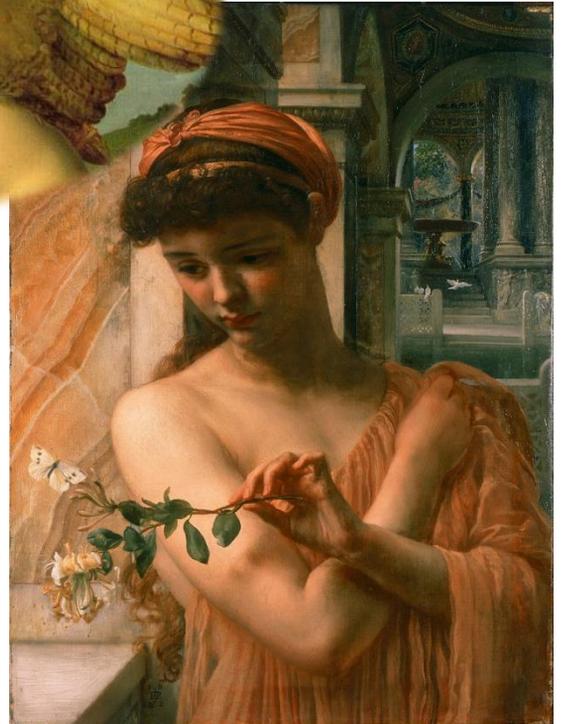
Venus noticed what was happening and was not pleased at all. To stop people worshipping Psyche, Venus ordered her son, Cupid, to make Psyche fall in love with the ugliest thing he could find by shooting her with one of his arrows.

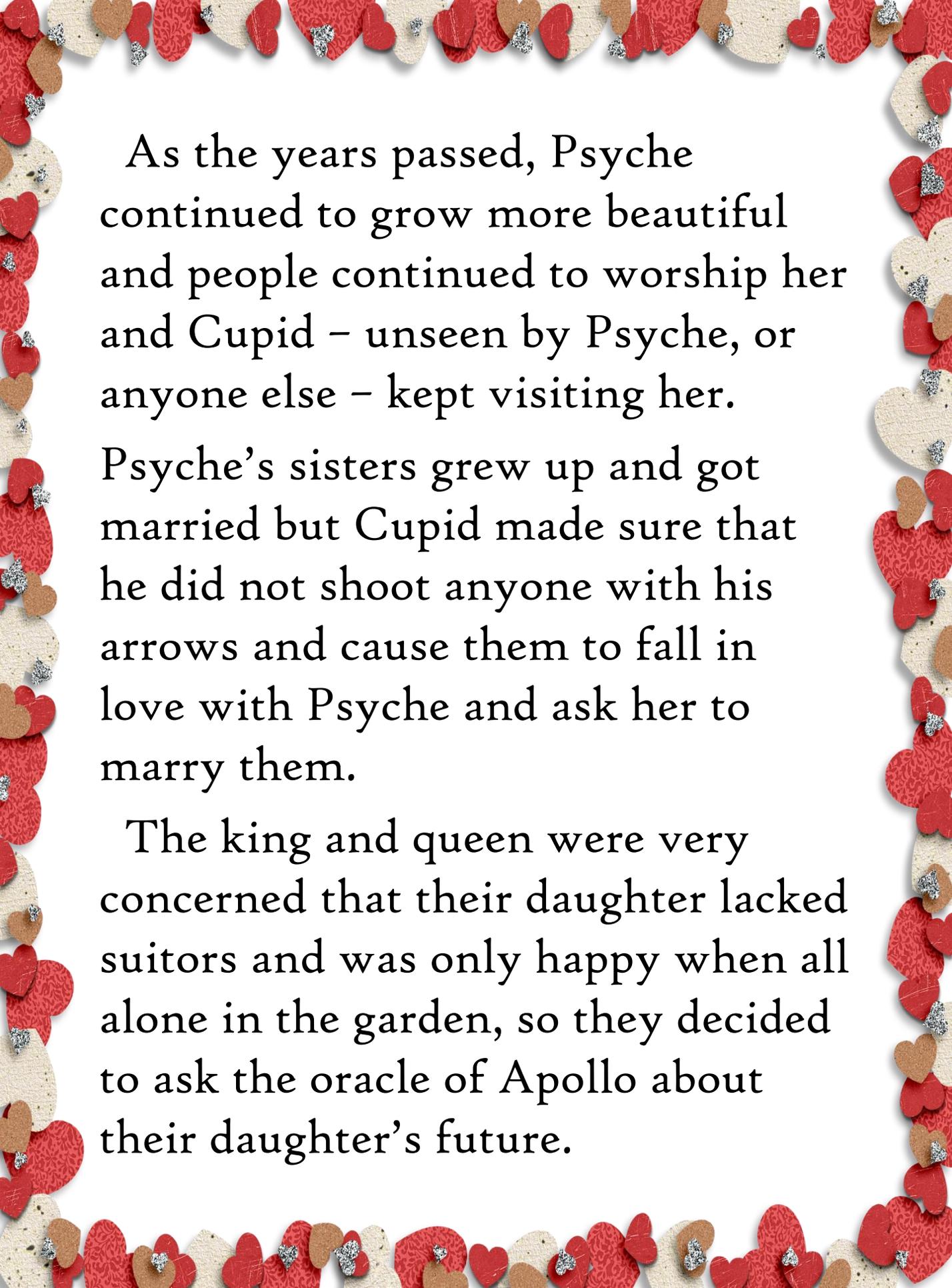
When Cupid found Psyche, she was crying softly – she did not want to be worshipped; she wanted people to stop gawking at her and actually speak to her. Cupid's heart melted. Psyche was beautiful not just on the outside but on the inside too.

He was so overcome that he pricked himself with the arrow intended for her. Cupid fell so completely in love with Psyche that he found he could not shoot her with his arrows as his mother had told him, so he left.



Clockwise from top left: *Psyche and Cupid* by Guillaume Seignac; section of the *Cupid and Psyche* wallpaper by Merry-Joseph Blondel and Louis Lafitte for Joseph Dufour (c.1850-80); *Psyche Receiving The First Kiss From Cupid* (1798) by Francois-Pascal-Simon Gerard; *Psyche in the Temple of Love* (1882 ) by Edward Poynter; *Cupid and Psyche* (1919) by Harold Gaze; *Cupid and Psyche* (1808) by Antonio Canova.

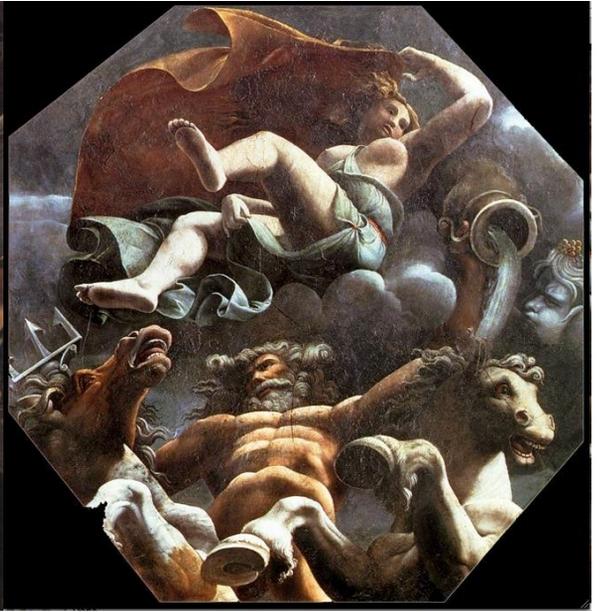




As the years passed, Psyche continued to grow more beautiful and people continued to worship her and Cupid – unseen by Psyche, or anyone else – kept visiting her.

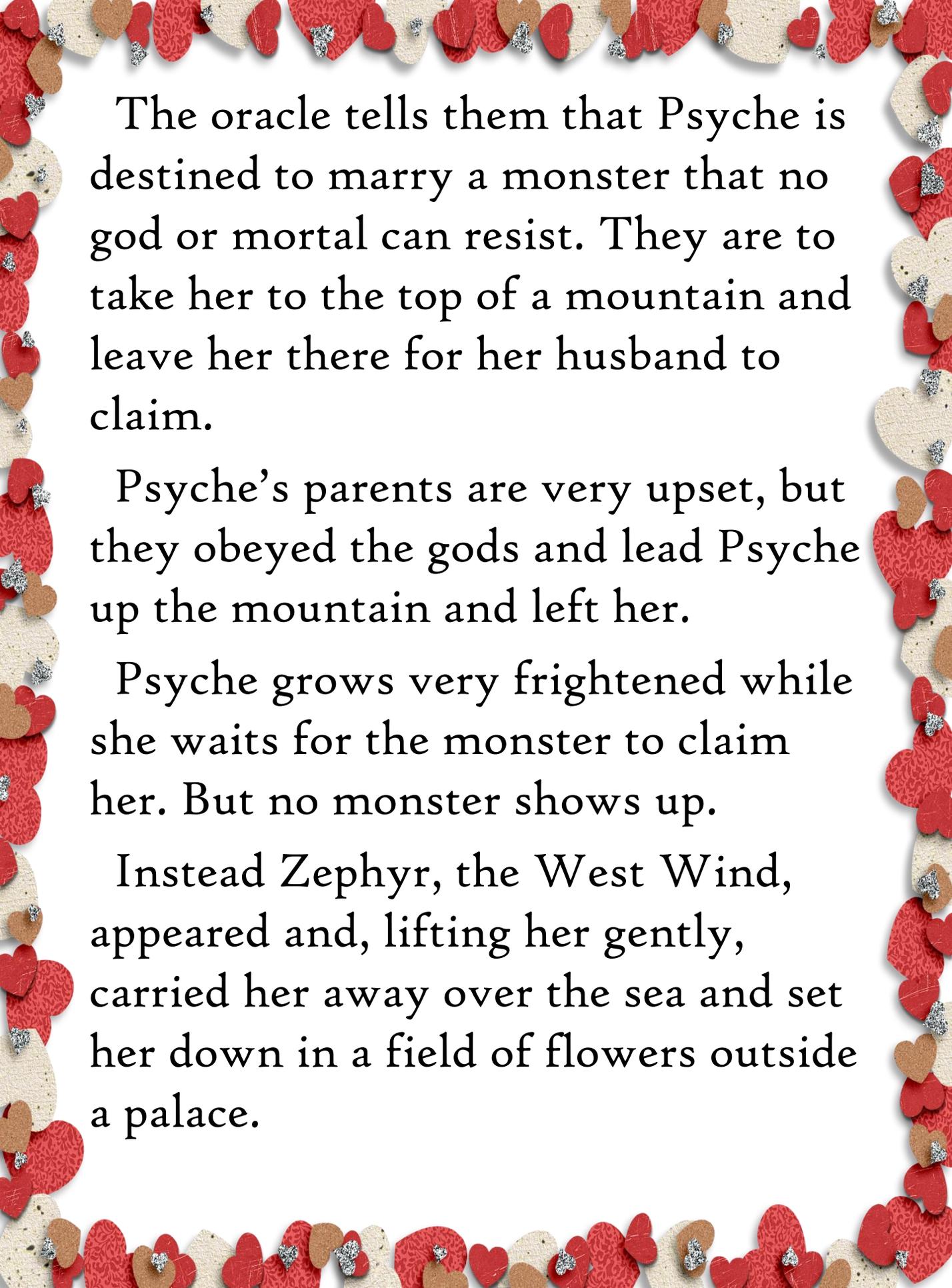
Psyche's sisters grew up and got married but Cupid made sure that he did not shoot anyone with his arrows and cause them to fall in love with Psyche and ask her to marry them.

The king and queen were very concerned that their daughter lacked suitors and was only happy when all alone in the garden, so they decided to ask the oracle of Apollo about their daughter's future.



Above: *Psyche's Parents Offering Sacrifice to Apollo* (1692-1702) by Guilano Giordano (left); *Zephyr Blowing Psyche over the Sea* (c.1527) in a ceiling fresco by Rinaldo Montovano (right)  
Below: *Psyche's Wedding* (1995) by Edward Burne-Jones.





