Once upon a time there was a king with three daughters, all were lovely, but the youngest named Psyche, excelled her sisters in beauty so much that she seemed like a goddess. The fame of her beauty spread far and wide and soon many people came to worship her. Meanwhile the real goddess of love, Venus became neglected as fewer people came to her temples to make offerings and pay her honor.

Venus grew jealous of Psyche and turned to her son Cupid (Eros) for help. She told Cupid to go and shoot Psyche with an arrow, to make her fall in love with the most vile and horrible creature on the earth. Cupid took up his bow and arrow, flew earthward, had one look at Psyche and was lost. No victim of his gold arrows was more deeply in love than he.

While everyone worshipped and admired Psyche, her beauty was so awesome that men were fearful to express their longing and desire for her or make plain their sentiments. Both her sisters though less lovely than Psyche had gotten married. So Psyche sat sad and solitary, only to be admired but not loved.

Psyche's father began to suspect some curse had fallen on his youngest daughter, and went to the nearby town of Miletus to consult the oracle of Apollo. The oracle said that Psyche was to be dressed in clothes of mourning and placed on the summit of a mountain. There she would be taken away by a fierce winged serpent as his wife. So the sad parents prepared this funereal marriage for their unfortunate daughter. All the people of the town mourned and wept, and Psyche was escorted to the appointed mountain top and left to her fate.

As she sat atop the mountain Psyche wept and trembled not knowing what was to come. Suddenly a warm breath of wind caressed her neck and the invisible wind god Zephyrus lifted her up and away until she came down upon a soft fragrant valley far below. Psyche had forgotten all her fears here and fell asleep. When she woke, she saw a magnificent palace in the distance and hastened towards it. At the threshold of this unguarded and uninhabited mansion, she heard a voice telling her: “All this is yours. Come bathe and refresh your tired limbs and prepare for dinner. We are here near you, but invisible and will satisfy your every wish and desire.”

The food was delicious and the bath so refreshing. While Psyche dined, she heard sweet melodious music, but could not see who was playing. As the day passed she began to feel reassured that she would soon meet her husband. As night came she heard the sweet whispers of her husband's voice in her ears and realized that he was no monster of terror, but someone she had so desperately longed for. However with each dawn, her husband was gone, leaving Psyche alone in the giant palace.

Her life was almost happy, and yet Psyche felt very lonely, as she couldn't see anyone around her, and especially her husband. So she told him that she missed her sisters and she wanted to see them. He tried to convince her it wasn't a good idea, but she insisted until he agreed.

So Zephyrus (the west wind) went to the top of the mountain and carried her sisters to the enchanted palace where Cupid and Psyche lived. They were amazed by what they saw: the beautiful palace, the riches, the invisible servants. They asked Psyche what her husband looked like, and she said he was a beautiful young man who liked to go hunting. After they spoke a while, Psyche gave them a lot of gold, silver and jewels, and Zephyrus took them back to their home.
Needless to say, the two sisters were green with envy: how come their parents married them to older men, to whom they were like servants, while Psyche was so lucky to have a young, handsome and rich husband?

Cupid and Psyche had a long conversation about her sisters. He warned her that they would try to destroy their happiness. He told her she should never try to see who he was, because if she managed to do that, it would also be the last time she saw him. Cupid also told her that, if she didn't see him, the baby she was pregnant with would be a god, but if she saw him, the baby would become a mortal. In the end she cried and embraced him and asked him to let her see her sisters again. Cupid and Psyche were so much in love, that he agreed.

When the sisters came the next time, they asked again about her husband. This time, Psyche told them he was a middle aged merchant. The two sisters understood she never saw him and told her that he probably was a monster, a horrible snake, just like the oracle had told her. And when the baby was born, the monster would devour both mother and child.

Psyche thought about how her husband forbade her to see him, because it would be the last time she saw him, and believed her sisters. So she prepared an oil lamp and a knife and hid them under the bed.

She waited until her husband fell asleep. Then she lit the lamp and took the knife to kill the horrible monster. But what she saw left her breathless: a beautiful winged god was sleeping in her bed. She understood her husband was Cupid, the god of love himself. For a while she admired his beauty, then she wanted to embrace him and, in doing that, the oil from the lamp spilled on his shoulder and burned him. Cupid woke up and fled away, but Psyche managed to cling to him. After a while she was too weary, so she fell to the ground. Cupid followed her and asked her, "Why do you want to kill me? Wasn't I gentle with you? My mother told me to inspire you love for the most hideous creature on earth, but I wouldn't listen. You'll be punished enough from my absence."

