

The story of Cupid and Psyche appears in Greek art as early as the 4th century BC. It concerns the overcoming of obstacles to the love between Psyche ("Soul" or "Breath of Life") and Cupid, and their ultimate union in marriage. It is often presented as an allegory of love overcoming death

The fame of Psyche's beauty threatens to eclipse that of Venus herself, and the love goddess sends Cupid to work her revenge. Cupid, however, becomes enamored of Psyche, and arranges for her to be taken to his palace. He visits her by night, warning her not to try to look upon him. Psyche's envious sisters convince her that her lover must be a hideous monster, and she finally introduces a lamp into their chamber to see him. Startled by his beauty, she drips hot oil from the lamp and wakes him. He abandons her. She wanders the earth looking for him, and finally submits to the service of Venus, who tortures her. The goddess then sends Psyche on a series of quests. Each time she despairs, and each time she is given divine aid.

Trial 1

Trial 2

Trial 3

She succeeds, but on the way back can't resist opening the box in the hope of benefitting from it herself, whereupon she falls into a torpid sleep.

Contents of the Box

Cupid finds her in this state, and revives her by returning the sleep to the box. Cupid grants her immortality so the couple can be wed as equals.