The oracle tells them that Psyche is destined to marry a monster that no god or mortal can resist. They are to take her to the top of a mountain and leave her there for her husband to claim.

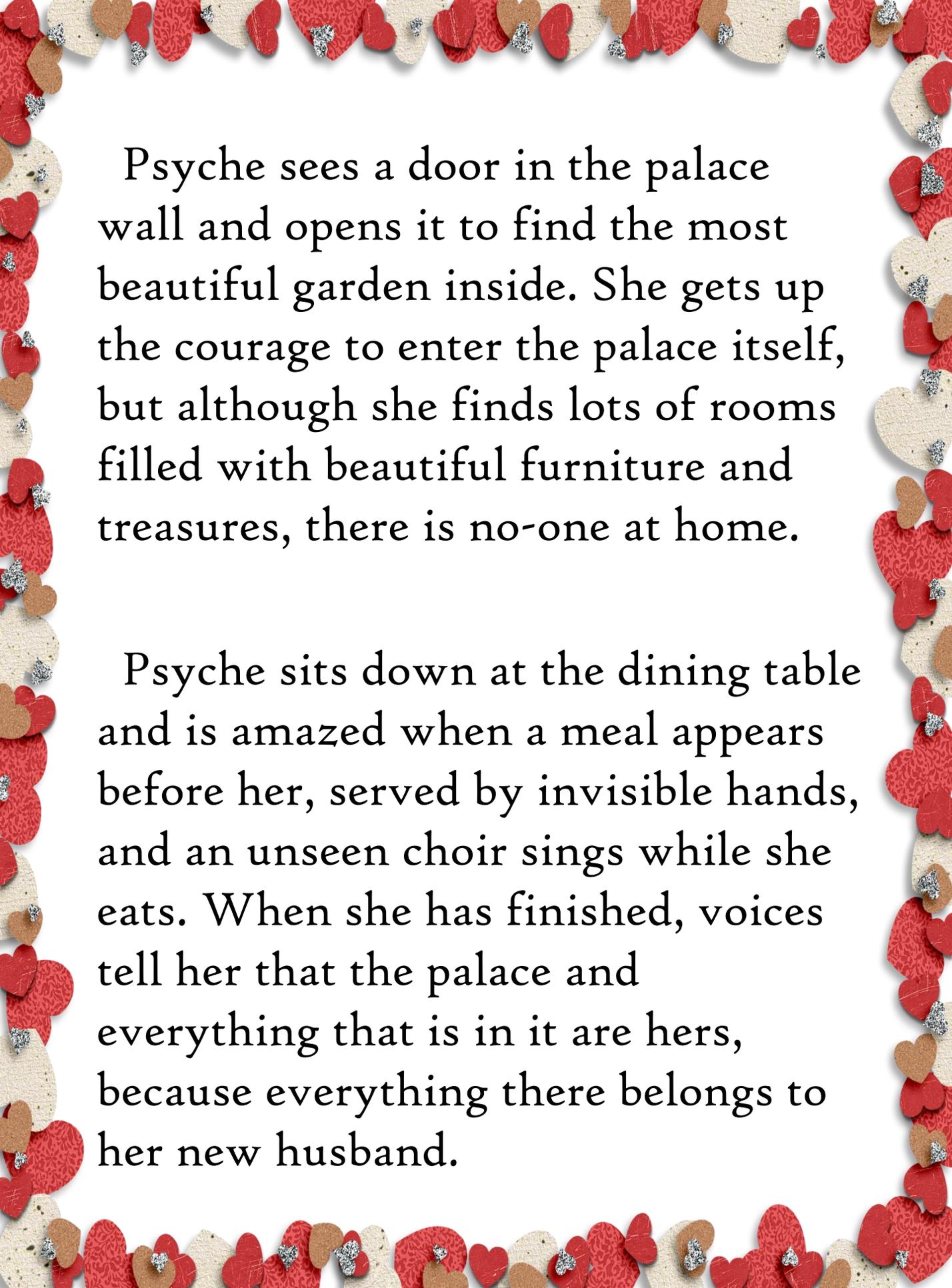
Psyche's parents are very upset, but they obeyed the gods and lead Psyche up the mountain and left her.

Psyche grows very frightened while she waits for the monster to claim her. But no monster shows up.

Instead Zephyr, the West Wind, appeared and, lifting her gently, carried her away over the sea and set her down in a field of flowers outside a palace.



Clockwise from top right:  
*Zephyr Carries Psyche Down from the Mountain* (1905) by Henry Ford; *Psyche Entering Cupid's Garden* (1904) by John William Waterhouse; *Psyche Served by Invisible Spirits* (1692-1702) by Giulio Giordano.



Psyche sees a door in the palace wall and opens it to find the most beautiful garden inside. She gets up the courage to enter the palace itself, but although she finds lots of rooms filled with beautiful furniture and treasures, there is no-one at home.

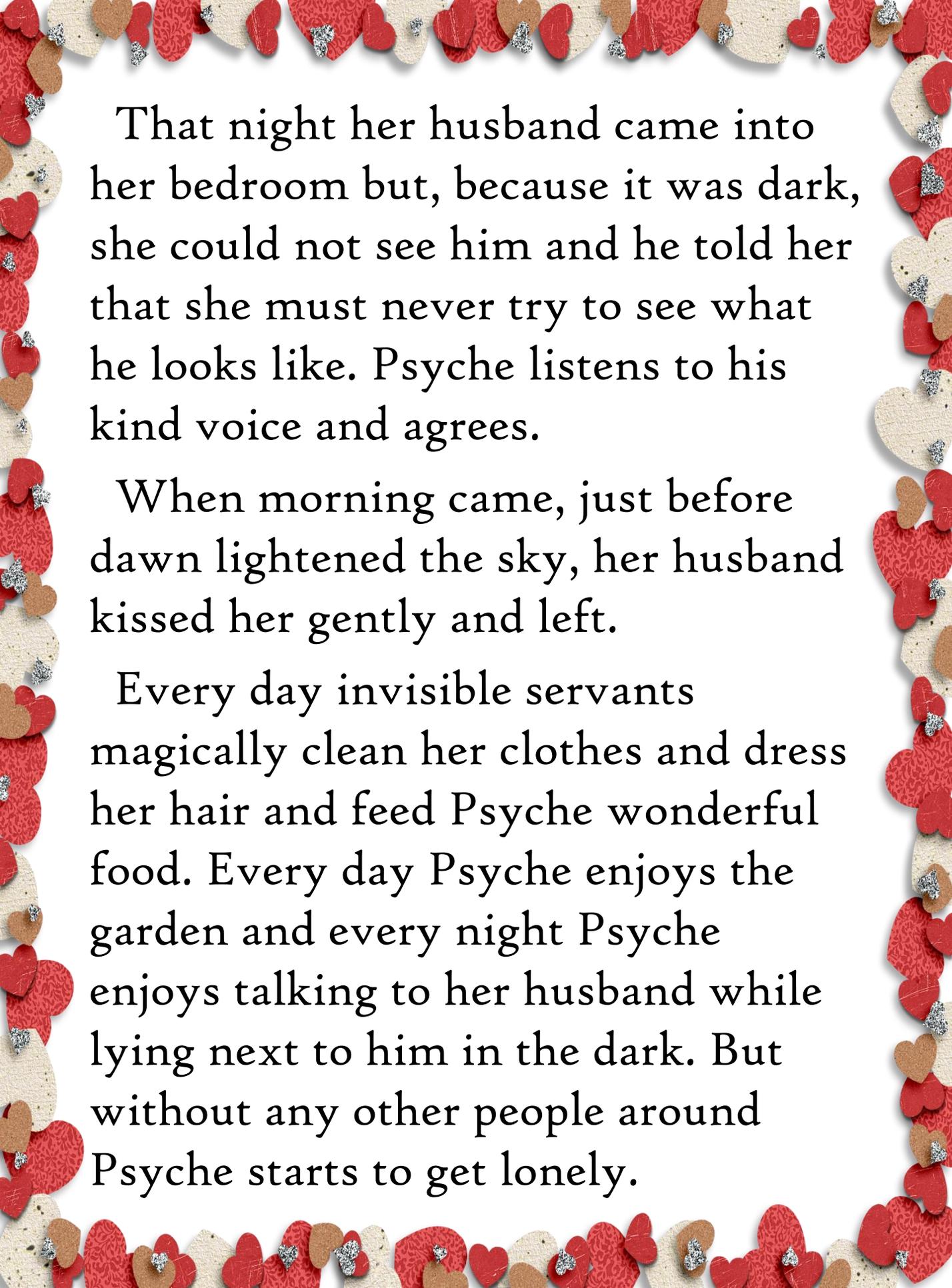
Psyche sits down at the dining table and is amazed when a meal appears before her, served by invisible hands, and an unseen choir sings while she eats. When she has finished, voices tell her that the palace and everything that is in it are hers, because everything there belongs to her new husband.



Above: *Cupid and Psyche* (1817) by François-Édouard Picot (1786–1868).

Below: *Psyche in the Temple of Love* (1882 ) by Edward Poynter (left); *Cupid Contemplates a Visit by Psyche's Sisters*, detail from *Psyche and her sisters* by Jean-Honoré Fragonard (left).





That night her husband came into her bedroom but, because it was dark, she could not see him and he told her that she must never try to see what he looks like. Psyche listens to his kind voice and agrees.

When morning came, just before dawn lightened the sky, her husband kissed her gently and left.

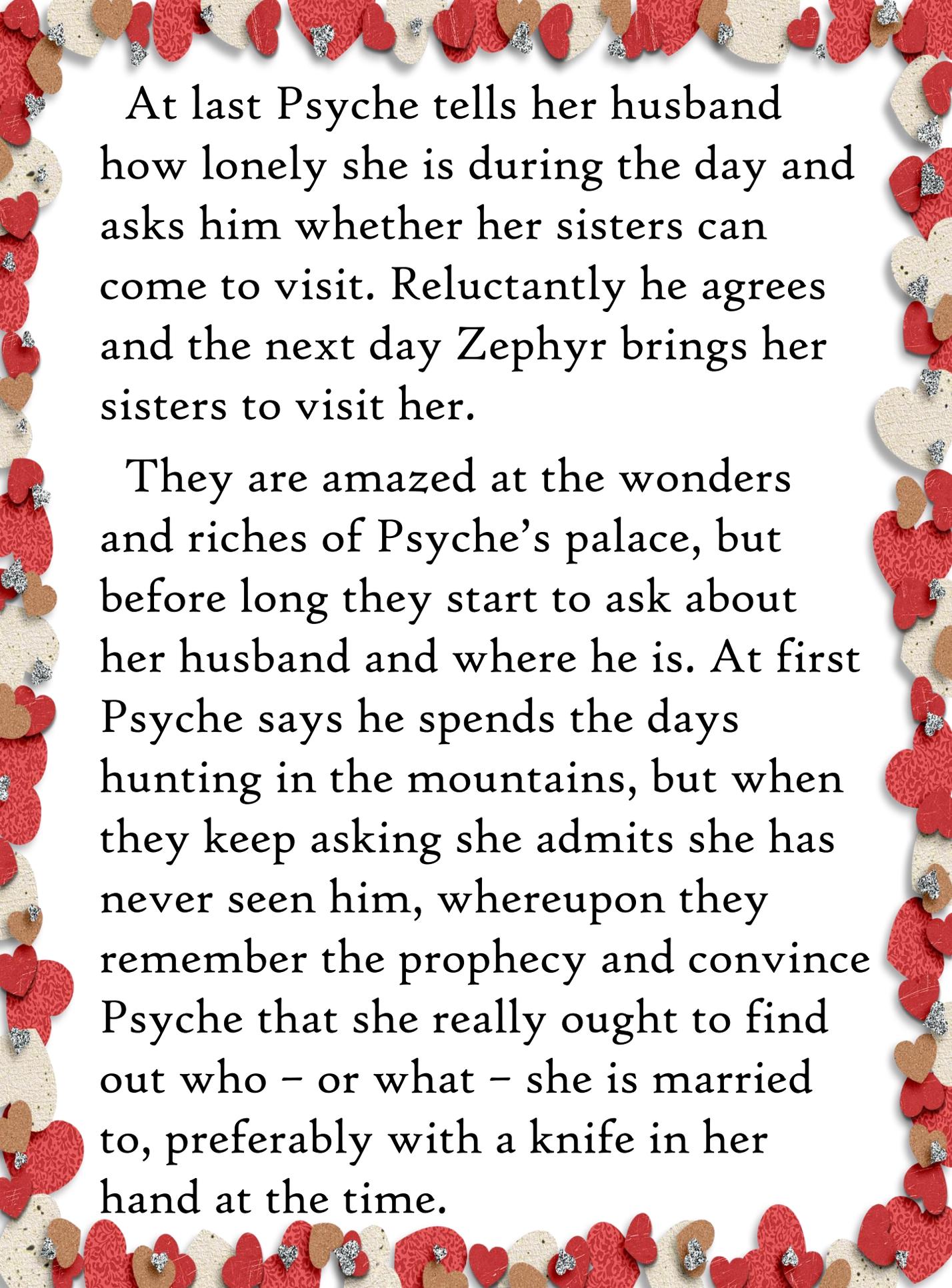
Every day invisible servants magically clean her clothes and dress her hair and feed Psyche wonderful food. Every day Psyche enjoys the garden and every night Psyche enjoys talking to her husband while lying next to him in the dark. But without any other people around Psyche starts to get lonely.