The poor girl wandered until she arrived into her older sister's town. When they met, Psyche told her what happened and added that Cupid had declared he would marry Psyche's sister. As soon as she heard that, her sister ran to the mountain and called Zephyrus to take her to Cupid's palace, and then she threw herself into the abyss. This time, the gentle wind didn't come to carry her, so she fell on the rocks and died.
After that, Psyche went to the country where her second sister lived, and told her the same thing. The second sister went to the mountain and threw herself headlong into the valley, but the wind didn't come to carry her and she died just like the other sister.

Meanwhile Cupid had gone to his mother's chamber to have his wound cared for, but as soon as Venus heard the story she left Cupid in his pain. She became even more jealous and angry. She vowed to show Psyche what it felt like to bring down the wrath of a goddess.

Psyche's search for Cupid was completely unsuccessful. Finally she went to Venus herself and begged forgiveness and offered to do penance, so she could see Cupid again. Venus was angry at seeing Psyche, but would grant her wish if she completed a series of difficult tasks. She led Psyche to her temple storehouse where there was one huge heap of wheat, barley, millet, beans, lentils and poppy seeds—and said “Sort these grains, putting all of the same kind in a pile by themselves, and get it done before twilight.” Then Venus departed, leaving Psyche to her dilemma.

As Psyche sat in despair, overwhelmed by her impossible task, Cupid stirred up a little ant to take compassion on her. The leader of the ant hill summoned an army of his six-legged creatures to help. Wave after wave of ants lined up as if for battle and before nightfall all the seeds were arranged in ordered neat piles. Then the brave ants returned whence they had come. When Venus returned from her banquet, she was surprised that Psyche had completed her chore. “Your work is by no means done” said Venus. She threw Psyche a piece of black bread for her supper and went away.

The next morning, Venus devised a more dangerous task for Psyche. “Look down in the valley below,” she ordered, “there are sheep grazing near the riverbank with fleece of gold. Go and bring back to me some of the golden wool from their backs.” When Psyche reached the river, she thought of ending her sorrow by drowning herself, but a voice bade her not to: “Do not give up hope, fair Psyche—the rams are ferocious and will kill you when you get close. Wait till sunset when the flock is tired and resting. Then you may gather the golden fleece sticking to the bushes and tree trunks.” So Psyche followed the plan and brought Venus her fleece of gold.

Venus then tested Psyche's courage and demanded a jar of ice-cold water cascading out of a mountain peak. As she approached the waterfall, Psyche realized that only a winged creature could reach it. This time the eagle of Jupiter came to her aid. He seized the flask from her with his beak, filled it under the falling mountain stream, and placed it quickly in Psyche's anxious hands.

But Venus had one final task for Psyche—“Go down to the Underworld and ask Persephone to fill this box with some of her beauty.” Psyche found her guide in a tower on her path. It gave her careful directions on how to get to Persephone's palace. She was told to bring two coins in her mouth as round-trip fees for Charon, the Styx ferryman, and six honey cakes to feed the three-headed monster dog Cerberus on her way in and out of the palace gates. Psyche followed her guide's instruction precisely and Persephone was happy to do Venus a favor, handing back to Psyche the box filled with an elixir of beauty.

The voice in the tower had warned Psyche not to remove the lid of the box, reminding her the evil spell that befell Pandora. However, Psyche was curious to see the beauty-charm in the box. With all the trials and tribulations she had gone through, she needed some beauty potion if she was to see her husband Cupid again. She opened the box but there was nothing inside. Suddenly a heavy mist arose from its chamber and caused her to fall into a deathlike sleep.
Cupid's wound was finally healed, and he could bear no longer the absence of his beloved Psyche. He slipped through the windows of his mother's chamber, and flew to the spot where Psyche had fallen. He stirred Psyche awake with a light touch of one of his arrows— "Again, you have almost perished by your curiosity." He wiped the sleep from her eyes and placed it into the box. Cupid told her to take the box to his mother and all would be fine.

To make sure, Cupid flew up to Mount Olympus and spoke with Jupiter himself. Although Cupid had been playful, making gods and goddess fall in love with his arrows at will, he agreed to end his mischief, if only he could marry Psyche, and she be made immortal. Jupiter summoned all the gods, including Venus, and announced the marriage of Cupid and Psyche. Mercury brought Psyche to the palace of the gods, and Jupiter himself gave her the ambrosia to make her immortal. Venus was finally satisfied, for with Psyche up in Heaven, she would not command attention and admiration from the men on earth.

So all came to a most happy end. Love and the Soul (for that is what Psyche means) had sought and, after sore trials, found each other; that union could never be broken.