Top: *Psyche shows her jewels to her jealous sisters* (1815) on wallpaper by Merry-Joseph Blondel and Louis Laffitte for Joseph Dufour.



Bottom:  
*Psyche showing her Sisters her Gifts from Cupid* (1753) by Jean-Honoré Fragonard.





At last Psyche tells her husband how lonely she is during the day and asks him whether her sisters can come to visit. Reluctantly he agrees and the next day Zephyr brings her sisters to visit her.

They are amazed at the wonders and riches of Psyche's palace, but before long they start to ask about her husband and where he is. At first Psyche says he spends the days hunting in the mountains, but when they keep asking she admits she has never seen him, whereupon they remember the prophecy and convince Psyche that she really ought to find out who - or what - she is married to, preferably with a knife in her hand at the time.

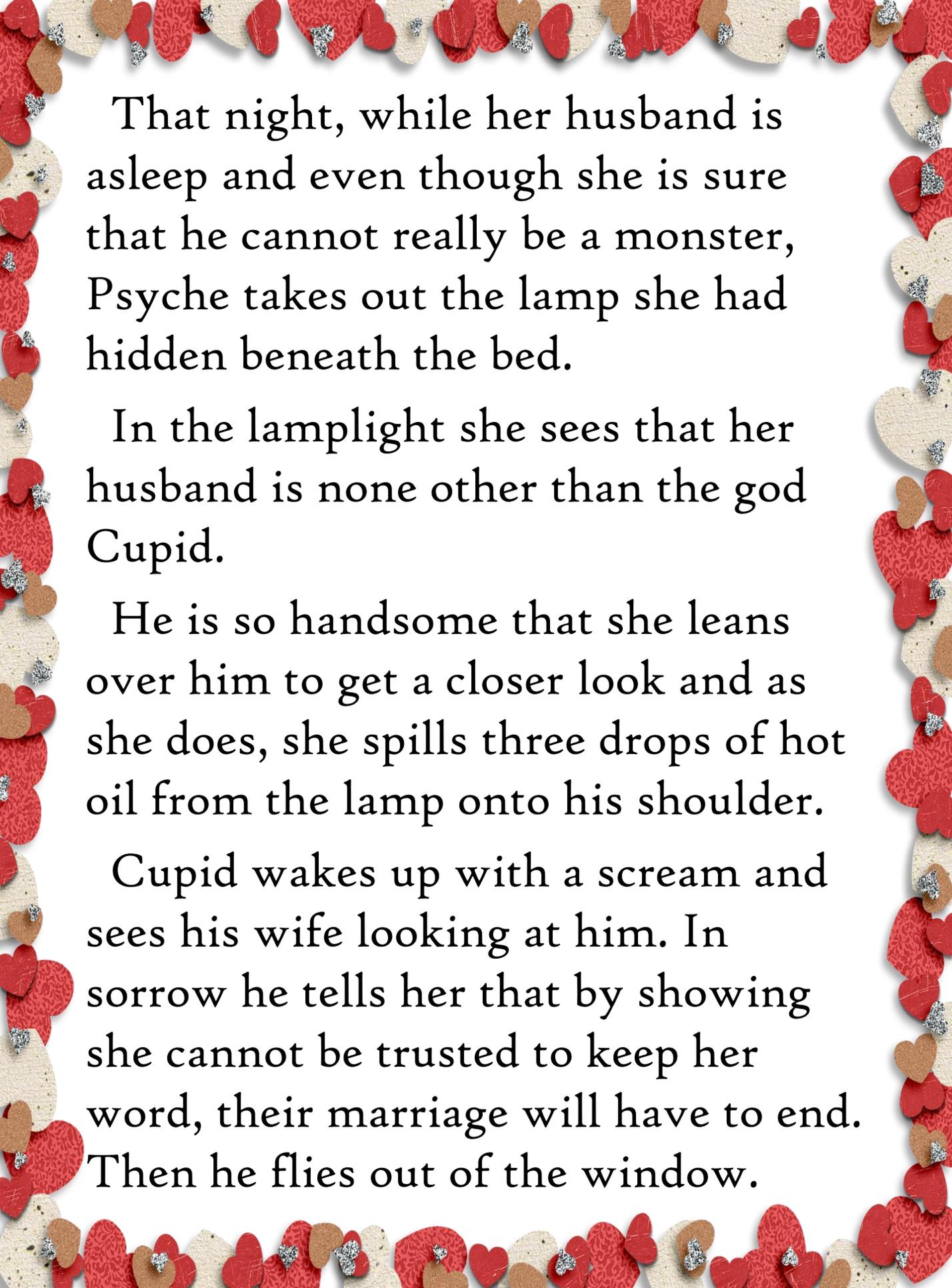


Above: *Amore e Psiche* (1707-09) by Giuseppe Crespi.

Right: *Eros and Psyche* by Troy Howell.

Below: *Cupid and Psyche* (1610-20) by Orazio Gentileschi.





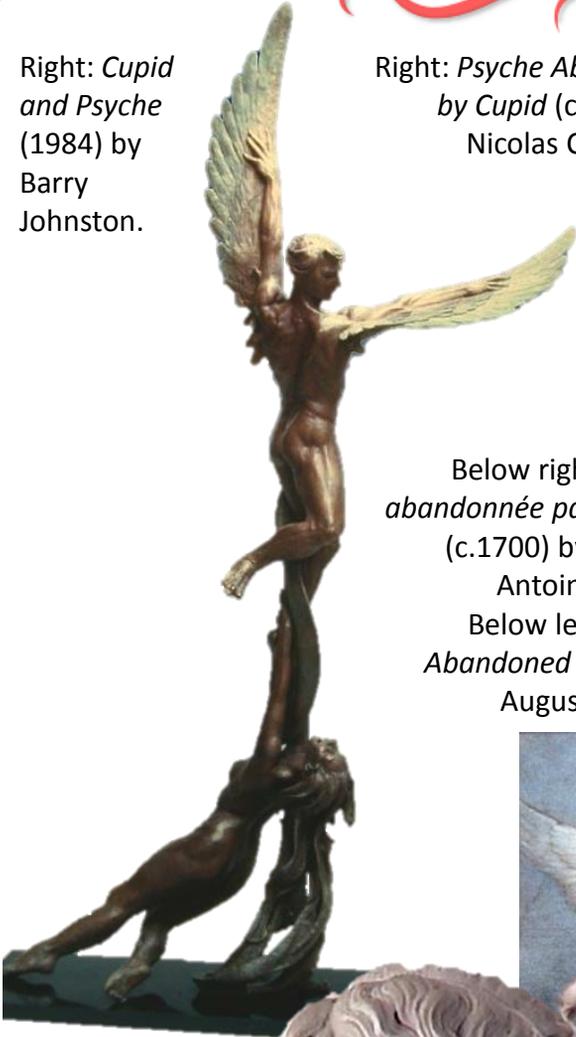
That night, while her husband is asleep and even though she is sure that he cannot really be a monster, Psyche takes out the lamp she had hidden beneath the bed.

In the lamplight she sees that her husband is none other than the god Cupid.

He is so handsome that she leans over him to get a closer look and as she does, she spills three drops of hot oil from the lamp onto his shoulder.

Cupid wakes up with a scream and sees his wife looking at him. In sorrow he tells her that by showing she cannot be trusted to keep her word, their marriage will have to end. Then he flies out of the window.

Right: *Cupid and Psyche* (1984) by Barry Johnston.



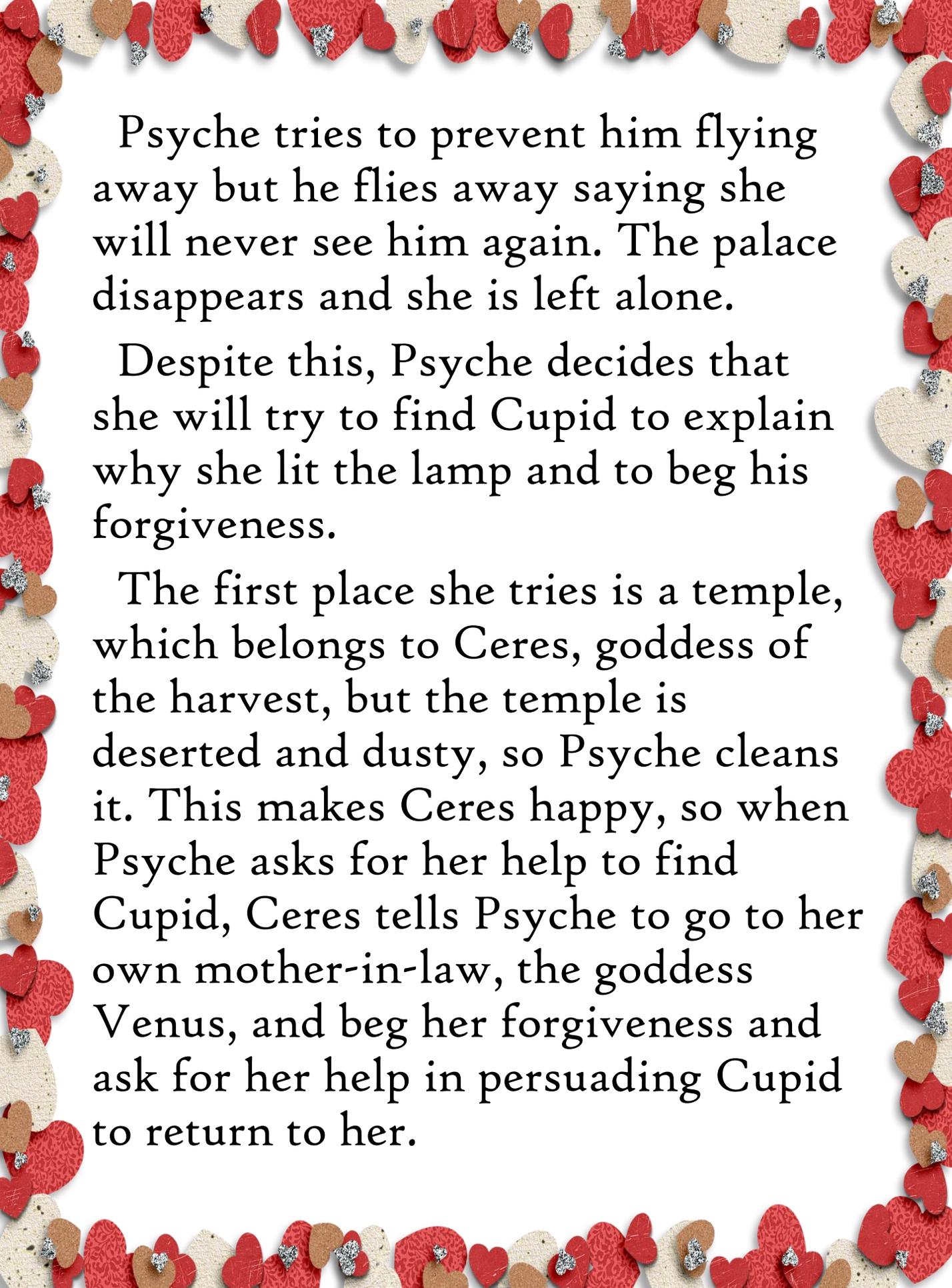
Right: *Psyche Abandoned* by Cupid (c.1700) by Nicolas Colombel;



Below right: *Psyché abandonnée par l'Amour* (c.1700) by Charles-Antoine Coypel.

Below left: *Psyche Abandoned* (1790) by Augustin Pajou.





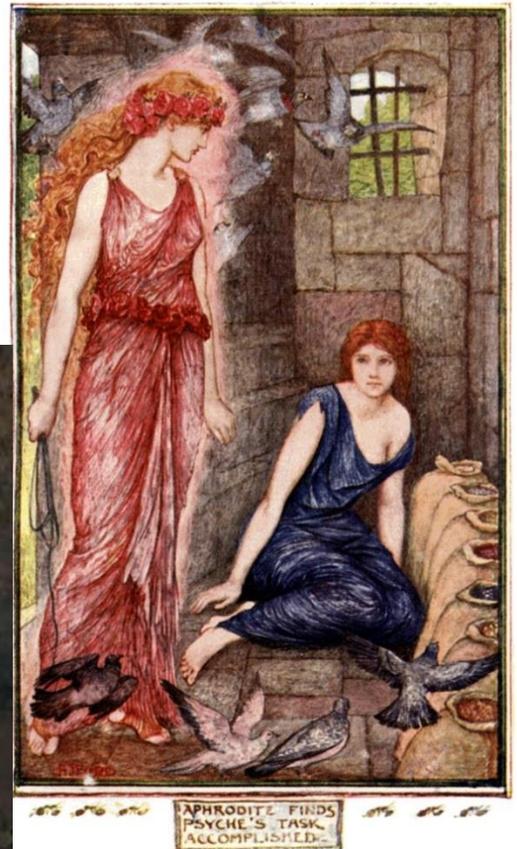
Psyche tries to prevent him flying away but he flies away saying she will never see him again. The palace disappears and she is left alone.

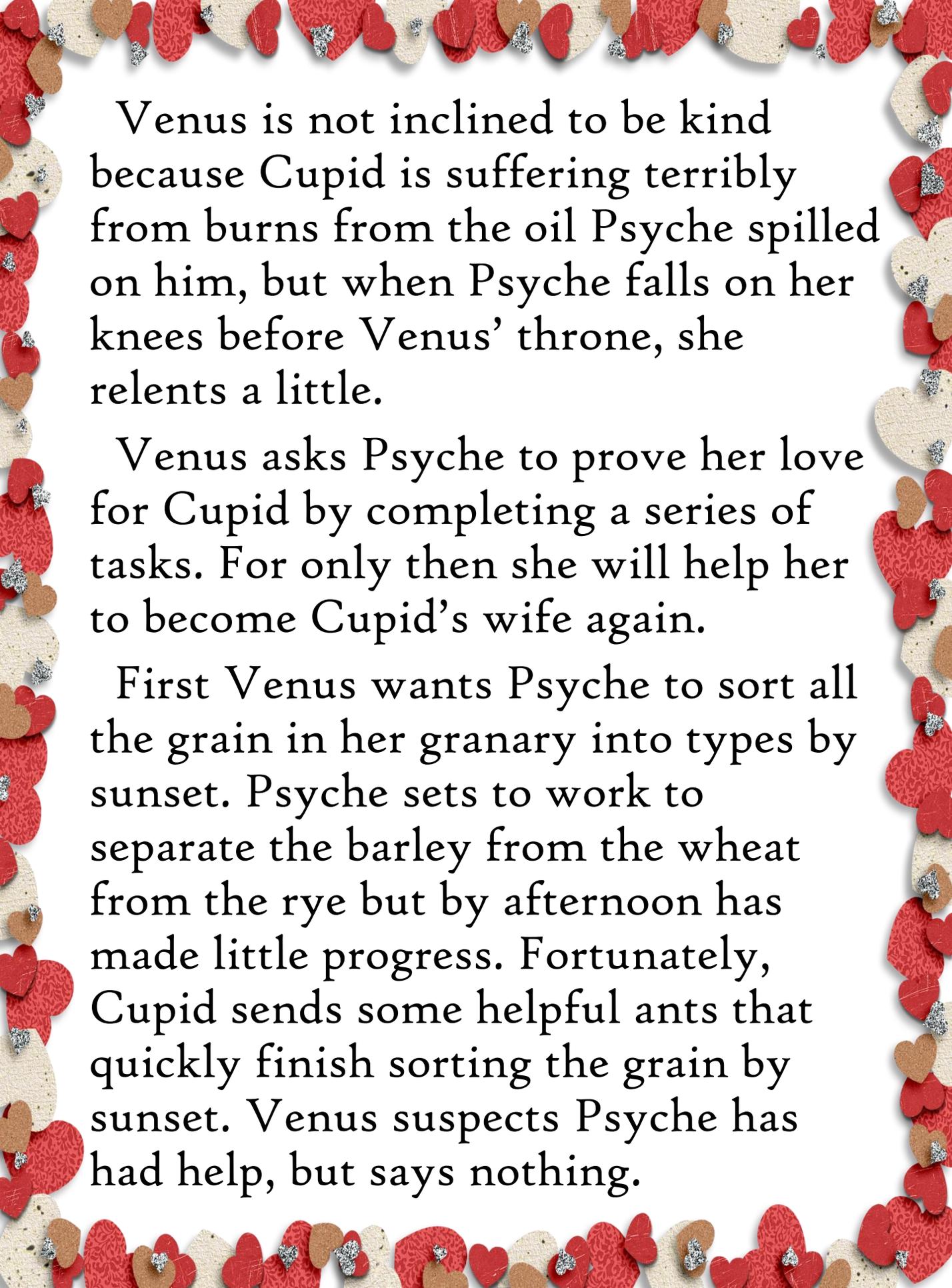
Despite this, Psyche decides that she will try to find Cupid to explain why she lit the lamp and to beg his forgiveness.

The first place she tries is a temple, which belongs to Ceres, goddess of the harvest, but the temple is deserted and dusty, so Psyche cleans it. This makes Ceres happy, so when Psyche asks for her help to find Cupid, Ceres tells Psyche to go to her own mother-in-law, the goddess Venus, and beg her forgiveness and ask for her help in persuading Cupid to return to her.



Anti-clockwise from top:  
Psyche pleads with Venus  
(1526-1530) by Giulio  
Romano; Venus' first task  
(2011) by Sankha Banerjee  
from *Stolen Hearts: The  
Love of Eros and Psyche* by  
Ryan Foley; Aphrodite finds  
Psyche's task accomplished  
(1905) by Henry Ford.





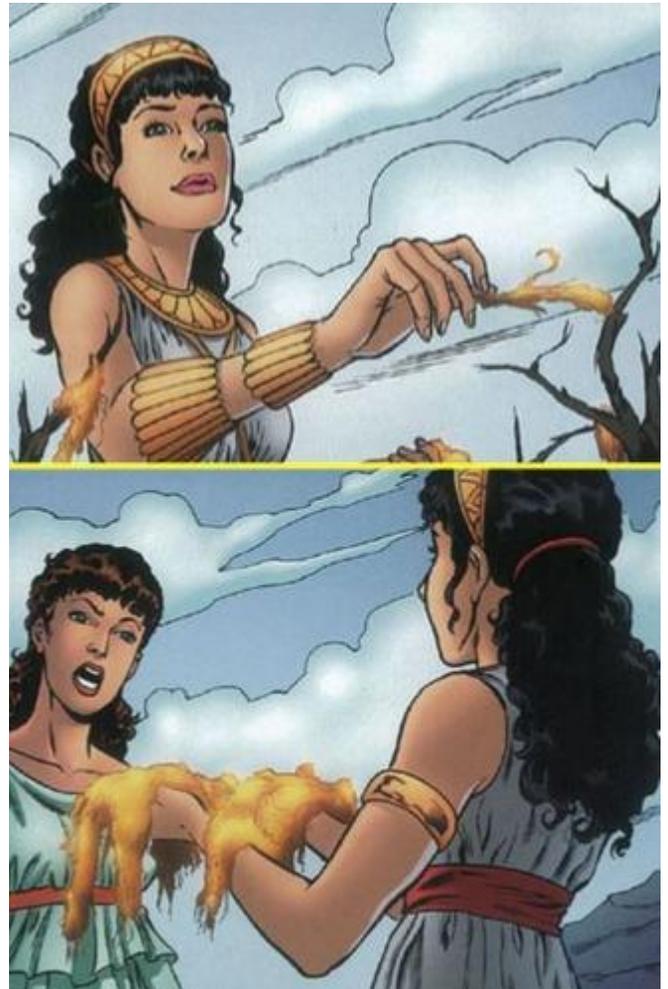
Venus is not inclined to be kind because Cupid is suffering terribly from burns from the oil Psyche spilled on him, but when Psyche falls on her knees before Venus' throne, she relents a little.

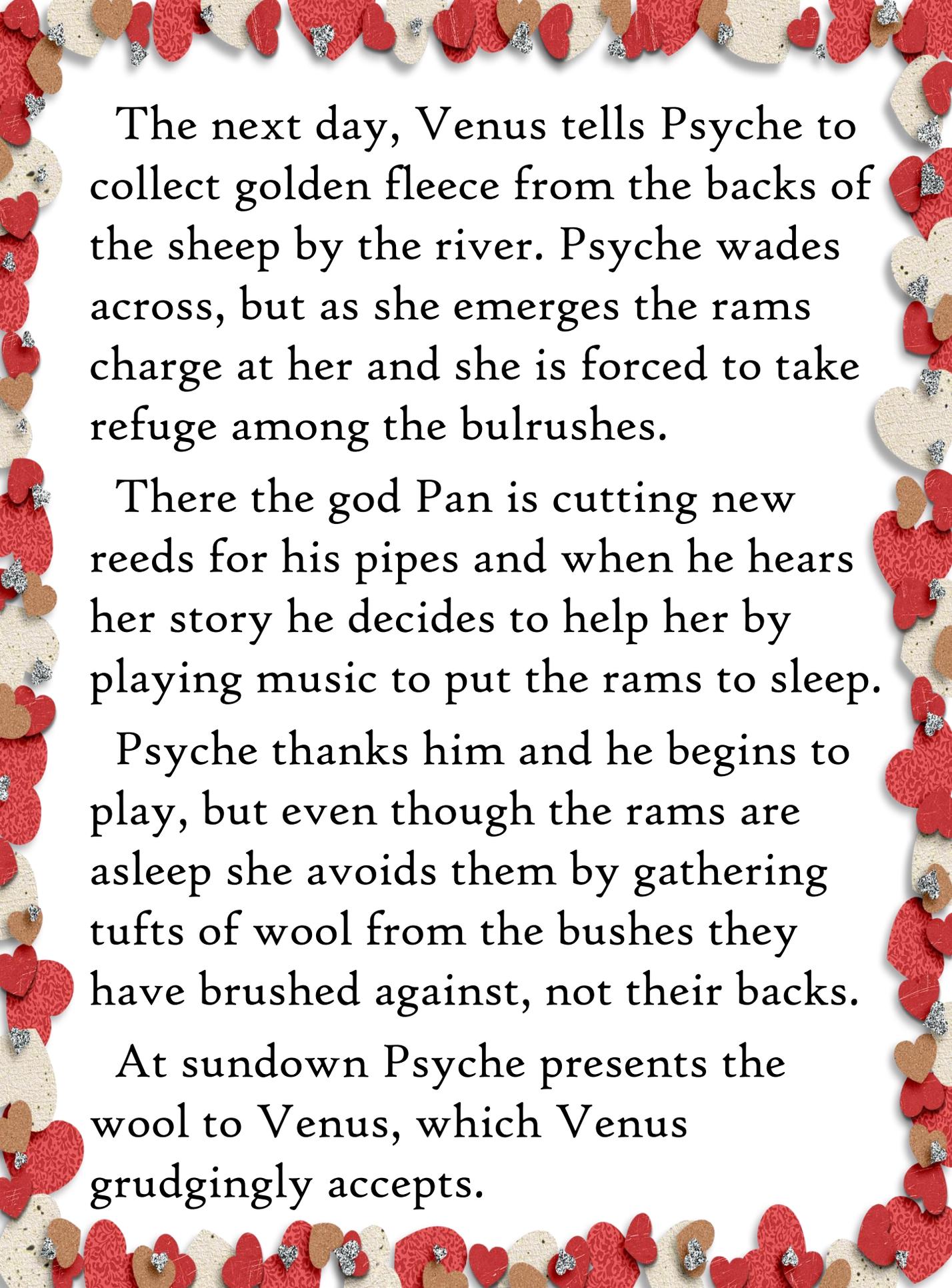
Venus asks Psyche to prove her love for Cupid by completing a series of tasks. For only then she will help her to become Cupid's wife again.

First Venus wants Psyche to sort all the grain in her granary into types by sunset. Psyche sets to work to separate the barley from the wheat from the rye but by afternoon has made little progress. Fortunately, Cupid sends some helpful ants that quickly finish sorting the grain by sunset. Venus suspects Psyche has had help, but says nothing.



Anticlockwise from top: *Psyche Crosses the River* (1940) by Kinuko Y. Craft from *Cupid and Psyche*, retold by M. Charlotte Craft (1996); *Pan and Psyche* (1914) by Dorothy Mullock from William Aldington's translation of *Cupid and Psyche*; *Psyche completes Venus' second task* (2011) by Sankha Banerjee from *Stolen Hearts: The Love of Eros and Psyche* by Ryan Foley.





The next day, Venus tells Psyche to collect golden fleece from the backs of the sheep by the river. Psyche wades across, but as she emerges the rams charge at her and she is forced to take refuge among the bulrushes.

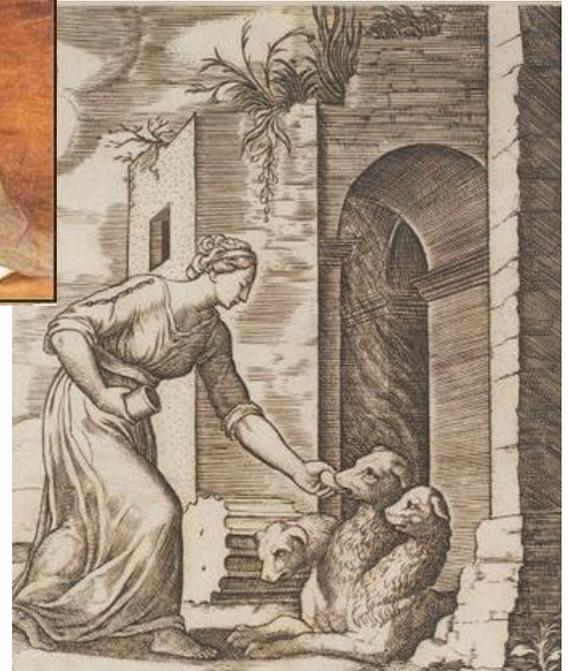
There the god Pan is cutting new reeds for his pipes and when he hears her story he decides to help her by playing music to put the rams to sleep.

Psyche thanks him and he begins to play, but even though the rams are asleep she avoids them by gathering tufts of wool from the bushes they have brushed against, not their backs.

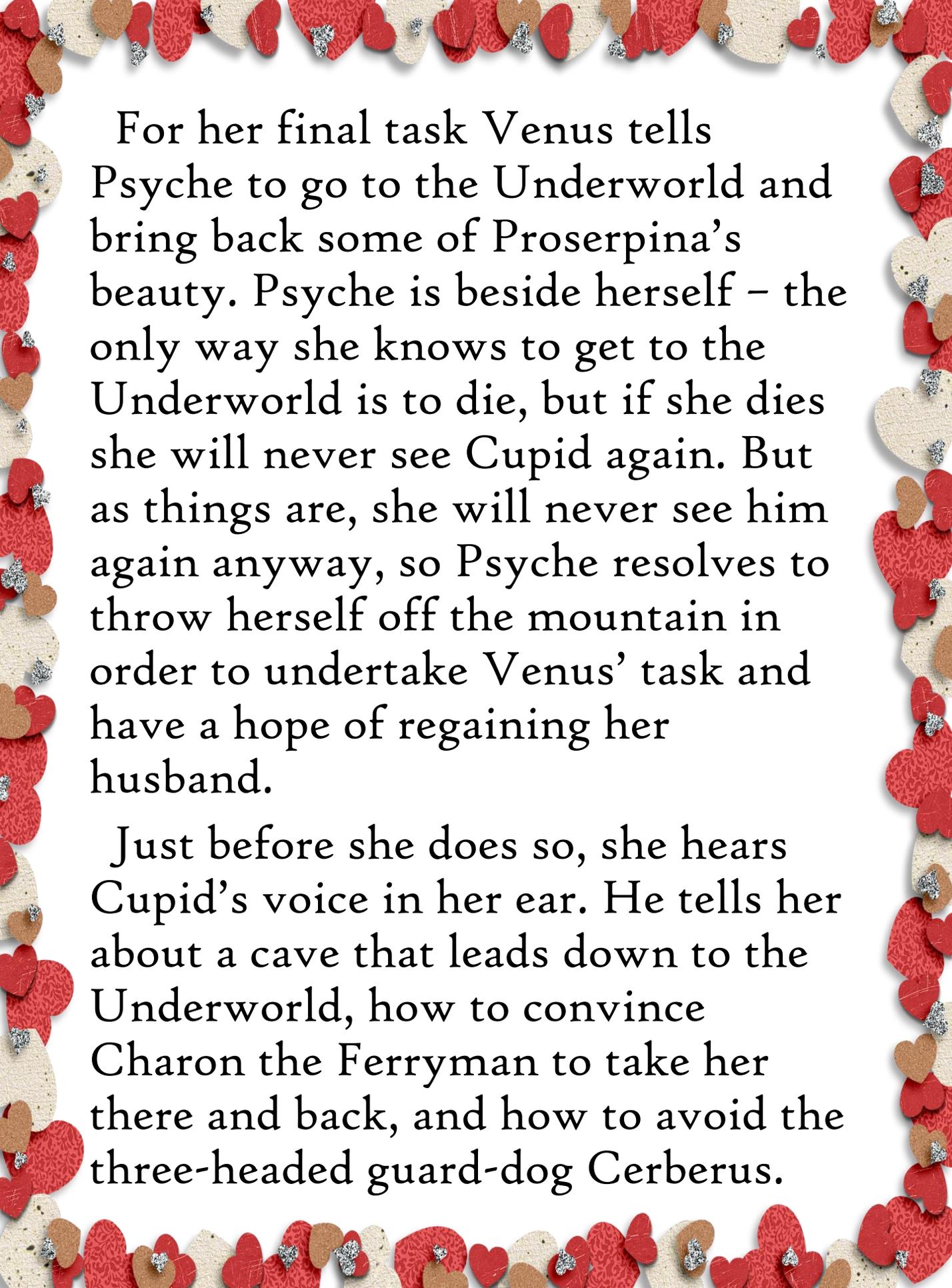
At sundown Psyche presents the wool to Venus, which Venus grudgingly accepts.



Left: *Psyche and Charon* (1883) by John Spencer Stanhope  
Below: Psyche feeds cakes to Cerberus in a detail of a print after Raphael by Maître au Dé from *Apuleius, History of Cupid and Psyche* (1532-35).

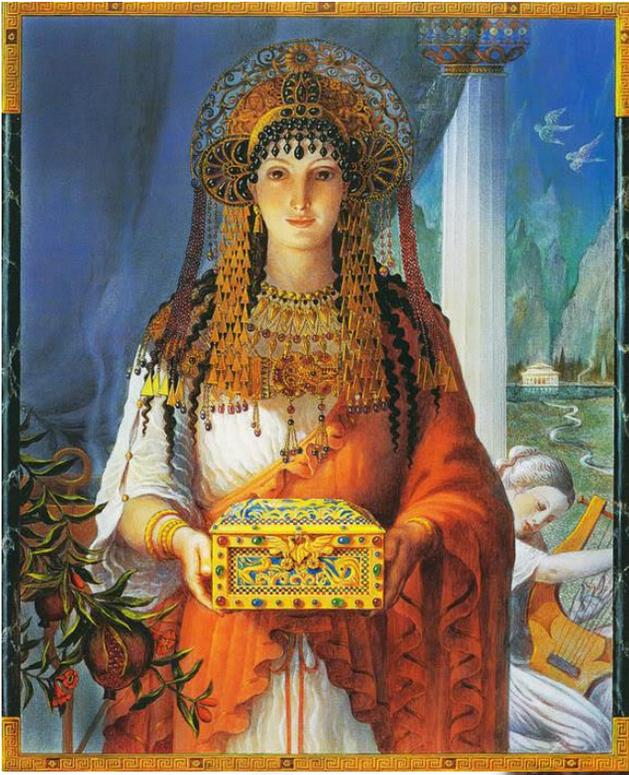


Above: Charon ferries Psyche across the Styx in a detail from an engraving after Raphael by Bernardo Daddi (1512).  
Right: Psyche approaches Cerberus in a woodcut after Edward Burne-Jones by William Morris (1880).



For her final task Venus tells Psyche to go to the Underworld and bring back some of Proserpina's beauty. Psyche is beside herself – the only way she knows to get to the Underworld is to die, but if she dies she will never see Cupid again. But as things are, she will never see him again anyway, so Psyche resolves to throw herself off the mountain in order to undertake Venus' task and have a hope of regaining her husband.

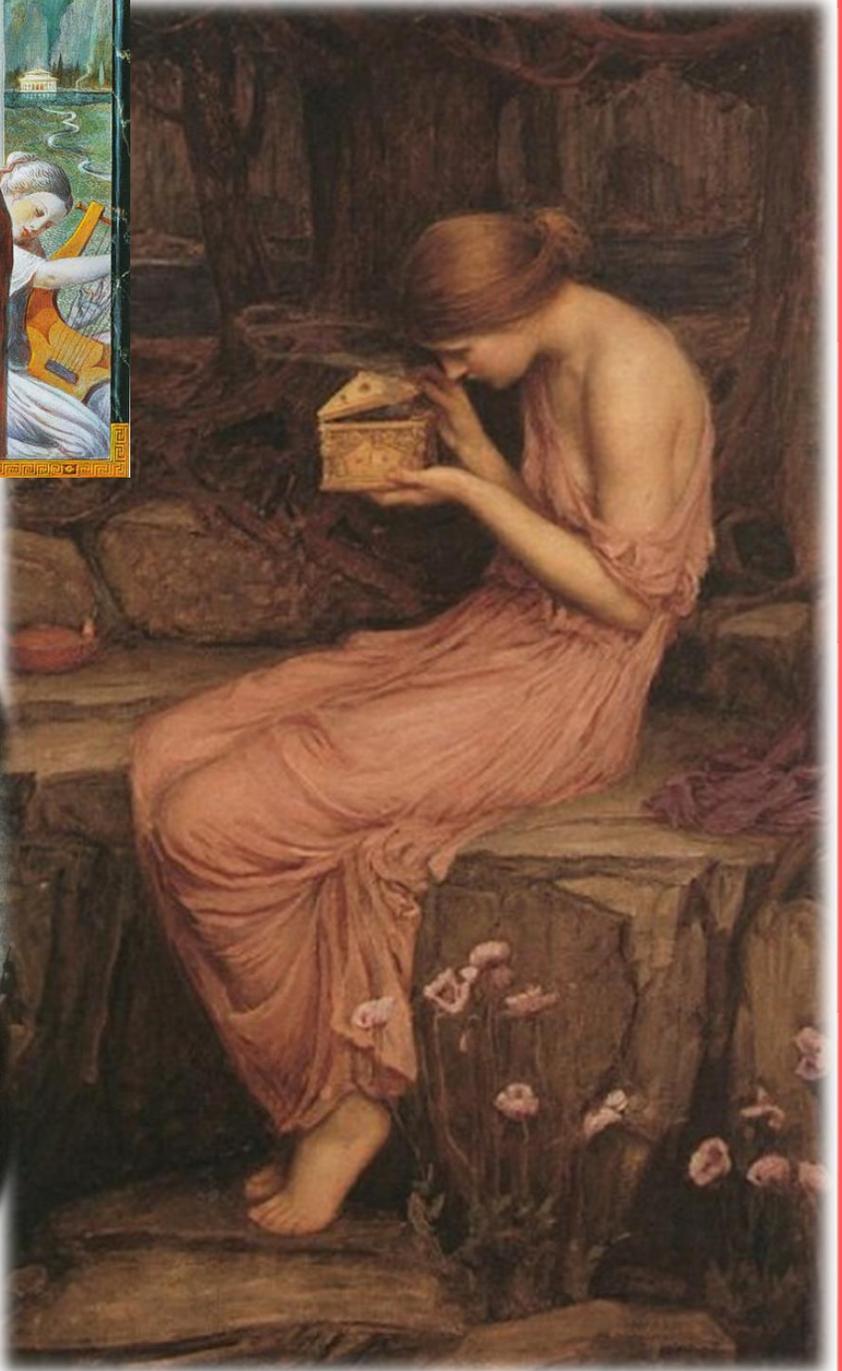
Just before she does so, she hears Cupid's voice in her ear. He tells her about a cave that leads down to the Underworld, how to convince Charon the Ferryman to take her there and back, and how to avoid the three-headed guard-dog Cerberus.

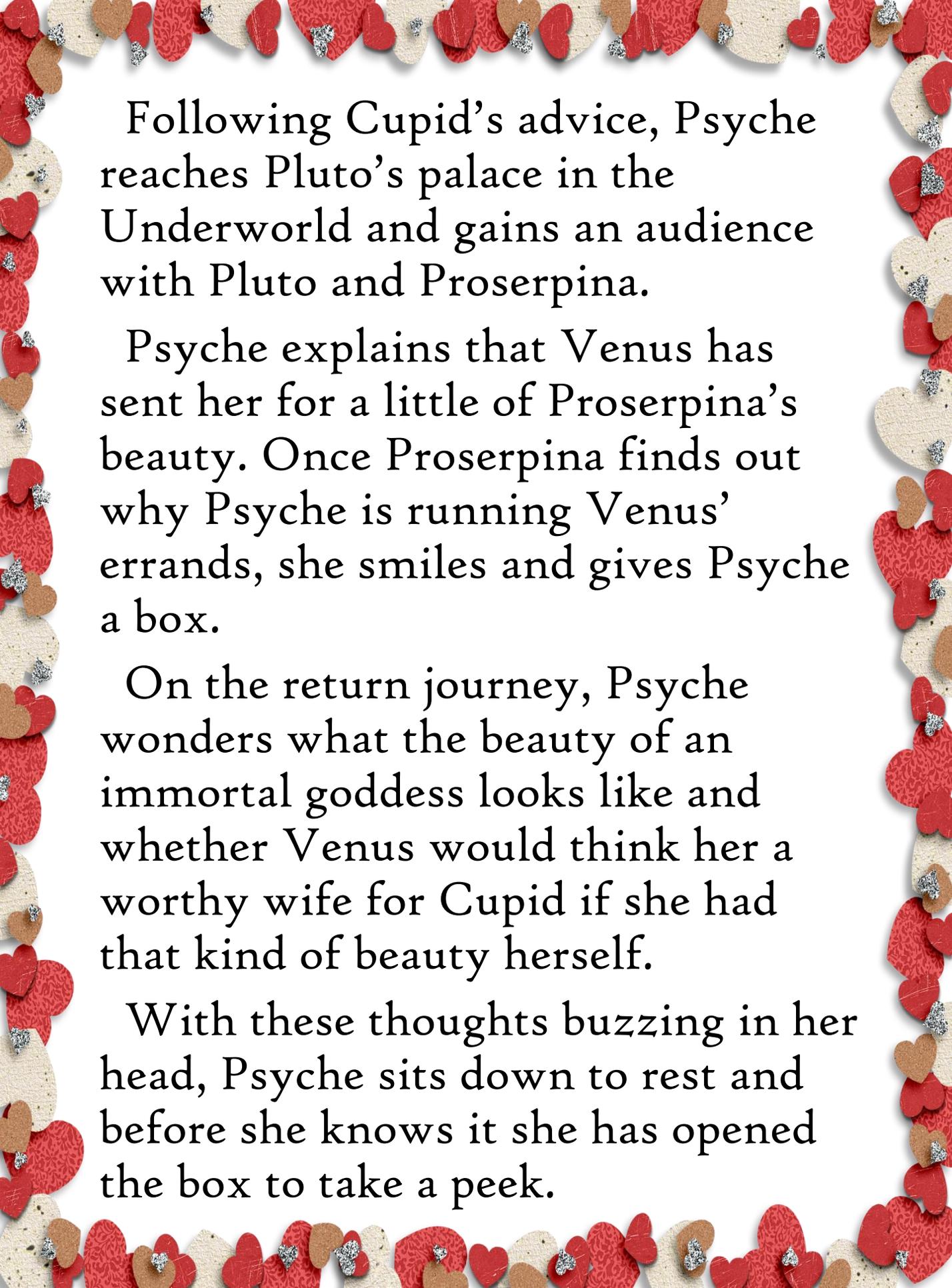


Top left: Proserpina aka *Persephone* (1940) by Kinuko Y. Craft from *Cupid and Psyche*, retold by M. Charlotte Craft (1996).

Bottom left: *Psyche in the Underworld* (c.1840-1859) by Paul Alfred Curzon.

Bottom right: *Psyche Opening the Golden Box* (1903) by John William Waterhouse .





Following Cupid's advice, Psyche reaches Pluto's palace in the Underworld and gains an audience with Pluto and Proserpina.

Psyche explains that Venus has sent her for a little of Proserpina's beauty. Once Proserpina finds out why Psyche is running Venus' errands, she smiles and gives Psyche a box.

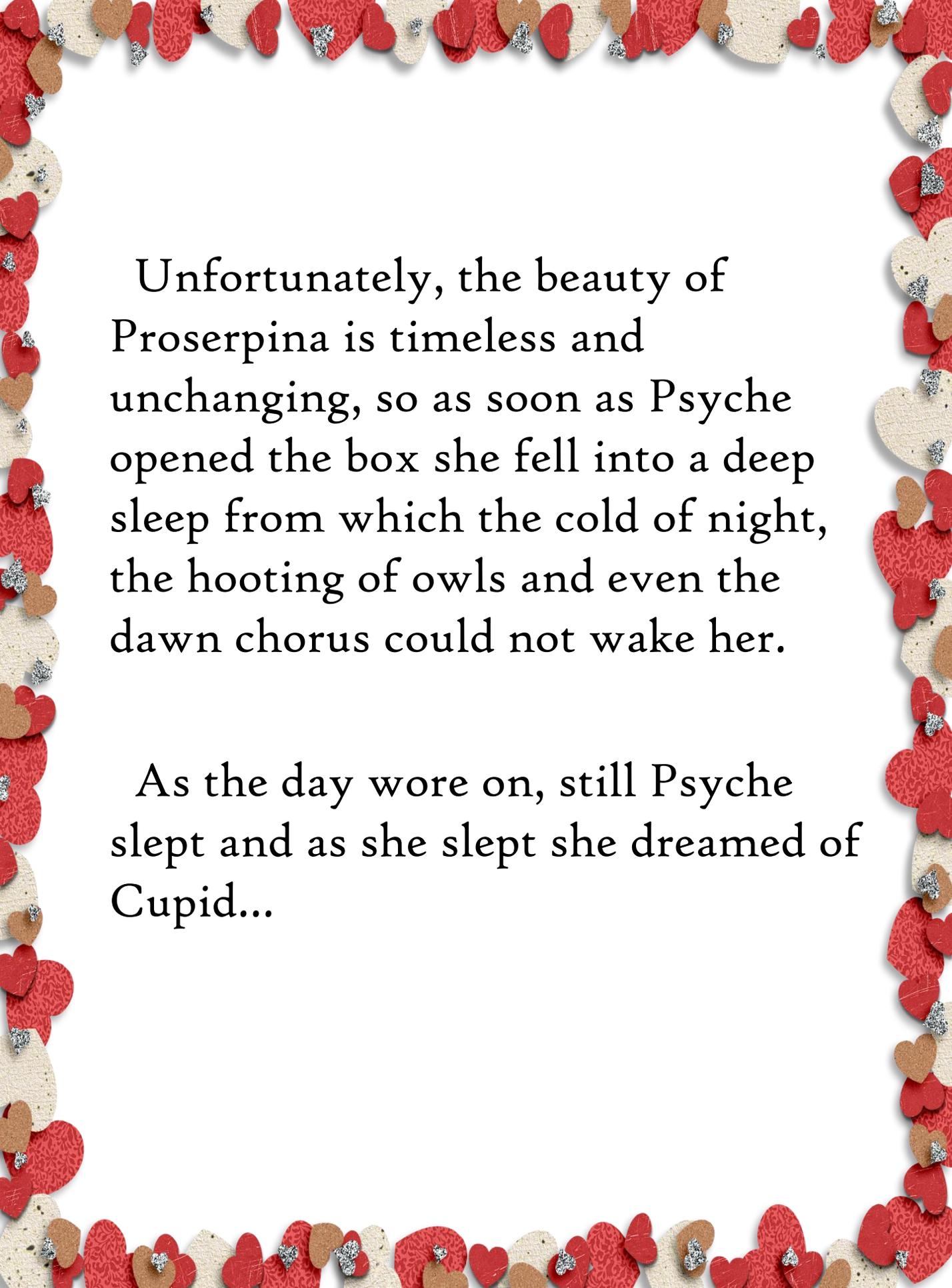
On the return journey, Psyche wonders what the beauty of an immortal goddess looks like and whether Venus would think her a worthy wife for Cupid if she had that kind of beauty herself.

With these thoughts buzzing in her head, Psyche sits down to rest and before she knows it she has opened the box to take a peek.

Right: *Psyche's Dream* by Josephine Wall (2000); as computer wallpaper (2001) by Mi9.

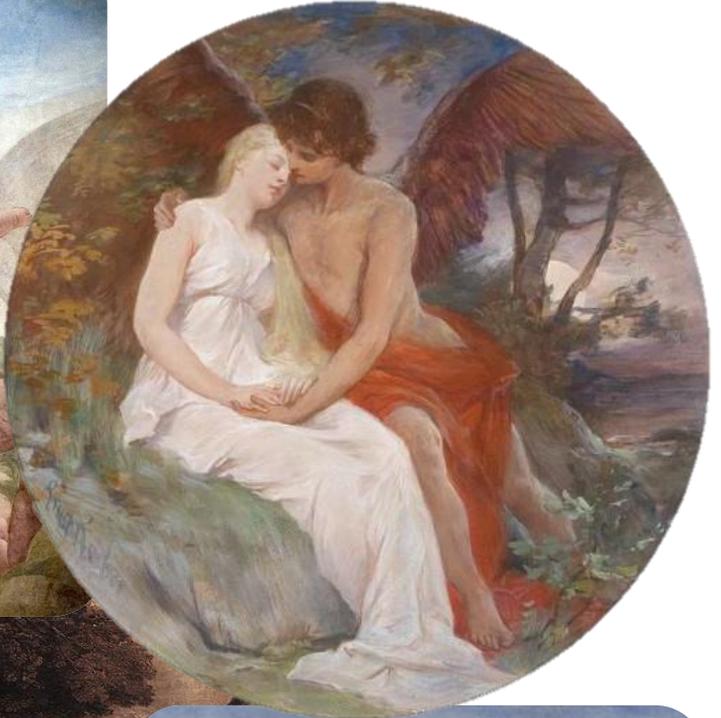


Left: *Psyche - Greek Goddess of the Soul* (2011) by Mystic Pagan.

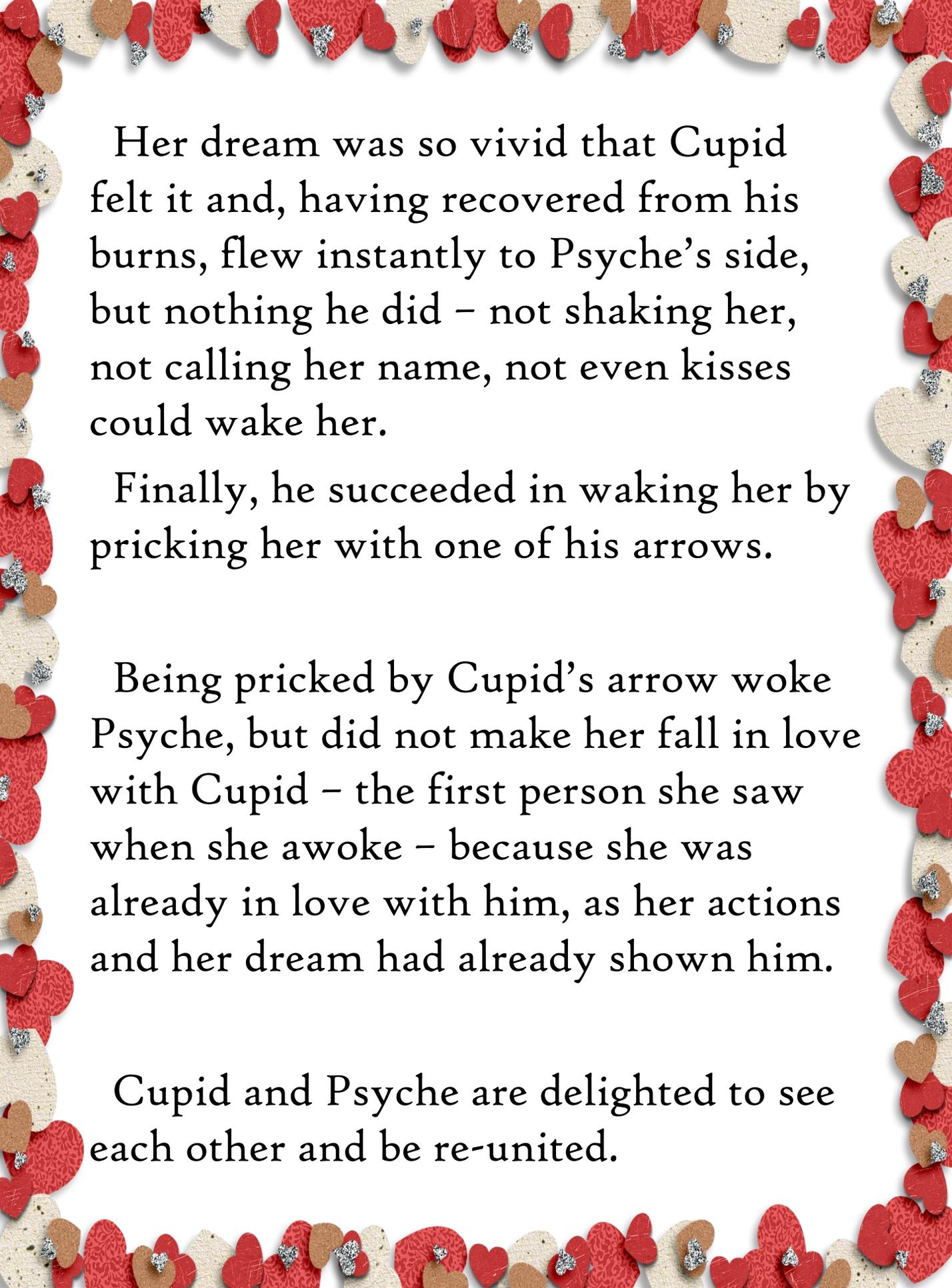


Unfortunately, the beauty of Proserpina is timeless and unchanging, so as soon as Psyche opened the box she fell into a deep sleep from which the cold of night, the hooting of owls and even the dawn chorus could not wake her.

As the day wore on, still Psyche slept and as she slept she dreamed of Cupid...



Clockwise from top left: *Stygian Dream of Psyche* (1688) from a fresco by Michelangelo Palloni ; *Amor und Psyche* (pre 1915) by Ernst Roeber; *Cupid Finding Psyche* (1865) by Edward Burne-Jones; *Cupid and Psyche* (1638) by Anthony van Dyck. Bottom left: *Cupid and Psyche* (2005) by yume-darling.



Her dream was so vivid that Cupid felt it and, having recovered from his burns, flew instantly to Psyche's side, but nothing he did – not shaking her, not calling her name, not even kisses could wake her.

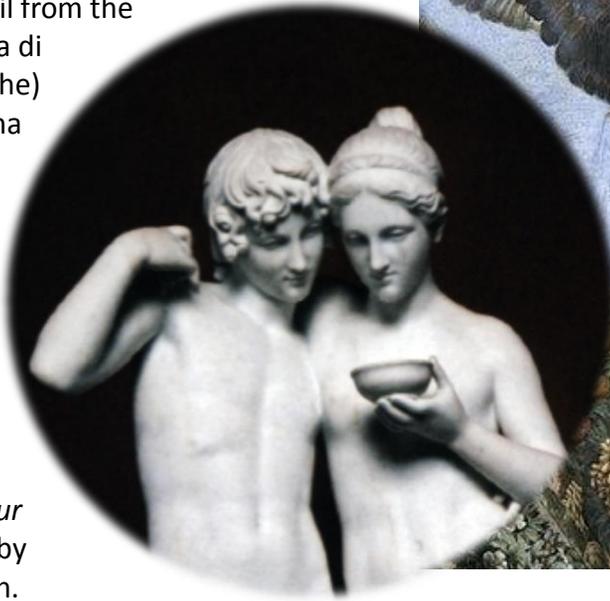
Finally, he succeeded in waking her by pricking her with one of his arrows.

Being pricked by Cupid's arrow woke Psyche, but did not make her fall in love with Cupid – the first person she saw when she awoke – because she was already in love with him, as her actions and her dream had already shown him.

Cupid and Psyche are delighted to see each other and be re-united.

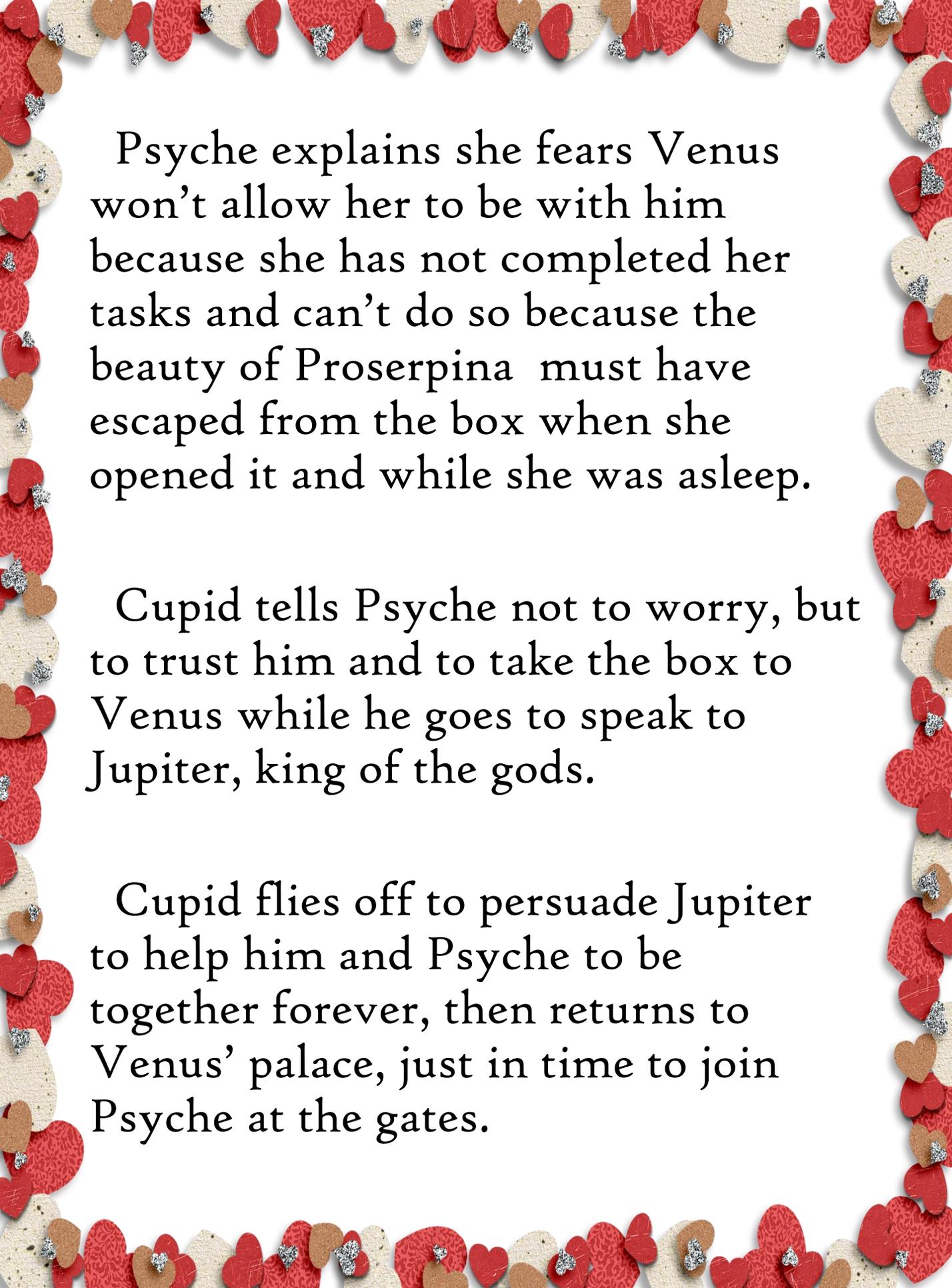
Right: Cupid tells Psyche not to worry in a detail from *Cupid and Psyche Reunited in Heaven* (c.1807) by Bertel Thorvaldsen.

Far right: Cupid pleads with Jupiter for Psyche (1517-18) in a detail from the ceiling of the Loggia di Psiche (Hall of Psyche) in the Villa Farnesina by Raphael and his workshop.



Below: Psyche imagines failing Venus' tasks as Cupid looks on and despairs from *The legend of Amour and Psyche* (1766) by Angelica Kauffmann.





Psyche explains she fears Venus won't allow her to be with him because she has not completed her tasks and can't do so because the beauty of Proserpina must have escaped from the box when she opened it and while she was asleep.

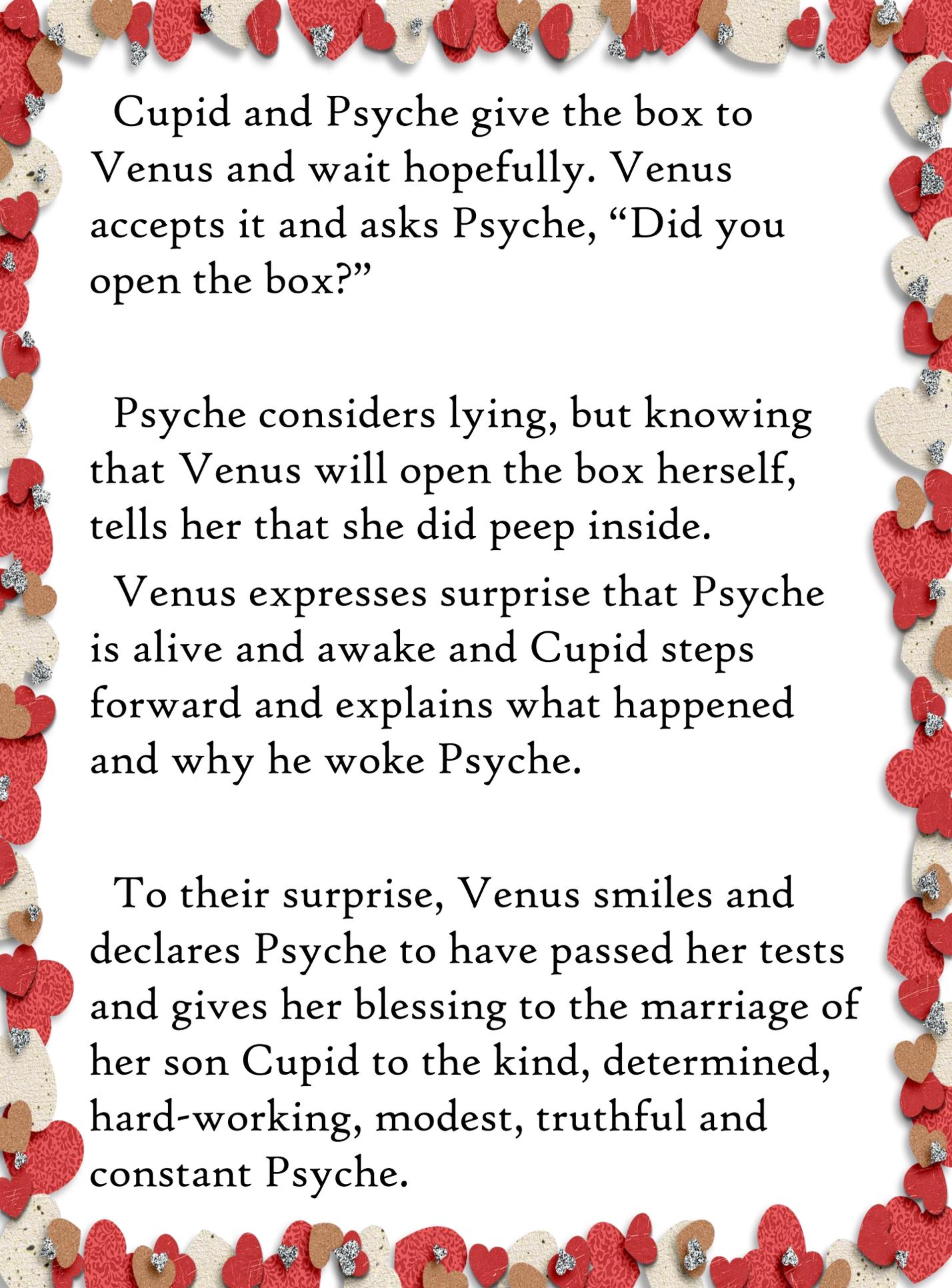
Cupid tells Psyche not to worry, but to trust him and to take the box to Venus while he goes to speak to Jupiter, king of the gods.

Cupid flies off to persuade Jupiter to help him and Psyche to be together forever, then returns to Venus' palace, just in time to join Psyche at the gates.

Right: *Eros Supplicating Venus to Pardon Psyche* (1827) by Georges Rouget.

Below: Venus holds her son's bow as she formally gives him in marriage to Psyche from *The Marriage of Eros and Psyche* (1756) by Pompeo Girolamo Batoni.





Cupid and Psyche give the box to Venus and wait hopefully. Venus accepts it and asks Psyche, “Did you open the box?”

Psyche considers lying, but knowing that Venus will open the box herself, tells her that she did peep inside.

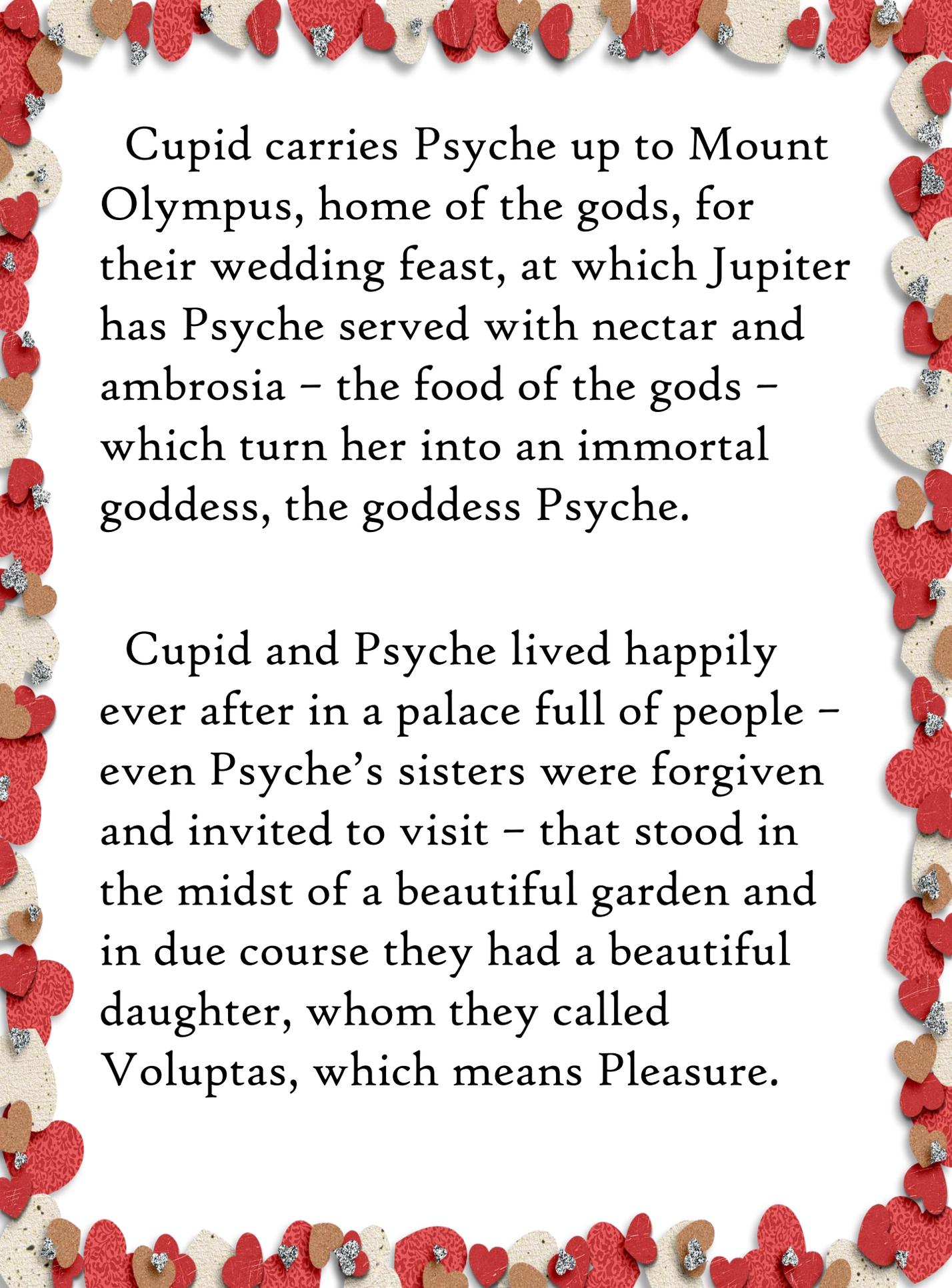
Venus expresses surprise that Psyche is alive and awake and Cupid steps forward and explains what happened and why he woke Psyche.

To their surprise, Venus smiles and declares Psyche to have passed her tests and gives her blessing to the marriage of her son Cupid to the kind, determined, hard-working, modest, truthful and constant Psyche.



Above: Cupid flies Psyche up to Olympus from *The Abduction of Psyche* (1895) by William-Adolphe Bouguereau (left). Cupid and Psyche together in a print (1876) published by L. Prang & Co. (right).  
Below: The marriage feast of Cupid and Psyche from a ceiling fresco (1517-18) in the Loggia di Psyche (Hall of Psyche) in the Villa Farnesina by Raphael and his workshop.



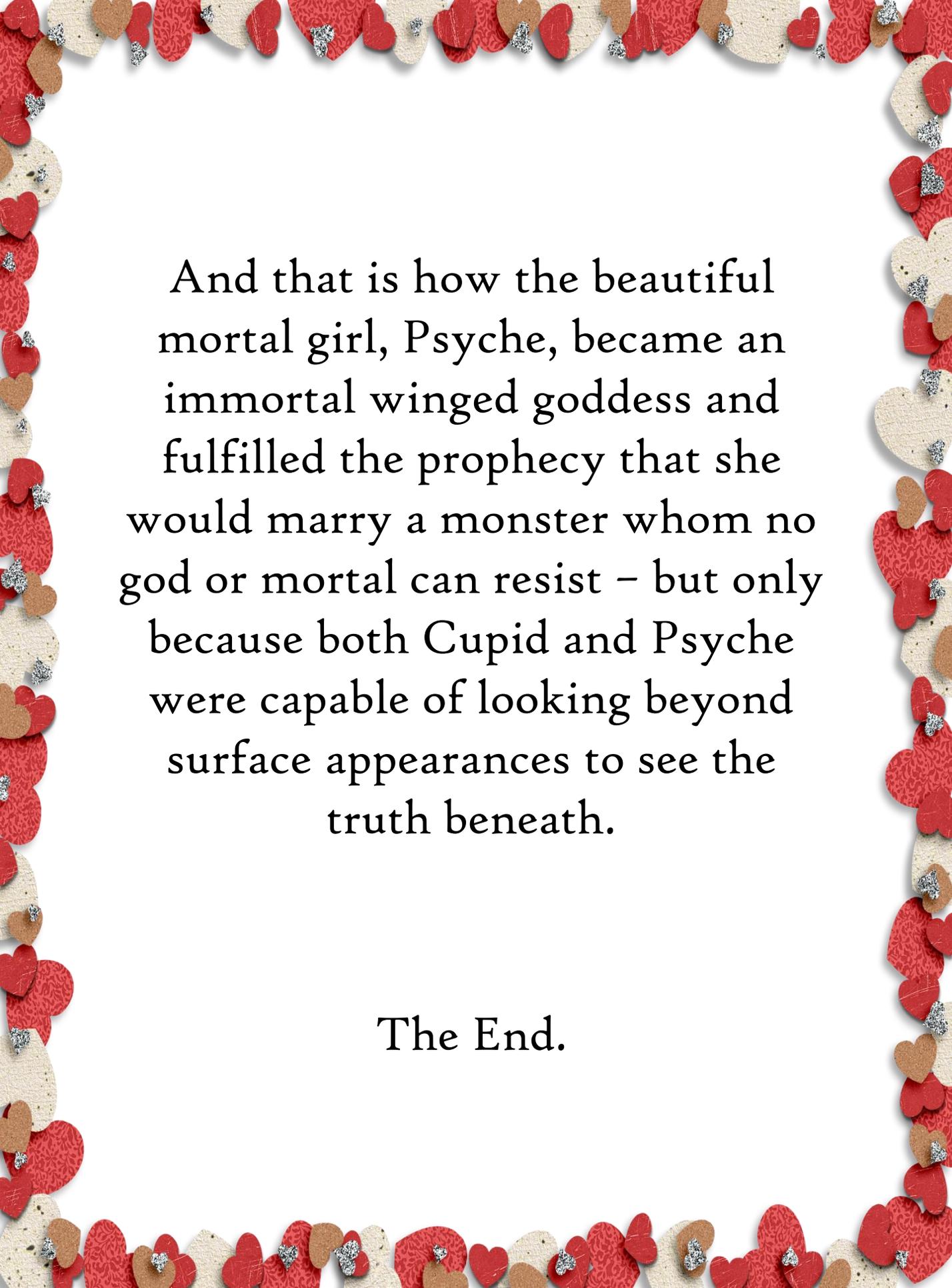


Cupid carries Psyche up to Mount Olympus, home of the gods, for their wedding feast, at which Jupiter has Psyche served with nectar and ambrosia – the food of the gods – which turn her into an immortal goddess, the goddess Psyche.

Cupid and Psyche lived happily ever after in a palace full of people – even Psyche’s sisters were forgiven and invited to visit – that stood in the midst of a beautiful garden and in due course they had a beautiful daughter, whom they called Voluptas, which means Pleasure.



Cupid and Psyche with butterfly-winged Voluptas at play with Cupid's arrows.  
*Cupid and Psyche* (c.1850) by Paul Baudry; engraved by Charles Waltner (1892).



And that is how the beautiful mortal girl, Psyche, became an immortal winged goddess and fulfilled the prophecy that she would marry a monster whom no god or mortal can resist – but only because both Cupid and Psyche were capable of looking beyond surface appearances to see the truth beneath.

The End.



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